

Cyclists Touring Club right to ride network

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06 June 2009

Simon Young NHDC
Dave Burt HCC

By email

Dear Simon, David,



Proposed Hitchin Railway Flyover

I know that the consultation on the railway flyover was a while ago now. We do however have some comments.

As an overall comment we are very much in support of the proposal. Increasing capacity on the overcrowded rail lines serving North Herts is something that few people would argue against.

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The proposed viaduct wraps around the existing industrial area. Two issues arise from this:

-  We have been talking about building an eastern access road to the industrial area, to relieve HGV traffic on Grove Rd and Cadwell Lane, for the last decade. This should be integrated into the design so that even if they do not go ahead together we do at least ensure that the railway alignment does not block the route of a future access road.
-  The new rail viaduct and embankment cross or pass close to a number of NHDC's planned cycle routes. At the very least these should be taken into account in the design and a corridor protected to allow a path to be built to the recommended (not minimum) dimensions required in LTN 02/08 and TA 90/05. The corridor should include all necessary clearances to boundaries, fences, hedges and other constraining features so that any future path is not compromised by having insufficient space.

We would obviously prefer that a major project like this included a very significant contribution to building the cycle network. Obvious routes would include NHDC route 1; this is planned to run alongside the railway from the existing bridge at the Cadwell Lane scrap metal works, up to Ickleford.



Cadwell Crossing

The other obvious and pressing need is to restore step free cycle (and equestrian) access across the rail lines at Cadwell Crossing. I presume that Simon remembers the history of this crossing, for David's benefit I will give a brief summary...

Until the Letchworth Garden City was built, the current Ickneild Way path (NHDC route 13) was the road between Ickleford and Norton (one of Letchworth's parent villages). When the garden city was built a new road was built a little further north (Arlesey New Road) and the Ickneild Way was left as a green lane. With the coming of formal rights of Way it was designated a byway.

In the 1970s a whole swathe of rail crossing points were closed or downgraded to footpaths, without any consultation and arguably without a sound legal basis (I understand that it you can only legally downgrade anything that was formally a road to a bridleway, not a footpath). The Ickneild Way was one of these - it remains a restricted byway except for the short distance between the railway boundaries where it is a footpath.

Ten years ago Railtrack decided to replace the level foot crossing with a footbridge. Along with NHDC and British Horse we argued that cycle and equestrian access should be restored. HCC shamefully opposed us, despite having policies that promised to restore broken links in the rights of way network.

The Ickneild Way represents the ONLY viable traffic free route Hitchin and Letchworth. More than that, it connects ALL of the North Herts towns from the village of Pirton in the West to Royston in the east, and beyond that there are continuous long distance route to the Dorset and Norfolk coasts.

We are deeply frustrated by the lack of interest that has been shown by HCC and NHDC in developing the Ickneild Way. This could be a real blue riband route - something to bring pride to the district and a huge asset to local people.

Anyway, the foot vs bridleway bridge argument went to a public inquiry - we won the argument but lost the battle ie the inspector agreed that it should be restored to a bridleway crossing, but since nobody was offering to pay for it he let Railtrack go ahead and put in steps.

It was a very disappointing result. The need for a traffic free route between Hitchin and Letchworth remains, and this remains the only viable route. This is the opportunity to put right an old wrong. We hope that this time around HCC will support rather than oppose improvements to the cycle network and use the Rights of Way Improvement Plan to help make this route a reality.

Plan illustrating some of the issues attached.



There are two other key “railway” issues in Hitchin. Both are very longstanding problems that we have raised on many occasions. Both were highlighted in the 1998 Hitchin Transport Plan and the 1999 [North Herts Towns Cycle Network Plan](#) (see routes 11 and 14).

Cambridge Road Bridge

The Cambridge Road bridge is a dreadful deterrent to both walking and cycling. The 1999 plan describes it as “*extremely unpleasant*”. In public surveys for the 1998 HUTP “*creating a new pedestrian / cycle route under the A505 Cambridge Road railway bridge*” was the eighth most popular measure with 80% of public in favour and only 7% against.

This is a vital measure, and one that enjoys overwhelming public support.

Previous proposals have focussed on tunnelling behind the bridge abutments to build parallel pedestrian tunnels. The existing footways could then be used to widen the road and create space for cycle lanes through the bridge and approaches.

Unfortunately that approach would probably not result in an especially satisfactory result despite considerable expense and disruption. The cycle lanes would be confined by the abutment walls so probably narrower than comfortable. The footways would be hidden from view - causing personal security concerns in what is not the most salubrious corner of Hitchin.

It would be better to replace the bridge in its entirety with a longer span. An additional 6m span would allow two 2m cycle lanes to be introduced and the footways widened to 2m each side. The bridge would then be open and airy, minimising personal security concerns.

This would of course be a major engineering exercise, but that is a very good reason to progress it at the same time as the Railway curve is built - get all of the disruption out of the way in one go.

Access to the east (London bound) platform

Again a very popular measure. In surveys for the 1998 HUTP it ranked 13th most popular measure with 72% in favour and only 5% against.

Building a second entrance to the east, with foot and cycle access from Cambridge Road and St Michael’s Rd would make the station significantly closer for many residents. It would remove the need for them to pass under the unpleasant A505 bridge to reach the station.

An eastern access would also allow step free disabled access to the London bound platform. It would give the chance to spread some of the competing demands for forecourt space that has left cycle access marginalised in such an unsatisfactory manner.

Yours Sincerely

Alasdair DV Massie

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CTC Right to Ride Representative, North Herts

cc Councillors on Highways Joint Member Panel by email

encl Plan showing NHDC planned cycle routes in the vicinity of the proposed viaduct.

Hitchin Railway Curve – Associated improvements needed

