

London Borough of Hackney – Scrutiny Panel Special Meeting

Monday 11 November 2024

Item 4 – Call-in of an Executive Decision: CES382 Amhurst Road/Pembury Circus

Mark Philpotts' statement, supporting the Hackney Cycling Campaign

My name is Mark Philpotts. I am a chartered civil engineer with 30 years of experience including highways and sustainable mobility design, and I work as an independent sustainable mobility design specialist.

I hold three professional fellowships with the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation and the Institute of Highway Engineers respectively. I am also a member of the Transport Planning Society and an associate member of the Society of Road Safety Auditors.

I am a CIHT Technical Champion, an ICE Knowledge Network member and a member of the Beyond the Bicycle Coalition.

I am the author of CIHT's Designing for Walking, I have been writing about highways and sustainable mobility design for over a decade, and I occasionally lecture on highway and street design issues.

I have had a look at the casualty data for the junction and in the 10 years to December 2023, there have been 88 injury collisions of which 13 were serious. The most vulnerable are over-represented with 18 involving cyclists, 9 involving pedestrians and 16 involving motorcycle rides or passengers. For cyclists, 5 collisions involved serious injury.

It is reasonable that from an injury collision perspective, the junction currently works poorly for everyone, and especially the most vulnerable. It is not just about recorded injuries, it is also about risk, and the complexity of the junction certainly adds to risk.

It is also about subjective safety and there is no doubt that the junction is subjectively unsafe for cycling. Although pedestrians have controlled crossings, the layout is nonetheless awkward for walking and especially wheeling.

Given the council secured a significant budget for the project, there is an ideal opportunity for a complete redesign of the space, and given the objective and subjective safety issues, cycling should be at the heart of such a design.

The council's preferred design certainly improves the layout for walking and wheeling on 4 of the junction's arms with single stage crossings, plus the diagonal crossing. However, the loss of the Amhurst Road crossing is a reduction in the level of service and creates a safety risk where people will still cross on the desire line. Paragraph 17 of the Key Decision Report suggests that this omission is for motor traffic capacity reasons.

From a cycling perspective, the council's design does little for cycling safety, accessibility and convenience and builds in risks for the future.

The council's preferred design relies on cyclists mixing with motor traffic which countless market research surveys reveal as being highly unsatisfactory for many people. Put simply, people wish to be protected and feel protected from traffic unless flows are low.

The council's design utilises Advanced Stop Lines. These provide the lowest level of protection for cyclists according to Paragraph 10.6.5 of Local Transport Note 1/95, Cycle Infrastructure Design, the National guidance for England.

The council has also decided to provide early release which is one step above ASLs in the same guidance. However, Paragraph 18 of the Key Decision Report suggests that only Dalston Lane (South) and Pembury Road only shall have an early release of only 4 seconds. Again, this is due to motor traffic capacity.

ASLs and early release only provide assistance for cyclists who enter the ASL at a red signal. They provide no protection when a green signal is running.

The council's design also makes use of mandatory cycle lanes for 4 of the arms. Such lanes can lead to poor positioning when mixing with traffic and draw cyclists into the nearside blind spots of large vehicles.

The general layout of the junction will be difficult for many people cycling to negotiate and there are predictable collision risks. For example the ahead movement from Dalston Lane (East) to Amhurst Road (West) has two left hooks, especially as this is from a nearside mandatory cycle lane and without any marginal benefit from early release. Right turns will also be awkward, intimidating and risky, especially from Dalston Lane (West) and Amhurst Road (West) which will require people to cycle into right turning lanes.

The bus gate provides limited respite in terms of general traffic flow and risk exposure for people cycling, but it only operates 12 hours out of 24. Finally, the general design layout is geometrically unrestrictive of driver speeds.

To be perfectly frank, this is the kind of layout that was being designed 20 years ago and will leave conditions that will have some people choosing to use the footway which creates objective and subjective safety issues for people walking and wheeling and will put pressure on other streets such as the Narrowway as people try to avoid Pembury Circus.

Section 3 of the Key Decision Report sets out the alternative options considered and rejected. There was apparently no option for a design that actually protects cyclists in time and space explored and this is astonishing given the collision history and the level of investment available.

In busy traffic situations such as Pembury Circus, international and national best practice would demand that a protected junction be constructed in this location. Such arrangements are common in countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden and North America. In the UK, the approach is being used in Glasgow, Greater Manchester, Bradford, Cardiff, Birmingham and in terms of this location, the Circulating Cycle Stage Junctions of Waltham Forest, the closest of which is just 2.5km away.

As well as taking note of my comments, I also recommend that councillors read the Road Safety Audit for the project that I am sure has been undertaken, as the issues I raise will surely have been noted there too.

The location demands a solution which separates cycle traffic from motor traffic, maintains clear walking and wheeling space and which will enable the fullest range of people to cycle for years to come