

Cyclists Touring Club right to ride network

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Please reply to:

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by email

Dear Simon (and James),

Hitchin Station Forecourt Rebuild - Mk 2

thank you for your email and plans for the proposed re-modelling of the Hitchin Station Forecourt.

It is ironic isn't it ? Nine years ago I wrote to all of the "partners" in the Station Forecourt rebuild (Railtrack, Mouchel, NHDC and HCC) advising them that the bus route should go around the outside with the taxis on the inside. Had people listened to our advice at the time we would not be considering digging it up again (at great expense) now.

2. *Internal circulation.*

The speed and volume of traffic does not require a segregated cycle track. Use the taxi lane to reach the cycle parking and booking hall. A contra flow cycle lane allows riders to return from the cycle racks without conflict with the traffic (Sk 02). Note, swapping the taxi and bus lanes would have the advantage of reducing vehicle numbers while improving bus manoeuvring space (Sk 05).

Extract from letter to Railtrack 22/2/99

Our concerns and views have not changed in the intervening decade. Everything that was relevant in 1999 is just as relevant today. I therefore suggest that all concerned read back through our old correspondence. For your convenience, I am attaching our archive of letters on the subject to Railtrack 1999-2000.

We hope that people will have learned from this experience that we know what we are talking about, and that our advice will be listened to this time around. We also hope that people will listen to ALL of our concerns, not just the ones that they conveniently now agree with.

The big picture – why does any of this matter ?

Anybody trying to get across Hitchin at peak times will realize just how congested the local roads get. Much of that traffic is on very short journeys - to work, to a school, to the railway station. Those short car trips could easily be replaced by cycle trips, reducing the volume of traffic on the roads, the amount of noise and pollution in the air, reducing road danger, and improving peoples' health and well-being.

Of all short trips, getting to the station is probably the easiest to change away from car use, and cycling is usually the closest, most accessible alternative. Under typical peak time conditions, cycling is the quickest and most reliable form of urban transport. Very few people currently driving to Hitchin station live more

CTC is the UK's largest cycling organisation with 70,000 members

Right to ride is the CTC's volunteer campaign network – working for all cyclists at the local level



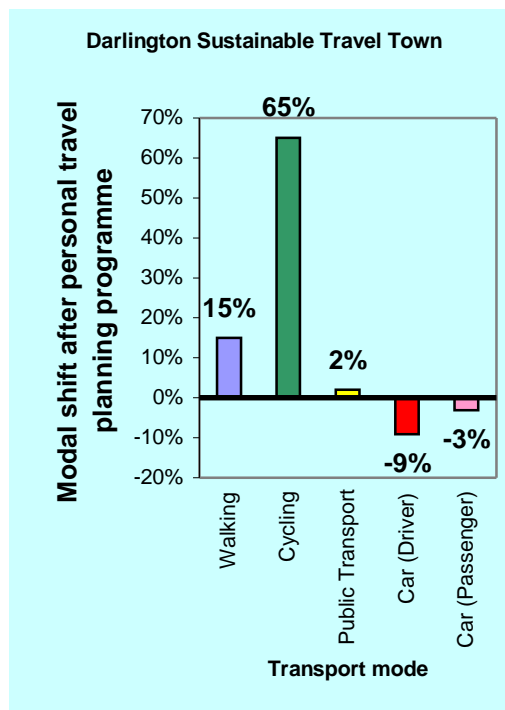
than 15 minutes cycle ride away, and most will be considerably closer. A bike gives you door to door convenience at virtually no cost. Most people already own a bike, even if they seldom use it.

Experience from Darlington (a “Sustainable Travel Town”) found that cycling was the mode with the greatest untapped potential to replace car use, and they have had remarkable success - a 65% increase in cycling and a 9% drop in traffic over the trial period - through personal travel planning combined with infrastructure improvements¹.

Darlington was starting from a low base, just like North Herts. We would like to see that same approach - personal travel planning combined with infrastructure improvements - applied here.

Sharing knowledge, sharing space

Before launching into detail on the proposals for Hitchin Station, can I draw your attention to the on-going developments at Cambridge Station. At Cambridge the forecourt is being rebuilt in a similar way, but the forecourt is being designed as a “shared space”. This means that the traditional kerbs and road markings are omitted and both motor vehicles and vulnerable road users share the same surface. Landscaping features and the absence of rigid hierarchies are used to keep vehicle speeds down.



I would be slightly cautious about using the same philosophy at Hitchin. Cambridge Station has very large numbers of pedestrians and cyclists streaming in and out at most times of day whereas at smaller stations it is a bit more patchy. Never the less, if you stand and watch people streaming out of Hitchin Station off an evening peak train you will see that it already operates as a “shared surface”. People do not walk along the pavement, they cut straight across the bus waiting area, which is itself used predominantly by waiting cars rather than buses. Cyclists leaving the bike shed do not of course go the long way round the one way system, they behave in exactly the same way as the pedestrians and take the shortest line to the exit.

We strongly recommend that you talk to the people involved at Cambridge before progressing too far and share their ideas and experience. Contact details follow:

Developer	Ashwell Plc	Rod Dowel
Walking and cycling officer	County Council	Patrick Joyce
Walking and cycling officer	City Council	Clare Rankin
Engineers	Mott Macdonald	Andrew Rawlings
Shared Space Consultants	Hamilton-Baillie Associates	Ben Hamilton-Baillie

Our concerns – before and now

As already stated, our concerns now are unchanged from 1999. They are as follows:

- What happens within the Station forecourt is of relatively trivial concern to anyone who might consider cycling to the station, when compared with what happens on the roads outside. The roads leading to and from the Station are unnecessarily hostile for a town of Hitchin’s size and virtually **NO** action has



been taken to improve conditions in the decade since the 1998 Hitchin Transport Plan was published. This despite the fact that cycling improvements **ranked second** in the public's list of priorities for the town.

- L In the immediate vicinity of the station improvements are needed to the A505 bridge, direct access is needed to the southbound platform from the A505, and a link is needed from Benslow footbridge. Other desperately needed improvements are described in the 1999 North Herts Towns Cycle Route Network masterplan.
- L Considerable space and investment has gone into providing bus and taxi facilities at the station, while walking and cycling have been shoved to the margins. This despite the fact that in the 1998 counts, more than three times as many people cycled to the station as took either a bus or taxi. Increases in cycle parking numbers at the station suggest that this gap will have grown further in the decade since.
- L There is an unhealthy emphasis on "kiss and drop". Of all methods of getting to the station, this is the least socially and environmentally friendly. "Kiss and drop" generates **TWICE** as much car mileage per journey as driving and parking at the station. Moreover this extra traffic is usually during peak time, on the town's busiest roads, on a cold (and therefore polluting) engine, and in immediate proximity to pedestrians, cyclists and anybody just out in the street. "Kiss and drop" should be strongly discouraged in favour of cycling, walking and public transport.

What cyclists need

Cyclists do not need to be segregated from traffic in a low speed / low traffic volume environment. A station forecourt that has high traffic speeds and volumes is one that has been very poorly designed. Even the current, very poor arrangement, is not what you would consider to be dangerous for cyclists. People demonstrate this by quite happily cycling against the traffic flow rather than going the long way around.

What cyclists **NEED** from the station forecourt is:

- b Safe, quick, direct, convenient and conflict free (but not necessarily traffic free) access both to and **FROM** the cycle parking. The current cycle lane is unsafe, it is invariably blocked by taxis or cars, and there is no sensible route from the cycle parking to the exit.
- b Safe, quick, direct, convenient and conflict free access both to and **FROM** the station building and platforms (many people will be taking their bikes with them on the train).
- b Safe, secure, convenient, covered parking. The current racks are well located but the stands themselves are poor. They are much too large and do not support bikes properly.

Observations on the current proposals

The immediate observation is that this is, again, a vehicle dominated scheme where cyclists and pedestrians are shoved to the margins.

If we want people to walk and cycle to the station rather than driving (and we really do want them to do so for a whole spectrum of social, environmental, health and economic reasons, not least to reduce the congestion on Hitchin's roads) then we must design for walking and cycling **FIRST**, and then fit the vehicle circulation around that.

Road-side shared pavements are NOT popular with either cyclists or pedestrians, and are wholly inappropriate in most urban environments. While a shared pavement might appear to solve one issue (getting from the cycle parking to the exit against the flow), it does so by creating other problems. Specifically:

- L There will be conflict with queues of people waiting for a bus (who will inevitably wait on the cycle path, blocking passage).



- L There is no safe and convenient way to get off the path and onto the road at the exit. Users will find themselves on the wrong side of the road, with no obvious means of getting across to the correct side, their path blocked by queuing vehicles, with other vehicles swinging in fast off the roundabout.
- L The width of shared path is not quoted but comparison with the road width suggests only 3.0m overall. Deducting 0.5m clearance on either side for kerb and boundary shyness, the effective width is only 2.0m total for cyclists and pedestrians. **This is wholly inadequate** and will lead to feelings of conflict and antagonism between users. The recommended effective width for a busy shared path is 5m (3.0m cycle path + 2.0m footway)², and in this case additional width would be needed to allow bus passengers to wait without obstructing the path (+2m).

This is wholly unsatisfactory and is the reason why proposals for a similar shared pavement were begrudgingly dropped in 1999.

We note that the cycle parking immediately outside the station entrance seems to have disappeared. There does not appear to be any reason for this, they have just gone. Although the pavement area has been reduced here, it is not on a pedestrian desire line and so there is no reason to believe that there would be any conflict.

Although this row of stands is currently not covered, it is the most convenient and best in terms of security (well overlooked). They should be retained.

Our recommendations

Cycle parking

We welcome the proposals to increase cycle parking. We assume that the existing cycle parking area will be retained so that the total number of spaces is increased. Please confirm that this is correct.

The oversized stands should be replaced by stands of the correct dimensions (750 long x 750 high, 1.0m min spacing).

Cycle parking close to the station entrance should be retained, but the stands replaced by ones of the correct dimensions and a cover should be built to protect from the weather.

Internal circulation

Two way access **MUST** be provided to the cycle parking. A shared pavement is **NOT** an acceptable way to do this.

We recommend that contraflow cycling is allowed from the cycle parking either by:

- b Providing a contraflow cycle lane in the bus lane. Or by...
- b Using shared space principles to keep speeds down and allow unregulated circulation. Note that NO segregation or defined lanes are required in 20 mph limits or where 85th percentile speeds are below 25 mph. If speeds in the forecourt exceed 20 mph then there is something very wrong in the design.

We prefer unsegregated contraflow cycling as this is more flexible and less vulnerable to obstruction. We recommend a divider island at the lane exit to protect waiting cyclists and provide a visible reminder that contraflow cycling is perfectly legitimate.

Keeping speeds down

The current layout encourages inappropriate speed, as does the proposed layout. Current speed management is crude - relying on speed humps instead of good geometry. In order to keep speeds to a minimum we strongly recommend the following:

- L The access road encourages speed. It is straight, with no direct activity off it. Address this by:
 - b Realign the access road, moving it towards the station building to fit the "kiss and drop" parking directly off it on one side (90 degrees parking is more space efficient). This will make the road less straight and create activity - making drivers more cautious.



- b Put the taxi rank on the other (station) side of the road (parallel parking, 2 deep if necessary with a central footway).
- b Plant mature trees to break up the view ahead and to create a calm environment. Make a tree the first thing that a driver sees in front of him as he comes through the entrance - people don't argue with trees.
- L The only real danger to somebody cycling contraflow to the exit is in crossing the wide mouths to the "kiss and drop" and taxi ranks. At the moment, and as proposed, vehicles can sweep in without slowing because there is an excessive amount of space and wide curves.
 - b Separate the cycle / bus access completely from the taxi and car access. That way, cyclists do not have to cross any traffic.
- L Tarmac encourages fast driving.
 - b Use block paviors to signal a change in function for the access road and set down / taxi areas. We recommend keeping tarmac on the bus / cycle lane as it provides a smoother surface and withstands heavy traffic better.

I hope this is of help to you.

James, we have not corresponded before but as you will have gathered I have been involved in cycle campaigning here for a long time. What you may not know is that my day job is as a consulting engineer. We can therefore be of great help to you - we have been through all of this before, we don't want to make the same mistakes twice.

Please make use of us. We know what we are talking about and the service is free. We do not pull any punches but providing you are straight with us, any criticism will always be constructive.

Please talk to us. You can contact me on 01223 882000 (d) a.massie@hannahreed.co.uk . Please send us copies of any drawings as they develop, in Autocad format (use the above address please, my LineOne address is on dial up and does not like big files) so that we can if necessary mark it up and send it back to you. It is much better to find out what will upset us before the design develops too far.

Yours Sincerely

Alasdair DV Massie Ceng MStructE

Former CTC Right to Ride Representative, North Herts

cc James Carter - Mouchel

encl Railtrack correspondence 1999-2000

Layout sketch - our comments and suggestions

Cycling Infrastructure Design - Quick reference sheet

Cycle Parking - typical details

¹ www.dothelocalmotion.co.uk

² TA 90/05 Geometric design for non-motorised road users