

REMOVING THROUGH TRAFFIC FROM REGENTS PARK

A STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE ACCESS

BACKGROUND

Introduction and History

Regents Park is one of the central London royal parks; with St. James Park, Green Park, and Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, it forms an essential green lung for residents, workers and visitors on the edge of the West End. It is large and secluded enough to give users real peace and quiet, and to accommodate a wide variety of attractions such as London Zoo, sports pitches, formal gardens and much open grassland. It is managed by the Royal Parks Agency (RPA), an agency of the ODPM.

All round the park, and with their access largely from the park's Outer Circle, are located residential buildings (including the famous Nash terraces); there are also a number of academic institutions such as Regent's College, the Royal College of Physicians and the London Business School, as well as the Central London Mosque and the Open Air Theatre.

Although there are parking meters in Chester Rd and the Inner Circle, the vast majority of park users arrive on foot, by cycle or by public transport.

Background to This Initiative

In summer 2003, the London Group of Transport 2000, the national sustainable transport charity, decided to join forces with the Camden Cycling campaign, and the Westminster Cycling campaign, constituent groups of the London Cycling campaign to press for improved access to Regents Park for pedestrians and cyclists. This was because all the groups considered current provision to be inadequate. In the past Camden Cycling Campaign has put a number of suggestions for cross-park cycling routes to the RPA, but nothing has happened; we think that the time is long overdue for the RPA to focus in a concerted way on improving access for the majority of park users.

The Current Situation

Pedestrians

Even though there are a number of pelican crossings or green phases at traffic lights, pedestrian access to some parts of the park from surrounding roads remains poor. From the South-East, access to the formal gardens along the Broad Walk, one of the most heavily-used areas, is hindered by the lack of a pedestrian crossing at the junction of the Outer Circle and Park Square East. The fast-moving traffic turning West along the South side of the Outer Circle at this point, or continuing South to Park Crescent, poses a real obstacle to pedestrians.

Equally there are no crossing facilities at the junction of the Outer Circle and Park Square West, which is a major route into the park from Regents Park tube station. From the West, pedestrian access from Park Road and the Marylebone Station area could be improved by installing pedestrian phases at the junction of Hanover Gate and Park Rd, and improving the pedestrian crossing at the Outer Circle/Hanover Gate junction. This area is heavily used by pedestrians heading for the Regents Park mosque. There is no pedestrian crossing at Kent Passage, a well-used entrance to the park situated on a stretch of Park Road along which traffic is fast and heavy.

Cyclists

Currently there is no provision for cyclists in Regents Park, either on the Outer or Inner Circles, or within the park itself, or in the adjacent Primrose Hill park. In common with all the other central royal parks, cycling is banned on paths within the park. Cycling on the Outer Circle is intimidating because of the fast speed of much vehicle traffic, and the lack of signal controls at the various gates to the park, which makes turning for cyclists difficult.

This situation is unacceptable because Regents Park could provide viable commuter and leisure routes for cyclists, situated as it is on the edge of the West End and potentially providing a means of avoiding heavily -trafficked routes from Central London to Camden Town, St Johns Wood and other suburbs to the North. In contrast to Regents Park, cycle routes have been installed in a number of central royal parks; these include:

- a traffic-free route along the E. and S. sides of Hyde Park
- a painted-on route along the N and W carriageways of Hyde Park
- a path along the S side of Green Park along Constitution Hill

Cycling is also allowed on Serpentine Road and paths leading to the Rangers Lodge in Hyde Park, as well as along three routes along the S and W sides of Kensington Gardens. There is considerable potential for linking up a cycle routes along the Regents Park Outer Circle to existing or new routes in the areas surrounding the park, thus enabling access from many parts of Camden and Westminster.

Public Transport Users

Bus routes serve all the roads which parallel the park boundaries, giving connections to Camden Town and St Johns Wood underground stations. In addition Regents Park, Gt. Portland Street and Baker Street are all within a short walking distance of the park. However the lack of dedicated routes from bus stops mean that significant barriers for public transport users remain.

OUR PROPOSALS

Removing Through Traffic: the Benefits to All Park Users

In our opinion , the first and most important step to opening up the park to pedestrians and cyclists should be the removal of through traffic from the Outer Circle of Regents Park. We consider it to be an anomaly that one of London's largest and most attractive parks is used as a through route by commuter and other through traffic. The availability of the park to through traffic is anachronistic in the 21st Century, and results in increased levels of pollution, noise and danger for other park users. There is no essential traffic reason for vehicles having this privilege, as there are parallel routes just outside the park in all directions. Indeed the original purpose of the Outer Circle when constructed in the very early 19th century was 'exercise on horseback, carriages or foot' (quoted in Regents Park; from 1806 to the Present; Ann Saunders; 1981). In the early 21st century removing through motor traffic and making cycling and walking easier would help to return the park to its original function and nature.

Moreover the park roads were never conceived as through routes, but as an integral part of the park, affording access for residents of the Nash Terraces located on the boundaries. Closing them to through traffic will open up the substantial areas of park on the North side between the Outer Circle and Prince Albert Rd for the enjoyment of users. It will also improve the quality of life for residents and for employees and students based at the institutions surrounding the park.

Closure Proposals

We therefore propose that the Outer Circle be closed to motor vehicles in three places:

- just West of the junction with Macclesfield Bridge
- just South of the junction with Clarence Gate
- just South of the junction with Gloucester Gate

These closures would cut all through traffic through the park, while enabling access for commercial and residential buildings located on the Outer and Inner Circles, including London Zoo, to be maintained. There would be some inconvenience because access routes would in some case be more circuitous; however this would be more than balanced out by reduced noise and pollution for building occupiers. The closures would be constructed with cycle access facilities.

Initially the closures would be installed for a 6-month experimental period, and then adjusted or modified as required. They would be inexpensively constructed from heavy concrete blocks, which could be made permanent (and more attractive) once evaluated as a success.

Improving Pedestrian Access

Our proposed measures for improving pedestrian access would need to be undertaken by the Royal Parks Agency (RPA) and by Camden Council (CC) and the Westminster City Council (WCC) on the respective roads under their control. The proposals are:

- a combined cycle and pedestrian crossing at the junction of Prince Albert Rd and Ormonde Terrace, facilitating both cycle and pedestrian routes from Primrose Hill to Regents Park (WCC/CC)
- a combined cycle and pedestrian crossing across Prince Albert Rd at the junction with Charlbert St (WCC)
- a pedestrian phase at the traffic lights at the junction of Park Rd and Hanover Gate (WCC)
- a pedestrian phase across the Southern arm of the Outer Circle/Hanover Gate junction, to complement that across the Northern arm (RPA)
- a zebra crossing on Park Rd at the junction with Kent Passage, an important pedestrian route.
- pedestrian crossings at Park Square W./Outer Circle and Park Square E./Outer Circle (RPA)
- installing a pelican crossing at the Cumberland Gate/Outer Circle junction
- resignalling of the Outer Circle/Gloucester gate junction to improve pedestrian protection (RPA)
- possible pedestrian improvements at the junction of Albany Street and Gloucester Gate (CC)

Cycling and the Park

The effect of the closures will be to greatly improve conditions for cyclists on the Outer Circle without requiring further measures here in the short term.

The London Cycling Campaign has been discussing with the RPA the question of greater access for cyclists to the interior of the central Royal Parks; however this is a separate question to that of improving conditions on the Outer Circle for all park users.

Traffic Displacement Effects

In the past there has been concern by the local councils concerned that traffic will be displaced from the Outer Circle onto main routes parallel to the park, such as Albany Street and Park Street. However the successful introduction of Congestion Charging, leading to reductions of up to 20% in areas surrounding the Congestion Charging Zone, should mean that such fears will prove to be unfounded. In any case, the history of many traffic-calming schemes has shown that there is seldom a 100% displacement effect onto parallel routes because drivers often react by changing their route from much further away.

Our proposals will further encourage the development of commuting by walking and cycling, which has been a positive outcome of Congestion Charging.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The ‘Nash Link’ to Regent St & Trafalgar Sq.

The architect Terry Farrell, in his proposals entitled ‘Marylebone-Euston Rd, London’s New Boulevard’ launched in 2003, puts forward a proposal for an enhanced pedestrian route from Primrose Hill to the South Bank via the Broad Walk, Portland Place, Regent Street and Trafalgar Square. This potentially magnificent route, called by Farrell the ‘Nash Ramblas’ would gain access to Portland Place by the construction of a new direct route through Park Square Gardens. We support the creation of this new direct route from the park to the West End which is in the spirit of Nash’s original early 19th Century concept for a grand route to Regent’s Park.

Consultation

We accept that many other interests located in and close to the park will want to have their say on these proposals, and that this may lead to modifications. However we think that the principles set out above form a good starting point for a long overdue debate on excluding though motor traffic from the park, and improving pedestrian and cycle access.

SUMMARY OF THE STRATEGY

A summary of this strategy for improving the park for the benefit of all users is set out below:

- the closure of the Outer Circle to through motor traffic by installing barriers at three points
- improving pedestrian access by installing additional pelican crossings and ‘green’ phases at traffic lights
- improving access to the park for cyclists by installing new cycle crossings on parallel routes, and improving access for cyclists within the park.

Transport 2000 London Group
Camden Cycling Campaign
Westminster Cycling Campaign
Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea Friends of the Earth

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