

Torrington-Tavistock Place Cycle Scheme – View from the North Side

Resident Access Issues

I am a resident on the north side of Tavistock Place. I am also a Director of the Company owning the shared freehold for our apartments. So I have both resident and business concerns, which are affected by the present experimental scheme and indeed its predecessor.

Like many central London residents, I find it impractical to own a car. The traffic restrictions designed to control the flow from outside the area bears heavily upon those who live within it. I, therefore, use a mixture of modes, walking, cycling, bus, tube, taxis, street car-hire, and traditional car hire. My wife and I are retired, and so do not commute. It is our intention that our current address will be the last for both of us. Consequently, we must plan for future restricted mobility and infirmity.

In my opinion Camden's plan for this cycle scheme has given inadequate thought to resident vehicle access, and while it has other failings some fatal I do not see why a cycle scheme could not accommodate resident access outside of weekday peak traffic hours when cyclists are virtually absent (see Figure 1). The preoccupation of local transport officers to resolve a traffic flow problem has created a problem for local residents – their ultimate employers. They need to think again.

Figure 1: Off Peak Cycling Activity



Dropping off / Picking Up in Tavistock Place

We have limited dropping off and picking up needs, but we expect them to grow as we age. We also receive visitors and not all of whom are able to use public transport. Indeed as friends, they too tend to be of a certain age and feel more comfortable and safer using their own vehicles or taxis to travel around – many prefer to meet elsewhere than confront the difficulties.

While it is apparently legal for a taxi or car to enter a cycle track to drop off passengers, no driver or taxi-driver is willing to do so because they fear the abuse of cyclists or of drivers if they choose the alternative to block the one way road. They invariably choose to drop off or pick up on the corner of Herbrand Street.

This predilection notwithstanding, I have seen a taxi block the corner of Tavistock/Woburn Place, fearful of entering the cycle lane, to deposit an elderly woman with a zimmer frame. She had to balance the frame on the concrete divider, and then step out unsteadily into the stream of cycle traffic before she lost her balance. When my mother was alive, her carer would occasionally bring her in her wheelchair to Tavistock. She bridled at pushing her across the street with its complex cycle and vehicle flows, because she did not feel safe doing so. A taxi from North London, with ramp and fixing for a wheel chair, would have cost about £30 to £40 one way; a mini-cab was much cheaper. However, this meant transferring my mother to and from the car seat and her wheelchair, which took time and could not be entertained within a cycle lane for reasons mentioned above. The mini-cab drivers therefore invariably drove on to the pavement in Tavistock, which is of course illegal, though far from novel in our street. I have also seen on more than one occasion the bus driver, who delivers the elderly to The Chinese Centre, gingerly shepherding 4 or 5 in his charge slowly across the road – the speed being dictated by their mobility problems. Needless to say his bus was parked on double yellow lines to shorten the walk for the elderly.

The concrete dividers or the proposed stepped tracks are very unfriendly for wheel chairs and zimmer frames. If this scheme is to go ahead, and drivers refuse to risk the opprobrium of cyclists, then it is essential that a zebra crossing is placed across Tavistock to permit the frail and elderly access to the North side of Tavistock Place from Herbrand Street.

Loading/Unloading

In the capacity of both resident and manager of a building, I find that I need to organize numerous “white van” visits – workers with equipment. Below I provide a list of recent such visits and those in the pipeline by category:

Building Works

- Investigation and repair of sewerage problems – 3 exploratory visits with cameras and hose; 3 day visit to make repairs.
- Several builder visits of Flat A to make good 3-4 rooms affected by water leak – several weeks
- Redecoration of Flat B following leak from stack
- Installation New Bathroom Flat C
- Installation New Bathroom Flat D – a month
- Grinding New Stone awning + new lead flashing
- Impending Full external building decoration / Scaffolding – a month or more
- Tree surgeon – a day
- Floor sanding / redecoration following water leaks – removal of furniture – furniture clearance – two weeks

Building Services Visits

- Lift maintenance
- Fire Safety Alarm Checks
- Electrical Safety Inspections
- Asbestos Checks
- Anti-Pest Inspections
- Water Quality Testing

Individual Flat Service Requirements (14 Apartments)

- Boiler maintenance
- Repairs: White goods, routers, etc
- Internet orders and deliveries (necessary for those without vehicles – common in central London – and increasingly for the elderly with limited mobility)
- Removal of domestic items to dump
- Periodic flat moving.

These visits require some form of white van to be loaded or unloaded. Some loads are heavier than others entailing longer periods in bays. Some companies choose to double up on the driver so the spare driver can cruise around waiting for his/her colleague if they cannot park – pointless vehicle miles. Other companies expect to be unable to park legally and accept fines as a normal cost of business. One of our local plumbers told me that he attracts about 3 fines per week in Central London.

Figure 2: Moving House in the Cycle Lane



Traffic jams raising travel times, the congestion charge, parking charges, abandoned deliveries and parking fines all add to the cost of the services provided, which are passed on to residents even though many of these restrictive measures are intended to stop the flow from outside the residential area. The new cycle track scheme adds to these costs by increasing congestion and removing loading and unloading (formerly available on the North side of Tavistock Place). Moreover

delivery services do not calculate these additional charges based on actual costs but their expected costs, so if there is an increase simply in the likelihood of not finding a loading or unloading space a charge is levied. This means that any loading/unloading area must have a surfeit of space to ensure a high probability of finding an open bay.

The recent Consultative Report provided no discussion of the sufficiency of loading and unloading bays in Herbrand Street. I understand that Camden commissioned a two-week video survey of the loading bays, but do not know whether this included Herbrand Street (see Figure 3). One of the limitations of a video survey is that it cannot capture the occasions when a delivery vehicle arrives at Herbrand Street in anticipation of a parking space, finds it full and then circles the area in a desperate search for a place to park. I have seen a delivery van driver pause at the bays, curse, and thread his way through the increasingly restrictive web of one way streets to find somewhere else to stop – time lost, costs raised. The alternative is to break the law in some way – parking on the pavement, which is far from unusual or parking in the cycle lane (see Figure 2).

Figure 3: Busy Bays



Finally, like drop offs and pick ups from Herbrand Street these delivery men need to carry either heavy or bulky equipment across to the north side of Tavistock Place, perhaps making several crossings of all lanes of traffic. If the only loading/unloading space is the seemingly inadequate bays in Herbrand Street, then a pedestrian crossing is essential for those carrying items, perhaps with an encumbered view, across to the North side of Tavistock Place.

Figure 4: Furniture Clearance - Veolia



However, if we reverted to the original road layout which existed up to 2005, cycle lane east, next to vehicle line east, next to vehicle lane west, next to cycle lane west with no physical cycle lane dividers, there would be material advantages. First as Eccy de Jong's statistical analysis shows it was a safer layout for cyclists. Second, during off-peak times there could be both loading and unloading and drop offs and pickups on to the pavements meeting the needs of residents rather than exclusive interest of transient traffic. Third, if a cycle lane is blocked by a parked vehicle the cyclist could move into vehicle traffic moving in the same direction, whereas at present going west the cyclist has to squeeze into a tight space against the vehicle flow (see Figure 4). Fourth, the outcome would not be one that discriminates against the elderly or those with mobility issues. Fifth, the eventual serious accident to a bin man stepping into a cycle lane from behind the van (see Figure 5) will be averted.

Figure 5: Bin men dancing in cycle lanes

