

Importance of achieving continuous off-route cycle facility avoiding the tram-tracks in the High Road / Chilwell Road area, Beeston

Abbreviations

B6464	the section of Chilwell High Road and Chilwell Road (Beeston) between Nottingham College (Beeston) and Middle Street
GNLRTAC	Greater Nottingham Light Rapid Transit Advisory Committee
NCN	Sustrans National Cycle Network

Background

Since the early stages of planning the two NET extension routes in 2003, Pedals has attempted – as we did in the case of planning NET Line One – to see cycle paths, or cycle lanes, installed alongside the tram routes, both to ensure that cyclists benefitted substantially from the NET and to help reduce the risk of cyclists slipping on tram-tracks, of which we were well aware from other tram projects such as Croydon and Sheffield. Where this was not possible, because of a lack of space (as on the B6464 in west Beeston, and especially the High Road / Chilwell Road area) we tried to achieve a continuous alternative parallel route, away from the tram-tracks, using quiet roads and upgraded paths.

During the 2½ years since the opening of the tramline extension to Toton Lane, accidents on the B6464 in west Beeston have continued to be common, despite all the efforts of Pedals, and other organisations including Ridewise, Tramlink and the local authorities to disseminate widely advice on how cyclists could at least minimise their risks of slips, e.g. by attempting to cross tram tracks at a right angle, where space permits, and where they do not feel at being intimidated by some drivers in the vicinity apparently unaware of how their intimidating behaviour can add to the risks for cyclists.

- Data is difficult to obtain. (Some has been logged on the Pedals website. Some has been collected at the QMC, and mentioned at GNLRTAC meetings.) But people who “survive, with just bruises” may just “count themselves lucky” and not appear in any data-sets. “Near misses” are unlikely to be logged.
- There’s much “anecdotal evidence”. This has not always been officially recorded, despite repeated attempts by Pedals to encourage people to report details, both to the Police and to the NET.

In the light of the poor accident record, we have emphasised the importance of achieving a continuous cycle-route away from the tram-tracks on several occasions. including to previous meetings of the GNLRTAC. See, for example, minutes of the 13 June 2017 meeting (Matters Arising: Minute 12b).

The alternative parallel route needs to be relatively close to the B6464 to be convenient to use. Although NCN Route 6 is useful for people who want to cycle to where it goes (e.g. QMC), it is about 300-400 metres to the south. So it is of little relevance to people who want an alternative to the B6464 (e.g. to get between the planned Barton Quarter and Beeston Tesco).

Despite the frequency of accidents on this stretch of the B6464, achieving a continuous alternative parallel route has proved particularly difficult.

- A large part of this safer alternative route could be achieved by developing a route via West End and Barrydale Avenue, with some upgrading of the “jitty” near the north end of Wilmot Lane.
- However, this still left a problem at the west end of the route.

For a long time, it seemed that there was no prospect of completing the continuous route away from the tram-tracks.

The situation started to change in late 2015, soon after the opening of the two NET extension lines, with the prospect of the redevelopment of the Barton's site.

- Simon Barton hosted a meeting in September 2015 of interested parties, including the County and Borough Councils, a representative of Anna Soubry MP, and cycling groups like Pedals and Ridewise.
- It was agreed that the housing plans for this site should include a cycle route across the site.
- This was included in Barton's subsequent planning application, submitted to Broxtowe Borough Council, which Pedals supported.
- Within the planned Barton Quarter, cycle-routes will provide a route between Bridge Avenue and Holly Lane (which leads to Factory Lane).

Inclusion of this link in Barton's plans would leave only a small proportion of the whole intended complete route away from the tram-tracks to be developed.

The prospect of an opportunity to help achieve this final link – to complete the whole route – seemed to be offered in late 2016, with the announcement of the plans for the redevelopment of the Myfords site around Wilmot Lane (i.e. between Barton's site and Beeston town centre).

- When the planning application for this site was submitted earlier this year, Pedals (and individual members of Pedals) responded by submitting comments to Broxtowe Borough Council in which we strongly urged that this further link be included.
- In construction terms, the difference between "final link to complete the route" and "pitifully missed opportunity" seems ridiculously small – whether-or-not the developer leaves a gap in any wall/fence between Factory Lane and the development's car-park – whether-or-not the interface between the car-park and southern Wilmot Lane involves a knee-rail.

Unfortunately, the paper that went before the Planning Committee asserted that requesting the Myfords developer to facilitate a "safe alternative route for cyclists" would be "unreasonable".

- A Pedals-member's request to speak at the Planning Committee meeting was declined.
- At that meeting, the "by-passing the B6464" question was not even mentioned.

The Committee approved the paper that was before them, implicitly supporting the idea that a "safe alternative route for cyclists" is "unreasonable".

Obviously – in view of our efforts to ensure that our views were submitted and widely understood – we were very disappointed. The process that led to this approval seems flawed.

County silo and Borough silo?	In this case there seems to have been no process by which a "highways & road safety" problem (County) can have a "planning" solution (Borough).
Silos within the County?	Whoever specified "County Council, as Local Highway Authority" requirements to the Borough seemed to regard the Myfords situation purely as a "motor-vehicle flow problem". They apparently said nothing about the proposed development being a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reduce tramline-related risks to cyclists.
Transport assessment	The report from the developer's transport consultants has just a bland section about "opportunities for cycle travel". It fails to mention the numerous cycle accidents on the B6464 immediately to the north of the site (accidents known to the County Council and Borough Council, and to Bartons, and mentioned on several occasions at previous meetings of the GNLRTAC).
False premises leading to false	(1) The report to the Borough Planning Committee says "to create such a link, it would be necessary to use land ... which is outside the applicant's

conclusions	ownership". But surely there can be a fairly good link via Factory Lane, which is immediately adjacent to the Myfords site? (2) Since the current "jitty" section of Wilmot Lane is shared with pedestrians, there's currently a rationale for cyclists having to dismount. The County "as highway authority" apparently envisages perpetuating this prohibition on cycling even after the rationale has disappeared (because the "jitty" section will have disappeared)!
<i>Equality Act 2010</i>	The knee-rail – conditioned by the County "as highways authority", to force cyclists to dismount – will make it difficult for wheelchair-users and buggy-users to get between southern Wilmot Lane and the car-park. It is obviously possible to design an interface that stops motor-vehicles while allowing cyclists, wheelchairs and buggies. (For examples, see City Road and Derby Street / Albion Street in Beeston.)
<i>DfT's Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Strategy (2017)</i>	This Government Strategy, recognising the very great environmental and health benefits of encouraging more walking and cycling, said that the aim should be to make both the natural choice for short trips in urban areas. One of <i>Strategy's</i> targets is (by 2040) "better safety ... streets where cyclists ... feel they belong and are safe". Clearly cyclists do not "feel they belong and are safe" on the B6464. Failing to make any effort to provide an alternative is incompatible with the <i>Strategy</i> .

As well as raising this at GNLRTAC, we will be raising this with Nottinghamshire County Council (as Local Highway Authority) at the next meeting of the Greater Nottingham Cycling Development Group (CDG), on 29 March.

Summary of current situation

Our current concerns about the B6464 in west Beeston include the following:-

1. Tramlines present a significant danger for cyclists, either by being caught in the lines or slipping on the metal, particularly in the wet or icy weather.
2. Buses/trams are frequent, and they occupy most of the road-width. So there's no "safe option" for a cyclist who encounters debris/pothole. Crossing a tramline at a shallow angle risks getting caught in the tramline or slipping on the metal. A manoeuvre to cross a tramline at right-angles puts the cyclist at risk from following traffic.
3. Someone cycling along the B6464 for the first time may not realise that the situation is even worse at the Chilwell Road tram-stop. By the time they realise, it's too late to opt to cycle onto the shared pavement.
4. For east-bound cyclists at Nottingham College (Beeston), the signage indicating "the safer option" is high up, so may not be noticed.
5. For east-bound cyclists who opt to go onto the pavement at the Chilwell Road tram-stop, the pathway (between tram-shelter and shops) involves contact with pedestrians.
6. There's no "safe option" for east-bound cyclists who need to turn right into Holly Lane or Ellis Grove. Crossing tramlines at a shallow angle is unsafe. But there's no "turning space" to facilitate crossing at right-angles.
7. Similarly, there's no "safe option" for west-bound cyclists who need to turn right into Imperial Road, Park Road or Grove Avenue.
8. Whether east-bound or west-bound, a cyclist has to take several split-second decisions about "which option". The "take care" signage is no help – it fails to shepherd cyclists onto the least hazardous pathways.

There have been tramline-related deaths in Croydon (Roger de Klerk) and Edinburgh (Zhi Min Soh). The circumstances of those deaths seem similar to the circumstances on the B6464.

It seemed to take fatalities to motivate Croydon/Edinburgh to do any more than just “pay lip service” to safety of cyclists.

There seems even more inherent inertia in Beeston than there was in Edinburgh. Since Edinburgh is a “unitary authority”, “prevention of future deaths” is clearly a matter for Edinburgh Council. But in Beeston ... the County, VIA East Midlands, the Borough and Tramlink all “have an interest” in the B6464 (and its surrounding area).

- None of them seems able to take a lead on identifying and implementing a solution to this problem.
- Responsibility seems to “fall down the cracks” between the four organizations’ “silos”.
- There seems no local forum at which the 4 organizations can collectively decide on an action-plan.

Will there have to be a death – and a Regulation 28 report from a coroner – before the 4 organizations are motivated to coordinate their “silos” – “highways”, “road safety”, “planning”, etc – in such a way as to agree, and implement, an action-plan?

We would be extremely grateful for any tangible suggestions that members of GNLRTAC may have for timely resolution of the current impasse.

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