

Cyclists Touring Club right to ride network

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Dear Dave and Graham,

Paynes Park Gyratory, Hitchin and Jubilee Rd / Baldock Rd, Letchworth

Firstly, thank you for meeting me on 27 January. I felt that it was a productive meeting, even if it did not result in any obvious, satisfactory solutions.

We do however have concerns that we were being presented with two, bottom of hierarchy “solutions” that fail to address problems with the road hierarchy at source, and instead target the “symptoms” by removing cyclists from the carriageway.

We feel there is some merit in the proposals for Bedford Road in Hitchin, but only as a temporary measure while a long overdue review of the dreadful one way system is carried out. Regrettably we can find nothing positive in the proposals for Baldock Road in Letchworth. We believe that these proposals simply move us further away from the goal of a safe, welcoming road network where walking and cycling are the natural choice for local trips, as would be the case on the far side of the North Sea.

Keeping track of the big picture

It is very easy to go from project to project, making changes in isolation, without considering whether they bring us closer to, or take us further away from our ultimate goals. Our experience is that this often leads to progressive squeezing out of walking and cycling - ie the opposite of stated goals.

We must always keep one eye on how any individual proposal will affect long term goals. These goals have already been defined in planning documents. In this case reference should be made to the 1998 Hitchin Transport Plan and the 1999 NHDC Cycle Network Masterplan, both of which contain recommendations for the Paynes Park gyratory.



When planning maintenance or improvement works we should always look at these plans as it is often possible to make infrastructure improvements at NO additional cost. It shouldn't be left to the last minute as that seldom allows enough time to get the best out of the opportunity.

HCC's wider goals are to reduce car dependency, reduce traffic levels in towns, improve road safety, increase levels of cycling and walking, improve the local and global environments, encourage healthy, active lifestyles etc. Increasing or even maintaining current levels of motor traffic capacity runs counter to all of those objectives, especially when that capacity is bought at the expense of walking and cycling.

CTC is the UK's largest cycling organisation with 70,000 members. Formed in 1878 we have actively campaigned for better, safer roads, locally and nationally since our inception. We have a large and active section for Stevenage and North Herts.



There may well be a lot of pressure to try and build our way out of congestion, and to squeeze other modes into the margins, but we know that it doesn't work. The best we can hope for is to move "our" congestion onto our neighbours.

So we need to be smart, we need to have a long term plan to reduce car dependency, and we need to follow it.

What are our goals ?

One way gyratories are a disaster for walking and cycling. They encourage excessive speeds and aggressive driving. They make journeys on a bike unpleasant and indirect. They are a very serious deterrent to cycling, create a traffic dominated environment, and should be avoided at all costs.

The contrast between the bustling High Street and the horrible race track that is Paynes Park could not be starker. It is only a short walk from the main shopping streets and yet the environment is hostile and vehicle dominated. Returning the gyratory to 2 way flow and reducing traffic speed and volume must be a priority.

The short length of 40mph dual carriageway separating Letchworth from Baldock is another anachronism. The two towns lie so close together that there is no genuine break in the urban area. The road capacity at both ends is severely limited by single carriageway roads with light controlled junctions and on street parking. There is simply NO benefit in having a section of dual carriageway here. All it does is encourage people to drive too fast and too aggressively as they battle to overtake before the lanes merge once more. As at Paynes Park there is an acknowledged problem with speeding, created by an inappropriate high speed, high capacity stretch of road in an urban environment.

Again, this road is only a short walk from Baldock and Letchworth town centres, but it is a threatening, hostile, vehicle dominated environment. The ultimate goal must be to remove the excess capacity and put it to better use. That excess capacity brings no benefits, on the contrary it creates danger and encourages law breaking.

Removing excess capacity may be controversial. People cling to the hope that if we just had a bit more road then all the jams will go away, however much their experience tells them that it is nonsense. That is why it needs to be part of a long term plan, it cannot be rushed into without marketing both to the people who stand to benefit most, and to those whose immediate reaction is to oppose it (perhaps without giving it any thought).

Treating symptoms (eg putting cyclists on the pavement) doesn't work. Treating causes is the only way to reach our goal of a safe, pleasant and equitable street environment.

Paynes Park Gyratory Hitchin

The problem:

Very hostile road conditions, high speeds, high volumes and indirect routes caused by the gyratory, severance of residential areas from town centre.

The solution:

Restore 2 way flow. This will remove most of the traffic from Bedford Rd and Paynes Pk, reduce traffic speeds, remove severance and restore direct routes. This will make the roads fine for cycling without separate provision and greatly improve the pedestrian environment

Hierarchy of solutions

Manual for Streets, LTN 02/08 and TAL 91/05

Traffic Reduction

Speed reduction

Junctions and Traffic Management

Carriageway Redistribution

Off road provision away from highways

Roadside pavement conversions

Consider first

Consider last

"Cycle tracks will not be created through the conversion of footways, without a full assessment by reference to the hierarchy of solutions, a cycle audit and full consultation with all stakeholders."

Hertfordshire Cycling Strategy Annexe 2

The scheme as drawn:

Shared pavement along Bedford Rd to link Brand St to Elmside walk.

Our recommendations:

If proposed as a permanent “solution”, this scheme is counterproductive and unwelcome. Even after widening, the pavement is much too narrow for comfortable shared use. The interface with the carriageway at either end is poor and there are a number of potential conflict points at side entrances.

The only satisfactory solution is to restore the gyratory to two way working throughout.

As a **temporary** measure to improve connection of Elmside Walk with the town centre until two way flow is restored it has some merit. We therefore give this scheme our support, with qualifications as listed below. The restoration of two way flow is however urgent and long overdue.

It is essential that the unsatisfactory width is not further reduced by sign posts, street furniture etc. Side turnings crossed on raised humps - good. Links with carriageway at start and end are poor and need some careful design. Protection of cyclists in carriageway - suggest putting cycle logos on carriageway but no lane as this may make correct positioning difficult.

Comments:

As stated, the ultimate aim must be to restore this gyratory to two lane, two way working. The same traffic is accommodated on two way roads only a few yards away, there is no technical reason why it cannot be accommodated here. There was public support for restoring 2 way working here when people were surveyed for the 1998 Hitchin Transport Plan. We have had a decade to implement the recommendations of this plan, it is about time that it was put into action.

The 1999 North Herts Towns Cycle Route Network Masterplan also recommends removal of the gyratory, noting *“This gyratory system is very hazardous and deters even bolder cyclists..”*

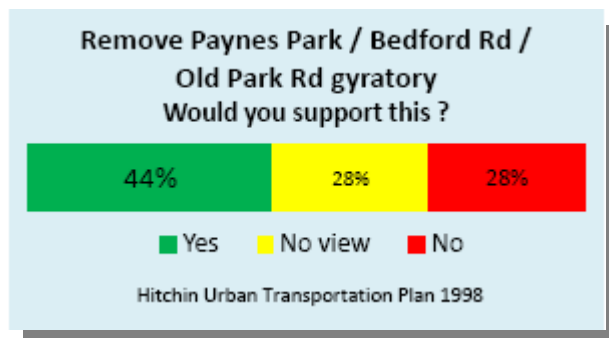
It is virtually impossible to avoid this stretch of road when cycling from the Bearton / Oughtonhead end of town to or from the town centre. It is a major deterrent to cycling, one of the worst in the town.

The one way system IS the problem, there is no avoiding the fact. Any measures other than restoring two way flow compromise peoples freedom to cycle in some way. Any measure put in place now must therefore be viewed as a **temporary stop gap** only until the real problem is addressed.

We do not recommend the use of pavement cycleways in urban areas. There are fundamental issues with side road crossings and there is rarely sufficient clear space to create a satisfactory path. This type of provision is rightly at the bottom of the hierarchy of solutions.

We do, nevertheless acknowledge that until **such time as the gyratory is restored to two way flow**, there is an acute problem, even for relatively confident riders. There are no obvious on-road solutions to employ. Widening the footway to accommodate pavement cycling that already occurs may help in the short term, but must not be considered as anything more than that. The following should be noted:

- 🚲 Confident riders will NOT use the pavement to ride with flow. Great care must be taken to ensure that their right to use the road is not compromised. Using cycle logos in the carriageway without a cycle lane may help.
- 🚲 Traffic lanes of **3.5m width** are “critical” width, allowing vehicles (including HGVs) sufficient width to push past a cyclist, but not allowing enough space to do so safely. It is not possible to create “comfortable” width lanes and retain two lanes within the width available.



Reducing the lane widths to 3.0m would ensure that HGVs needed to change lanes to pass and would reduce the danger slightly. The road will however remain an unpleasant environment for cycling and the lane width remains within the “critical” range for car / cycle interaction (LTN 02/08). There is no “right” answer available (other than reverting to two way) only varying shades of “wrong”.

Reverting to two way flow would remove almost all the traffic from both Paynes Park and Bedford Road as far as the Old Park Rd junction. It would automatically become a comfortable environment for cycling.

Even after widening, the pavement will be a very substandard width for shared use. Attention should be paid to removing all hazards and features that restrict the effective width. Posts, signs, railings, bins, phone boxes and other street furniture must all go.



To achieve satisfactory width for a two way pavement cycle track would require the loss of one traffic lane. We believe that restoring 2 way flow and keeping cyclists in the carriageway is a better way to use the space. This is in accordance with the Hierarchy of Measures LTN 02/08 and Manual for Streets.

We do not recommend segregating pedestrians and cyclists using the proposed off-road track due to the lack of available width. Segregation is rarely well respected and often becomes a source of unnecessary antagonism. Ladder and tramline paving are also a hazard and are unpopular with all path users.

We encourage the use of raised tables across driveways and entrances.

The Brand St junction can be greatly improved to increase deflection, reduce entry speeds and widen the pavement. The 1998 HUTP called for pedestrianisation of Brand St (with continued cycle access). This is long overdue.

The crossing at the Old Park Road end is not very satisfactory. Again this is a problem created by the one way system and would be greatly simplified by reverting to 2 way flows. The obvious solution is for toucan crossings of all cyclable arms, with an “all red” traffic phase to avoid multiple crossings.



“It is not illegal to cycle across a Zebra crossing if there is shared-use to either side, but it is contrary to Rule 64 of the Highway Code which states that cyclists should dismount and walk across Zebra crossings.

Nearly 90% of cyclists at six sites surveyed cycled across Zebra crossings

The TRL study found that the conflict with pedestrians at the six observed sites was low and comparable with at a Toucan crossing.

It also found there was little difference in the rate of conflict with vehicles between those pushing their cycle across the road and those riding across.



The number of serious conflicts (involving controlled or emergency manoeuvres) was very low (0.83% of 1570). No collisions were observed. These figures suggest that a cyclist would be far safer crossing a road via a Zebra (2.85) than exiting and crossing from a priority side-road junction (5.13), but not as safe if crossing on a Toucan or walking across a Zebra. “

TfL [Cyclists’ Use of Zebra Crossings](#)

TRL Shared zebra crossing study





-  We have no objection to a mix of crossing types. The existing zebra could have an uncontrolled crossing in its shadow (see 1999 NHDC Cycle route plan section 6.6) to allow cyclists to cross the road without needing to use the zebra crossing itself. Note that cyclists frequently use zebras and there is no evidence of safety problems (refer to TfL, TRL and Cycling England reports). We recommend putting the whole crossing on a table.
-  Cyclists must be able to join the path without having to make an abrupt turn. It may be easiest to do this at the Elmside Walk turning. A marked on-road lane to this point MAY help, but only if adequate width can be provided (1.5m min). Alternatively cycle logos on the carriageway can reduce the likelihood of belligerence from drivers who might otherwise believe that cyclists were no longer entitled to use the carriageway.

Pedestrianisation or traffic restrictions in Brand Street and Bancroft were also part of the 1998 Plan recommendations. We strongly endorse the recommendations for these busy shopping streets. If implemented they would, in our view, greatly contribute to making Hitchin more walkable and cycleable.

Baldock Road / Jubilee Road junction

The problem:

Baldock Road has a very short stretch (400m) of 40mph dual carriageway either side of the Jubilee Rd intersection. This dual carriageway brings no traffic benefits as road capacity on either side is severely constrained, but it sends out a message to drivers that this is a place to go fast. Although this is only a short distance from Baldock (1km or 3 min by bike) and Letchworth (2km - 6 min) town centres, it creates a very hostile environment for walking and cycling.

There is an obvious problem with speeding on this stretch of road which speed cameras have failed to address. Note that the maximum theoretical journey time saving over the 1 km long stretch of 40 mph limit on Baldock Rd is less than 20 seconds in free flowing traffic (compare to a typical 40 second wait at traffic lights). Congestion on the roads at either end means that it is rarely possible to “cash” that 20 seconds in, drivers just spend the extra 20 seconds looking at the back of the car ahead in Baldock. This is not a “real” saving and is certainly not one that justifies maintaining hostile conditions for walking and cycling.

The solution:

Remove the excess traffic lanes, returning the road to a two lane single carriageway. The spare width created can then be used to create an attractive walking and cycling environment as can be experienced only a short distance away.

Note, this does NOT reduce capacity. As previously observed, the roads capacity is limited by the roads and junctions at either end. Rather than concentrating congestion at these locations it will be more evenly distributed - in the same way as SUDS (sustainable urban drainage systems) absorb rainfall over a wide area and prevent acute flooding downstream.

The scheme as drawn:

The junction at Weston Way, Baldock (800m east) has already been signalised. The current proposals are to signalise the Jubilee Way junction and to extend the existing roadside cycle track from the end of the service road, along a narrow pavement to Jubilee Road.

Our recommendations:

We cannot support these proposals in any form. This is a wholly negative proposal in our view. It reinforces the vehicle dominated environment where it should be reducing it, and marginalises cycling at the expense of existing pavement users.

We recommend that this scheme is completely re-thought. We recommend that the short stretch of dual carriageway is restored to a two lane, 30 mph single carriageway, that on-road cycle lanes are introduced to provide more comfortable cycling conditions and to reduce the apparent carriageway width (hence reducing traffic speed).

The existing cycle track adjacent to Letchworth Road is a worthwhile feature but of limited use, slow and inconvenient to use. The interface with the carriageway at Weston Way is poor - downright dangerous in



fact, and needs to be changed. The existing footway close to Jubilee Road is completely unsuitable for conversion to shared use. A good quality “adjacent use” track requires over 7m of clear width and even a “minimum” width 2m cycle track without pedestrian provision (and therefore not suitable here) generally needs at least 4m width from boundary to kerb. See attached sheet.

Removing the excess traffic lanes in Baldock Road creates space by which this path can be extended to Jubilee Rd without compromising width (*NHDC Cycle Route Masterplan Letchworth 2.2*). It will also allow space for on-road cycle lanes in both directions. On-road lanes are more appropriate in this situation, giving a clear “cyclists welcome” message, without compromising journey times, without loss of priority at side roads, and without the need to cross and re-cross the main road in order to move along it.

We do not support signalisation of the junction as it adds to journey times and ultimately acts as a deterrent to cycling for short trips. It takes less than 10 minutes to cycle from the centre of Baldock to the centre of Letchworth; a single light controlled junction adds up to 2 minutes (20%) to a journey.

If the junction is to be signalised, we recommend that a cycle track is built on the south side of Baldock Road that bypasses the lights in the westbound direction. This track should be brought seamlessly back into an on-road cycle lane, without requiring cyclists to stop and give way and without putting them into potential conflict with vehicles. We also recommend that advanced stop lines are used on all junction approaches.

The use of multiple approach lanes and dedicated left / right turn lanes reinforces the sense of vehicle dominance, as does the use of large arrows on the road. All of these give the message that “*this is a place for vehicles, not for people*”. None of these are welcome in what should be a minor local distributor. We have just spent £33 million in an attempt to remove traffic from Baldock, we do not want to encourage more in via the back door.

Foot and cycle access to the retail park is very poor. New access paths on desire lines from all directions should be provided.

We recommend that some of the shortcomings of the existing cycle track on Letchworth Road are addressed. The short length of track to the south of Letchworth Road is unsafe as it launches cyclists unexpectedly into Weston Way at a blind corner. This should be converted back to a footway and the cycle track junction relocated so that it faces opposite Weston Way and operates as one of a 4 arm junction. Advanced stop lines should be provided on all arms.

Junction priority on the service road (used as a cycle route) on the North side of Letchworth Rd should be reversed to give the service road priority over Hadrian Way, Hopewell Rd and Pepys Way. This will minimise the number of unnecessary interruptions to the cycle route.

There is already a much better cycle route connecting Baldock and Letchworth. This uses the bridge over the A1 connecting Coachmans Lane with Works Road (*NHDC Cycle Routes Masterplan Baldock 1.11 and Letchworth 1.1-1.3*). The existing cycle track on the north side of Letchworth Rd can easily connect to this via Pepys way (*Baldock 2.14*), or by passing under the A1 bridge and following Hadrian Way. Some minor improvements are needed - the bollards at Coachmans Lane are unsuitable, vegetation needs controlling, the path junction needs modifying, and the path needs a proper interface with Works Road. Works Road itself is in poor condition and in urgent need of maintenance. It also suffers from rat running traffic, which needs addressing.

This route should be signed from the Letchworth cycle track. To ensure that there is a coherent, permeable cycle network this route should be developed in addition to ensuring that Baldock Road is safe and comfortable for cycling.

Yours Sincerely

Alasdair DV Massie

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CTC Right to Ride Representative, North Herts