

January 15, 2007

Our ref: C 07 016

Your ref:

Traffic Management AJC Councillors



Cambridge Cycling Campaign
P.O. Box 204, Cambridge CB4 3FN
01223 690718 (phone & fax)
contact@camcycle.org.uk
www.camcycle.org.uk

Dear Councillors,

AJC meeting, 22nd January 2007, Agenda item 8b. Gonville Place crossing

We write on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign's Crossings Subgroup which has been working on issues relating to this crossing.

The Officers report is, in our view, unacceptably poor. Officers have simply not listened to Councillors, to ourselves, nor to the 500+ people that signed our petition. They appear to have ignored the detailed technical presentation we gave on 1 December 2006.

We request that the Officers concerned attend the meeting to hear points raised (in contrast to the previous Area Joint Committee meeting).

Summary of the (two tiny) changes which Officers propose

The sum total of the proposed changes are:

- The County have removed five of the 17 posts in, or adjacent to, the cycle path.
- They will consider laying some red surfacing on the road, at some unspecified time.

This is simply unacceptable. Only one of the very many points (the posts) raised by concerned members of the public has been addressed at all, and that only in part .

The failure / refusal of the signals team to take our complaints seriously, and their failure to match the commitment shown by Councillors and by the Cycling Campaign to this issue, is simply unacceptable.

Councillors should remind themselves of the scale of public dissatisfaction at the changes, and that public confidence can only be restored by restoring the crossing to the same standard or better than previously.

This is a very important and very busy crossing of a major road for both pedestrians, and more especially for cyclists. If cycling and walking are to be encouraged then it is vital that crossings like this are safe, pleasant and convenient to use, with the minimum of conflict and the minimum of delay to peoples' journeys. As it stands now, the design is a deterrent to walking and cycling.

A clear solution exists

We feel Councillors should directly request the Signals Team to (i) work up a costed design based on the Queen's Road crossing, and/or (ii) produce a costed restoration of the original layout, which has proven to be safe. We recommend that the design is then independently audited to discourage the Signals Team from trying to use the sort of scare tactics apparent in this report – bandying about prohibitive costs for work that is not necessary.

We feel that finance should be made available from the budget of the Signals Team (not the cycling budget), or that other cycling-related crossings in the pipeline should be delayed in order to fund these changes.

Issues of width, safety of detection loops, and use of nearside signals are all addressed in our reports and the presentation we gave at the crossing design workshop attended by officers from the City and County Councils on 1 December 2006. The same issues were put across directly to the signals team at our meeting with them on 3 November 2006. The County Engineers have clearly ignored these reports, resulting in much anger from our members.

A proposed design exists

Technical drawings have been on our website for months, at:
<http://www.camcycle.org.uk/campaigning/issues/gonvillecrossing/>

These drawings were prepared by a Chartered Engineer and accord with current best practice.

Deconstruction of points in the report

We offer the following deconstruction of the points in the report, which we hope provides Councillors ample evidence to oppose the Officer recommendation.

Safety

The County Engineers are in effect claiming that the arrangement that existed and operated safely for many years was in fact dangerous and geometrically unachievable.

This is clearly wrong on both counts since it had a good safety record, with no recorded incidents between pedestrians and cyclists, and of course fitted neatly into the space that it is apparently now too big for.

Narrowing

The County Engineers state that, having narrowed the existing crossing to less than half its original width, they believe that it would be impossible to do the reverse - or at least prohibitively expensive because to do so would require relocation of the large cantilever signal arm for the central lane.

This is nonsense. Their whole argument seems to revolve around an ideological standpoint (one not approved by the Area Joint Committee) that cyclists and pedestrians SHOULD be forcibly mixed at the crossing and its approaches, and nothing should be allowed to divide them.

What is being asked is to restore the previous width, leaving the cobbled paving housing the mast column just as it has always been - guiding cyclists onto the cycle path and pedestrians onto the footway, instead of forcing them into an disorganised melee around the Parkers Piece side signal pole. This would cost nothing, except to restore the signals to their original positions.

Failure to cater for provision for cyclists leaving the road

This was one of only two problems that existed with the previous design. Not even a dropped kerb has been proposed.

Nearside signals

Our comments relate principally to the orientation of the signals, so that they can be seen by approaching cyclists but not by motorists. The County Engineers do not appear to be attempting to answer the issue put to them but have chosen to talk about something completely different.

Detector loops

The report claims that detector loops are dangerous. This is totally undermined by the complete absence of any recorded collisions between pedestrians and cyclists in the many years of trouble-free service.

"The principle of the installation of advanced cycle detection loops at this site has been safety audited and the conclusion is that the loops could have a negative influence on the safety of cyclists".

The County Council should provide evidence to back up this statement or accept that it is false. We have requested the Safety Audit. We have asked the engineering community as a whole via the Institution of Civil Engineers and Cycle England Local Authority Planning discussion groups - nobody had any experience of any problems relating to the use of advance detection loops, and their use is considered to be best practice.

As we have repeatedly pointed out, advanced detector loops had been used at this site and other sites around Cambridge without incident for many years.

The benefits of advanced cycle detection at this type of crossing are not considered to be of that much benefit.

It is a little strange then that they are used universally at traffic light junctions. Having discussed this point with the signals team we are aware of their resistance to the thought of allowing cyclists to benefit from advance detection in the same way as other traffic does. This is a regrettable and unjustifiable standpoint which runs counter to the Council's policy of promoting cycling. It is also at odds with best practice, the following is a quote from Alex Sully, one of the authors of "Cycle Friendly Infrastructure", the definitive guidance document on Cycle Infrastructure design that is presently awaiting publishing of its second edition from the DfT:

*The use of **detector loops** to minimise delays to cyclists approaching signal controlled crossings was considered to be **best practice** when we drafted CF12 and hence formed part of that guidance. I am certainly unaware of any body of evidence that suggests this is in any way hazardous or we would not have included it and therefore still consider that **this is a cycle-positive measure to be encouraged**.*

This quote was reproduced in our report. The Signals team have no excuse for persisting with this assertion.

Speeds

We cannot agree that detector loops encourage cyclists to approach at "significant speed". Significant speed would be more than the urban speed limit (30 mph) then, or maybe 20 mph as used in Home Zones where vehicles and pedestrians, children etc are presumed able to mix safely without segregation. Yet a cyclist on an urban cycle path can only manage about 10-15 mph. An actual speed survey would utterly destroy the Officer claims that detector loops

encourage "significant" speed. As far as we are aware there are NO recorded incidents of collisions between pedestrians and cyclists resulting from excessive approach speeds at this crossing in the many previous years use of detector loops.

"As a shared crossing, pedestrians and cyclists are treated in the same way with regard to detection through the use of push buttons"

This is unstated ideology again. Cyclists and pedestrians naturally approach the crossing at different speeds. When one approaches a crossing on foot a push-button works well. On a bike, having to stop, press a button and wait is a significant inconvenience when compared with a system that detects your presence and changes the lights for you - as happens on the road. Should motorists have to stop and press a button in order to cross a crossing?

What is being asked for is that cyclists are treated in the same way when approaching from a cycle track as they are when approaching from the road. This is entirely reasonable. Any policy that treats cyclists using cycle tracks as lower priority than road vehicles (who have a green light by default) discriminates against cyclists. By doing so the Council will discourage people from cycling instead of driving, in conflict with its own stated policies.

Shared space

"Where pedestrians are waiting to cross in a shared area, cyclists should not be encouraged to approach at a significant speed..."

Creating one problem and then using that problem as a justification for producing a second problem is not good design.

As we have repeatedly pointed out, having pedestrians waiting in front of where people needed to cycle was a BAD thing, and that was one of the principal reasons why the old (parallel) crossing worked but the new (unsegregated) arrangement does not.

"the frequency of queuing [of vehicles across the crossing] has been reduced by combining the crossing areas..."

No evidence (in the form of before and after surveys) is presented. All that has happened is that whenever the crossing is obstructed there is a lot less space left for everybody to squeeze through.

By experience, obstruction has become much more of a problem than before.

Forcing walkers and cyclists to wait unnecessarily

"The pedestrian / cycle stage must be allowed to operate at least once every 120 seconds, should a demand be present."

This translates to "...if you press the button then you will only have to wait 2 minutes max in order to get 6 seconds of crossing time". This is not reasonable. Traffic is only interrupted if and when a request is made. There is no advantage to making people stand waiting needlessly at the kerb. Waiting times should be minimised - if there has been no request in the previous two minutes then the lights should change immediately.

Officers have completely ignored our request that loops are used to extend the crossing green phase for approaching cyclists (as happens with road vehicles) in order to minimise red light running by people who don't quite make the incredibly short 6 second green phase.

Misrepresentation of Department of Transport views

"The upgraded crossing layout now conforms with current DfT advice.."

The report presents the insinuation that the previous "parallel" crossing somehow failed to satisfy DfT guidelines. There is no reason to believe that this is true. Parallel crossings are perfectly legitimate, and DfT guidelines continue to make the point that they are superior to Toucans for busy crossings.

Putting a signal pole smack in the middle of a cycle lane does not appear in any piece of DfT guidance anywhere as far as we are aware. Unfortunately the DfT does not explicitly tell you not to do so because they expect design engineers to conform to common sense. Likewise, the nearside units are not, and never have been, correctly aligned.

The insinuation that this crossing arrangement is a standard arrangement used successfully all over the country and people here are just making a fuss, is unacceptable.

Weasel words

"It is recognised that for some users the change in layout is not considered as convenient as previously".

This sort of weasel wording really makes us very angry. The scale of public dissatisfaction is unprecedented. The new arrangement is not just a little inconvenient, it is a disaster, and has resulted in a huge increase in conflict between cyclists and pedestrians using the crossing. The arrangement and timing of the nearside signals have made using the crossing a difficult and intimidating experience, it has increased harassment by motorists and the incredibly short green phase increases the likelihood of people taking a chance and crossing on red. That makes it more dangerous.

Summary

The changes made by the County Council made this crossing considerably more difficult and unpleasant to use, and in our opinion it is more likely to lead to accidents both between cyclists and pedestrians, and between road and crossing users. None of the changes made have brought any material benefit to any crossing users, and they have not addressed any of the shortcomings of the previous crossing.

There is a clear way forward, as suggested above.

Yours sincerely,
on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign,

Members of the Crossings Subgroup