

Applying the Permeability Principle



Response to TfL Street Management's consultation on the
Shoreditch Triangle proposals

London Cycling Campaign in Hackney

July 2001

1. The permeability principle

1.1 One-way systems are a phenomenon of the motor traffic-centric planning consensus of the post-war era, when the priority was to cram as much motor traffic through the system as possible. They offer nothing but unpleasantness and danger to non-motorised road users in general. In particular, cycle journeys are cursed with lengthy diversions which make no sense to cycling as a mode of travel. Cycle traffic abhors diversion from the desire line – it should flow through the city like water through a sieve.

2. Local context

2.1 The London Cycling Campaign in Hackney (LCCiH), which has over 500 members in the borough, has been calling for reform of the traffic system in Shoreditch for many years, and the removal of one-way-only working from the high streets of both Shoreditch and Stoke Newington formed one of the key aims of a 'manifesto' published by this group back in 1996.

2.2 When the transportation department of London Borough of Hackney presented its original scheme in 1997, with Old Street remaining one-way eastbound, the needs of cycle traffic had been neglected. We intervened to win agreement that contra-flow cycle traffic should be permitted on Old Street in particular, and that two-way cycle travel should be facilitated around the whole system, including in the minor streets within and leading to the Shoreditch Triangle.

2.3 This principle of 'permeability' – of maximum route choice and minimum diversion for cycle traffic – was accepted by both officers and councillors, and this was strengthened by the Council's subsequent adoption of a new order of priority for road users, with the non-motorised modes coming first, followed by public transport, and with non-residents' motor vehicles last in the order of priority.

2.4 LCCiH continued to argue for the implementation of the Hackney plan as soon as funds permitted, and contributed both financially and in volunteer effort to the influential 'Look Both Ways' event of 1 December 2000, which drew cross-party support for traffic reform. We were naturally delighted when the GLA gave TfL Street Management the green light to plan a scheme for early implementation.

3 Every street is part of the cycle network

3.1 People who don't cycle much – including many planners – often overplay the importance of official cycle routes and underplay the importance of being free to move conveniently around the entire road network.

3.2 The London Cycle Network (LCN) is indeed a useful addition to the overall network for cycle traffic, and LCN routes often redress impermeability problems caused by the engineering of city streets for large volumes of motor traffic.

3.3 It should be remembered, however, that the majority of cycle journeys within and through Shoreditch are, and will continue to be, made on the rest of the road network, especially on the main desire lines of Old Street, Shoreditch High Street, Great Eastern Street and Curtain Road. This is absolutely natural, and the main streets should be engineered to permit direct and uncomplicated cycle travel.

4 A broad welcome for TfL's proposals

4.1 Many features of the TfL proposal presented for consultation at the end of June are welcome and uncontroversial for this group. In particular the directness of many journeys will be improved. The facility to go northbound on Shoreditch High Street, westbound on Old Street and south-east on Great Eastern Street will allow far less complicated journeys than at present.

4.2 It is also good to see that impermeability has been removed from key junctions. Cycle movements will be allowed from Hackney Road into Old Street, and from Pitfield Street across into Paul Street. This is excellent news.

4.2 LCCiH does, though, have reservations about particular parts of the scheme, and it is our belief that TfL should seize this valuable opportunity to build in even more convenience gains for cycle traffic than are currently envisaged.

5 Areas of concern, plus recommendations

5.1 Curtain Road and the north-south corridor

5.1.1 It will come as no surprise that LCCiH does not welcome the retention of Curtain Road as one-way only. A key part of the Hackney scheme was to take the bulk of through motor traffic out of Curtain Road, allowing the re-linking of Hoxton Street and the length of Curtain Road into a 'green' north-south route, especially attractive for walking and cycling. We understand that there are already plans to amend the proposals to reduce the burden on Curtain Road, and we would welcome this as an opportunity to increase permeability in this corridor.

5.1.2 Recommendation: That cycle travel be facilitated southbound on Curtain Road, including the crossing of Great Eastern Street into the southern section of Curtain Road.

5.1.3 Recommendation: That cycle movements also be permitted into the north end of Curtain Road from Hoxton Street, as well as from Old Street in both directions. This could be facilitated by staggering the junction, bringing the stop line for signals east along Old Street so as to include the junction with Hoxton Street. This would also permit pedestrians to cross closer to the desire line.

5.2 Rivington Street and the east-west corridor

5.2.1 It is good to see that TfL's proposals suggest the raising of the priority of non-motorised traffic in Rivington Street, in the form of the suggestion of pedestrian access only for the section between Curtain Road and Charlotte Road.

5.2.2 Rivington Street is also an obvious east-west route for cycle traffic, as an alternative to the busier Old Street, and simply for travel within the Triangle. It is already well used in the eastbound direction by people cycling, and it is also used informally for westbound cycle travel. It could provide an excellent link between the two current north-south LCN routes (the Market Porters route which passes through Arnold Circus at the end of Calvert Avenue, and Hackney's LCN route which TfL is proposing to re-route via

Pitfield Street and Tabernacle Street/Paul Street).

5.2.3 Recommendation: That Rivington Street be given the status of a home zone, given the large volumes of pedestrian traffic on it, with motor traffic allowed on suffrage at very low speeds. Pedestrians should be considered to have the priority over all other modes, and cycling should be permitted in both directions.

5.2.4 Recommendation: That the use of Rivington Street as an east–west cycle route be facilitated by providing facilities for entry and exit at either end of Rivington Street.

- At the junction with Shoreditch High Street, east–west movements should be permitted between Rivington Street and Calvert Avenue, with a staggered junction similar in design to the junction on the A1 Holloway Road which permits movements between Fieldway Crescent N5 and Madras Place N7.
- Similarly at the junction of Rivington Street with Great Eastern Street, cycles should be permitted and facilitated to pass between Rivington Street, Great Eastern Street and the proposed new public square at Tabernacle Street, linking into the official north–south LCN route.

5.3 Pitfield Street and the LCN route

5.3.1 The current arrangement for northbound cycle traffic northbound from Tabernacle Street into Pitfield Street is as near to optimal as it could get. Cycle traffic stays on the desire line and is introduced directly into the carriageway of Pitfield Street.

5.3.2 It has been a long–held objective of LCCiH to see southbound cycle traffic permitted in Pitfield Street, with a facility for entering Old Street (in either direction), Great Eastern Street and Tabernacle St/Paul Street. To this extent, as stated previously, we welcome the proposals to remove this southbound impermeability and facilitate movement across the north–south axis. However, we do not like the fact that cycle traffic would be removed from the desire line and be routed across footways, bringing cyclists into conflict with pedestrians. It is also non–optimal that traffic on this important LCN link would be delayed by two separate light phases.

5.3.3 Recommendation: That the arrangement for north–south cycle traffic be changed to keep it as close as possible to the direct desire line, to put northbound cycle traffic directly into the carriageway of Pitfield Street rather than onto a segregated route on the wrong side of the road.

5.3.4 Recommendation: That the highest possible priority be given to minimising the delay for cycle traffic in crossing from Tabernacle Square to Pitfield and vice versa.

5.4 Speed limits

5.4.1 We are glad to hear that a 20mph limit is planned for the length of nearby Commercial Street. Such speed reductions would have the effect of making the streets safer and more pleasant for non–motorised road users, while discouraging the practice of acceleration between queues which is so wasteful of road space. A 20mph limit would almost certainly mean users of all modes getting to their destination sooner.

5.4.1 Recommendation: That the Commercial Street 20 mph speed limit be extended to cover the whole of the Shoreditch Triangle road system.

5.5 Cycle parking

5.5.1 Very little parking is currently available in the Shoreditch Triangle area, even informally. We therefore welcome the fact that parking has been seen as an integral part of this scheme, and see this as an opportunity to make a serious attempt to satisfy presently unmet demand.

5.5.2 Recommendation: That the historical lack of parking facilities be rectified by the installation of ample numbers of Sheffield-style or similar stands spread around the area within easy reach of every section of street. To increase capacity, stands can often usefully serve instead of bollards along the length of a street. Major trip generators should be particularly well catered for. To cater for demand over the whole area, including inside the Triangle, the numbers should be in the hundreds of stands, rather than the dozens.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Within a densely populated area such as this, cycling is the ideal mode not only for personal transport, but also increasingly for the efficient short-range delivery of goods from dispersal nodes supplied by motor freight. We understand and approve of the fact that buses are clearly one of the highest priorities in TfL's thinking on the Shoreditch Triangle, but we think that this should also be seen as a golden opportunity to encourage and reward a modal shift to cycling.

6.2 In the current proposals, the convenience of cycle traffic is largely subject to the convenience of motor traffic, whether moving or stationary, which is a reversal of what is necessary if serious modal shift is desired. We would urge you to be much bolder in prioritising the needs of the non-motorised modes.

6.3 We are very anxious to have the chance to see and comment on any detailed modifications made to the Shoreditch Triangle proposals as a result of consultation. This could possibly be carried out as part of a working group with other interest groups in the area.

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