

Does a bold blue line make a cycle route a superhighway?

Mid July saw the opening of the first two Cycle Superhighways for London, CS3 and CS7.

The numbering is easy to remember if you think of the dials on a clock. CS3 in the east links Barking with Tower Gateway, and CS7 to the south-west between Colliers Wood and (almost) the Bank.

Cycle Superhighways are intended to provide safer, faster and more direct journeys and these two pilots, ahead of a further ten radial routes to be delivered by 2015, along with the start of the Cycle Hire scheme, has put the stamp on the Year of Cycling and set the scene for what the Mayor and TfL have described as a cycling revolution in the capital.

Initially there was some criticism that focused on the blue paint used to demarcate the routes. Were the Cycle Superhighways simply defined by a painted blue line? Kulveer Ranger, the Mayor's transport advisor, was quick to point out that this was not just an ordinary blue line, but a bold blue line. I would tend to agree with Kulveer, although I should add the caveats that I am a proficient cyclist and so far have only used the routes during the off-peak.

One thing that I quickly noticed was that there was an increased awareness of cyclists by other road users. On my first ride on CS7 I was delighted when a lorry driver making a delivery actually apologised for forcing me to pass his parked vehicle and join the slow moving traffic in the outside lane. I waved back and said no problem.

We had acknowledged each

others presence, we had shown each other respect, all helped I think by the blue paint!

Navigation is of course easier when the route is laid out so beautifully in front of you and the blue stuff is (nearly) always in sight. Some additional signage on Newington Butts, northbound CS7, fifty metres before Churchyard Row would be useful because the turn here can currently be hidden from view by buses serving the adjacent bus stop. And way out on CS3, which unlike CS7 uses largely off-road segregated paths, I found myself in an industrial estate on a spur of the A13 due to an ambiguously aligned sign and lack of paint.

Wayfinding is enhanced by iconic roadside plinths showing approximate timings and linear maps that pedestrians should find useful too. Tooting Bec to the City in 45 minutes is about right, Poplar to Barking in 36 minutes may be a challenge given that three of those minutes can be used attempting to cross Woolwich Manor Way at Beckton via four toucan crossings. The city end of CS3 the route was an absolute joy to ride, but the long A13 section east of Canning Town provided quite a contrast due to the sheer level of noise created by the adjacent fast moving traffic which frankly made it an unpleasant place to be. Of course, it would be particularly satisfying to use on those occasions when traffic on the A13 is at a standstill.

Clearly the highways are not perfect. It is the same old story that has beleaguered attempts to provide infrastructure for cyclists over the years. The

complexities associated with how best to ease conflict at major junctions, the difficult bits, do not always get fully addressed. Some have pointed to the southern approach to the start of the gyratory at Stockwell and to the large junction at Kennington. I am left pondering where exactly is the Cycle Superhighway in the vicinity of Canning Town station? The total is only as good as the sum of its parts, so it would be a pity if a few sections are left to undermine the entity.

In many ways the first two Cycle Superhighways appear to have delivered far more in one year than the 900km (and unfinished) London Cycle Network has (at a cost of around £147m) in the last ten. The purpose of the LCN was to provide high-demand routes that were fast, safe, comfortable, coherent, continuous, of high quality, easy to use, and also give cyclists greater priority over other traffic. What has been delivered is a series of patchy, non-continuous, unfinished, poorly signed cycle routes that vary greatly in quality from borough to borough. This outcome clearly reflects the piecemeal, cash-starved fashion

of implementation.

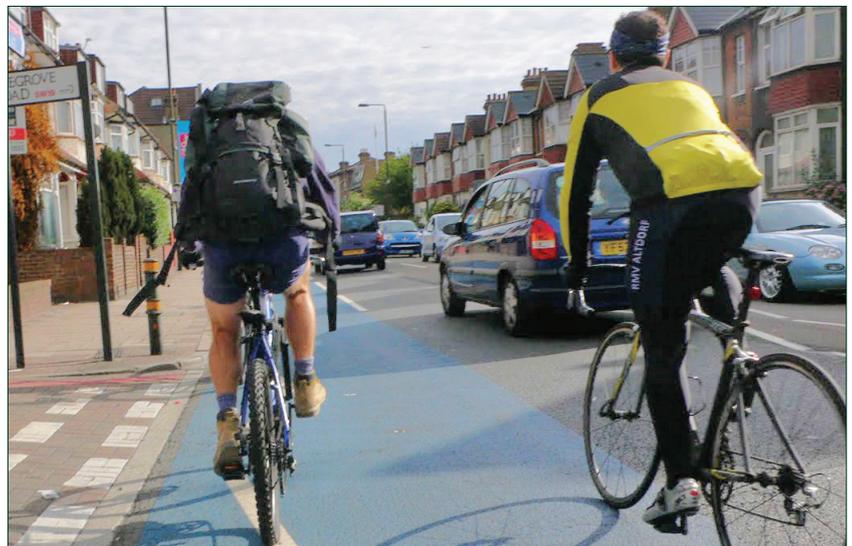
Nevertheless, Boris can give us Superhighways until he is blue in the face, but, as the London Cycling Campaign has pointed out, unless he ensures that other roads receive cycle friendly improvements too, the full advantages may not be realised. Some enhancements just require more efficient allocation of road space, and this could be achieved relatively easily and inexpensively at no disbenefit to other road users (and that would be music to Boris's ears). Meanwhile, there are no signs of the promised cycle hubs in outer London. Implementation by one competent body, and not a myriad of individual boroughs or consultants, may ensure a more consistent approach. Hopefully TfL's current research into new ways of navigation will bear fruit too.

Streets without paint now seem simply naked, so I look forward to the continuation of the Cycle Superhighways programme. In the meantime, if the arrival of the bold blue line onto some of London's roads helps engender greater respect between all road users a little further, well, that has to

Our Newsletter is sent out to our London members and other contacts. The group exists to campaign for sustainable transport solutions in London and to support the work of the Campaign nationally. If you have not already done so we would be pleased if you would also join our group and take part in our London based activities.

To contact the group write to Chris Barker, Campaign for Better Transport, 46 Redston Road, London N8 7HJ. email: c.barker@lineone.net; phone: 020 8347 7684. Regular meetings of the group are held in central London. The Newsletter is edited by Chris Barker. Contributors are welcomed. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Campaign for Better Transport.

design: Eve Barker



Cycling Revolution - or Barclays Promotion Scheme?



The Barclays Cycle Hire scheme for central London, otherwise known as the Boris Bike scheme after Mayor Boris Johnson, was launched on 30th July this year.

At the launch there were 315 cycle docking stations and 5,000 cycles available, with 400 stations and 6,000 bikes planned to be available by late summer 2010. This means that docking stations are aligned on a closely-spaced grid around 100 ms apart throughout Central London. The capital and running costs over a 6-year period are estimated at a rather staggering £140 m, more than £20,000 per bike; of this £25 m has been contributed by Barclays. During the first three weeks of the scheme over 250,000 trips were made.

To take out a bike members insert a key into a slot in a docking point. The cycles can be returned to any docking point. Once membership is taken out, an access fee and a usage charge are payable; access fees are £1 for 24 hrs up to £45 for a year; usage charges are free for the first 30 mins, £1 for up to 1 hr, and so on up to £50 for 24 hrs. Payments are taken from credit

card accounts, with late return charges of £150 payable.

The scheme, inspired by the 'Velib' scheme introduced in Paris introduced in July 2007, and similar ones in other French cities, is based on the scheme in Montreal, and the bikes and docking stations are made in Canada. The hire scheme is a key element in the Mayor's plan to deliver a 400% increase in cycling use by 2026, as part of his Cycling Revolution London Strategy, with the main aim of ensuring that cycling is recognised as a major transport mode in the capital. The scheme has generally been welcomed by cycling organisations: CTC, the national cyclists organisation called it 'a wonderful opportunity for lots of people in London to discover how much easier and quicker it is to travel by bike', but Sustrans, another cycling charity, criticized the apparent transfer of funds from promotion of cycling in 13 outer boroughs to a high-profile Central London scheme. The initial figures for use indicate that the concept is popular, and once the 'turn up and go' facility becomes available this autumn, demand is likely to be further boosted.

There are some doubts however, about the bikes themselves, the width of their appeal and their branding. On testing one out, your correspondent found it heavy to ride, with serious effort required to keep it moving even on the straight, let alone on hills, and with only three gears momentum was hard to maintain. There are also no locks, making intermediate stops between docking points difficult. For Barclays, who have provided less than 20% of the funding but whose logo is much more prominent on the bikes than the TfL roundel, the bikes are a tremendous investment; but why can't the taxpayer's investment also be recognised?

Hopefully London's scheme will avoid some of the pitfalls of the Paris Velib scheme, where 9,000 bikes have been stolen to date, and 9,000 vandalised, mainly because users have not properly secured them at the end of a trip. Even so Velib has become part of Paris life, with many Parisians using bikes to get home after the metro system has shut down. To make this kind of use practical, and to start to relieve some of the pressure on public transport, as is happening in Paris, the London scheme will need to expand to cover a much larger area of inner London. Paris now has around 24,000 bikes at 1,750 sites - a target to which London should now be aspiring.

Norman Beddington

Crossing the Thames

With the demise of the Thames Gateway Bridge we thought we had seen the end of proposals for new road crossings. Although, sadly, this is not the case and there are new plans for road bridges, an imaginative new scheme for enabling pedestrians and cyclists to make the crossing has been put forward. It takes the form of a cable car connection between North Greenwich and the vicinity of the Excel Centre. It is both greener and cheaper than a land based alternative. Coming after the two cross river tunnels of the Docklands Light Railway and preceding the Crossrail tunnel, these will hopefully satisfy the demand without the need for road crossings.

Slow Boat to Stratford

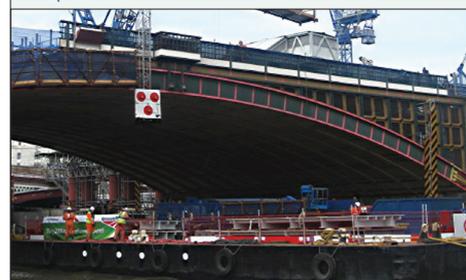
Part of the green credentials for the Olympic developments at Stratford was a commitment to supply 99% of aggregates to site by sustainable means. It was intended that at least 25% of this traffic would be by barge and to this end a new lock was to be installed on one of the tidal channels of the Bow Creek. The Three Mills (originally Prescott) Lock was built at a cost of £21.5million and opened in 2009 but has barely seen a trickle of traffic because the waters are too shallow for it to carry loaded water borne traffic for more than two or three hours a day. Dredging at a further cost of £2.5million would have resolved the problem but by 2009 the financial pinch was being felt and the funds were not forthcoming. Moreover delays in setting charges for the use of the lock seem to have encouraged transport contractors to seek alternative delivery methods rather than hang on indefinitely for the charges to be resolved. Ironically a new class of lightweight Olympic barges designed for the aggregates traffic has been pressed into service carrying garbage on the Grand Union Canal in West London.

There are different versions of how much traffic has actually used the lock. Instead of the original hopes of 12,000 tonnes per week the Daily Telegraph has suggested one barge per week whilst Games Monitor has claimed only three barges of construction materials in and one barge of construction waste out together with five barges of contaminated soil. One cynical view is that it was never seriously intended to develop barge traffic which could have used the already navigable River Lea anyway. Instead it has been suggested that the lock would maintain water levels and avoid long stretches of less than fragrant mud being revealed alongside the Olympic Park at low tide.

It isn't all bad news, however. Besides the barges of contaminated soil there have been barges of plants grown on contaminated soil. In a pioneering experiment by the University of the Arts these plants have been grown to absorb the contamination from the land. The plants are then taken away by barge for incineration. It is not clear whether these barges are using the Three Mills Lock or the navigable Lea.

Even better news is to be found on the Thames where extensive use is being made of barges in the reconstruction of Blackfriars Station across Blackfriars Bridge. Network Rail estimates that this work has taken 2000 lorries off the congested streets of Central London. It is not clear if this refers to actual lorries or to lorry loads. Barges operate to Blackfriars from Thames Wharf not far from the entrance to Bow Creek. It is estimated that 14,000 tonnes of construction materials including new rib arches for the widening of Blackfriars Bridge will have been delivered and 8,000 tonnes of waste carried away during the course of the works.

Stephen Garrett





A fine city for walking

The case for a Central London Pedestrian Network

Central London should be one of the finest cities in the world for walking and exploring on foot, with so many interesting destinations and meeting-places, all within easy walking range of each other.

But these days, it's not much fun being a pedestrian in the West End. The streets and public spaces around the centre are noisy, congested, and dominated by motor traffic. Cars, taxis, and buses always seem to come first, with people on foot too often treated as an afterthought. Just look at Oxford Street, one of the busiest shopping streets in Europe, described in a recent GLA report as "a slow-moving bus park", and "a totally unacceptable environment for residents and pedestrians".

This picture of traffic domina-

tion isn't good enough for a great city like London, soon to host the Olympics. We need to compete with cities which do much more for pedestrians, like Barcelona, Copenhagen – and now even New York. The bustling, popular streets and public spaces of Central London are much more than traffic highways and intersections – they are important destinations and meeting-points in their own right.

It's time to transform the West End by changing our priorities, putting people first and motor traffic second in the busy, crowded central areas of the city. We need much better facilities for pedestrians, with many smaller streets and public spaces completely free of motor vehicles, letting people on foot relax away from traffic noise and danger. Larger streets which are shared with motor traffic should be made more pedestrian-friendly, with wider pavements free of obstacles and diversions, reduced traffic speed, and good-quality crossings without guard-rails, giving people time to cross in comfort.

The gyratory systems which blight so much of central London should be phased out and replaced by two-way working. Great squares like Berkeley Square – at present totally encircled by traffic – should be opened up by making at least one side

traffic-free, like the north side of Trafalgar Square.

How can such a transformation be achieved? We need to create a network of pedestrian-friendly streets and public spaces in and around the city centre, inviting people to walk instead of using cars or public transport. Such a network could be built up step-by-step, starting with a central hub like Leicester Square, creating pedestrian-friendly links from the hub to nearby traffic-free streets and public spaces like Covent Garden and Chinatown, then later on gradually expanding to connect other busy pedestrian streets and important destinations around the centre.

A pedestrian network in central London would soon become extremely popular, and an important focus of economic vitality. It would encourage residents and visitors to explore the new network and to travel on foot instead of using underground, train, or bus - especially on those short trips around the centre where the tube system is under most strain.

The network would be practical, affordable, and right in line with the Mayor's transport strategy. We hope he will accept it as our contribution to the Year of Walking 2011.

David Martin

Agreement on Exhibition Road

Guide Dogs' concerns taken into account

Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea have announced a joint agreement on the redevelopment of Exhibition Road. Judicial review proceedings initiated by the charity have now been put on ice following the talks.

As part of the agreement, Guide Dogs and other disability organisations will work with the Council to continue the earlier research on the corduroy paving that is being used in the design to mark the pedestrian and traffic zones.

The agreement was reached after the Royal Borough confirmed its intention to conduct real world trials to test its proposed design.

Guide Dogs, and the other organisations that are represented on the scheme's Access Group, will be fully consulted on how the trials will be conducted, and on the evaluation of the results.

The Royal Borough has also expressed its desire that pedestrians should have priority on Exhibition Road and as part of the agreement, Guide Dogs will support the Royal Borough's application to the Department for Transport to introduce a new sign for single surface streets.

Guide Dogs chief executive Richard Leaman said: "Legal action was not something that Guide Dogs entered into lightly but in working to secure the best outcome for blind and partially sighted people we believed it was the right course of action.

"We are, however, delighted that we have been able to negotiate an agreement with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and we look forward to working with them to deliver our shared goal of making Exhibition Road fully inclusive."



Pedestrian countdown

The mayor has introduced another measure to 'smooth traffic flow across London'. A pedestrian countdown system, common in many other countries, has been introduced at eight junctions. It will count down the seconds remaining after the green man is extinguished before the red man appears – the so called blackout period. David Brown, Managing Director of Surface Transport at TfL, said "Our research has shown that many people in London are not sure about the amount of time they have to safely cross the road. Pedestrian Countdown will remove that concern and give them a clear indication of how long they have to cross before the red man phase begins. This will hopefully lead to less pedestrian injuries."

Emission based parking charges

Richmond, following change of control from Lib Dem to Tory, has scrapped its pioneering emission based parking charges. They claim there is no evidence that it has resulted in residents buying less polluting vehicles although the Lib Dem spokesperson said that it might take up to two years for there to be evidence of that. However the borough is cutting back on car allowance for staff.

Whilst Richmond has cancelled its scheme, Brent has introduced one, charges ranging from nothing to £200 per year. They are also offering vouchers towards purchasing a bicycle, joining a car club, or buying an Oyster travelcard to residents willing to give up their parking permit.

First class commuting

London TravelWatch recently conducted a survey of commuters asking about their attitudes to first class rail travel. The majority felt that first class should not be provided on services of less than an hour and that the space should be reclassified to provide more accommodation. For journeys between one and two hours, on the other hand, the majority felt that some core facilities should be provided for those willing to pay, although this might not be of current first class standard.

Silence at night



The DfT have launched their Quiet Deliveries Demonstration Scheme which aims to reduce the noise arising when HGVs deliver to supermarkets and other places in residential areas at night. It is not the vehicle which causes the most nuisance. An experiment with Sainsbury's in Wandsworth resulted in a notable reduction in noise. Drivers were instructed to switch off engines and radios and to speak softly and dock curtains were erected to seal in the noise of containers being moved about. An idea worth extending to all areas.



More trains - More passengers London Fields and Cambridge Heath as a case study

Two doughty volunteers from the Cambridge Heath and London Fields Rail Users' Group (CHLFRUG) have been undertaking twice-yearly counts of passengers at their two 'adopted' stations since, amazingly, 1996.

Every May and December, on a term-time mid-week day just before each timetable change, a headcount is taken at each station in both peak periods and, in May, the inter-peak, building up a consistent data-set which is now attracting wider and official attention. Their herculean efforts have been well-rewarded with improvements to the train service and station facilities supported by

hard evidence of some dramatic patronage rises.

A by-product of the real headcounts has been concern about the veracity of the official station usage data, published by the Office of Rail Regulation and used in rail industry planning. These data are estimates based on ticket sales, undertaken each October. The ORR's latest figures for 2008/09 show declines in patronage of 13.5% at Cambridge Heath and 11% at London Fields since 2007/08, whereas CHLFRUG's figures for the corresponding May suggest 7% and 21% increases respectively! This immediately highlights the anomaly of the ORR data not including Oyster PAYG, first

introduced in January 2008.

Since the last major timetable change in December 2005, a virtuous circle of a turn-up-and-go reliable train service, complemented by a pay-as-you-go multi-modal ticket since January 2008, has seen May patronage multiply 3.7 times at Cambridge Heath and 4.6 times at London Fields - from 509 to 1881 and from 527 to 2410 respectively. Since 1996 (when the train service was weekday peak periods only) the comparable multiplier has been almost seven times at Cambridge Heath (from 207 to 1379) and literally ten times at London Fields (from 181 to 1812). Within that the often-neglected contra-peak flows have multiplied to four times the pre-December 2005 levels, since the train service doubled from just two to the all-important four, albeit irregular, trains per hour.

While recent figures from the Association of Train Operating Companies have suggested rail patronage returning this year to pre-recession levels, these two inner-city stations have shown more-or-less consistent growth throughout, only the overall percentage rate of increase varying. Although their peak period use may have stalled between December 2008 and December 2009, their inter-peak use has maintained an upward trend with an average 25% rise between May 2009 and May 2010.

The lesson appears to be to invest in a regular and reliable turn-up-and-go train service and a respected pay-as-you-go multi-modal ticket. On the back of those, coupled with improved station facilities, will come dramatic patronage growth which in turn justifies further investment.

Roger Blake

See <http://www.railwatch.org.uk/chlfug.html> and <http://www.atoc.org/media-centre> and <http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/nav.1529>

LONDON AGM

The AGM of the London branch will be held on Tuesday 16th November. The meeting will be addressed by Louise Ellman MP, Chair of the House of Commons Select Committee. Further information for members will follow but, meanwhile, make a note in your diary.