

KING'S CROSS DEVELOPMENT FORUM

A consultation on changes to the King's Cross Gyratory A response by the King's Cross Development Forum March 2016

The respondent

The King's Cross Development Forum was set up so that people living or working in King's Cross could have a say in the future of the area and the development of the old railway lands. Its composition can increasingly represent the occupants of the King's Cross Central development site now that is becoming occupied; for example, already more than half the members of its Steering Group live there. This response reflects the views expressed at a meeting of the Forum after a meeting at which Transport for London (TfL) presented the initial proposals. A draft of it was circulated to members by email before that meeting. It is also supported by the Steering Group of the nascent King's Cross Neighbourhood Forum which, if it comes to fruition, will cover a wider area around King's Cross.

The mode of consultation

The Forum congratulates TfL on taking the trouble to speak to meetings and to put forward proposals before they reach the stage at which, realistically, significant modification is unlikely or even impossible. Other public bodies, and developers, could learn from this example.

The next stage of the work will involve more detailed traffic studies. The Forum suggests that the data on which these studies will be based, including traffic models, traffic projections and road dimensions, should be made publicly available even before those studies are concluded, so that others may use, and comment on, them.

The consultation does not consider pedestrian journeys between St Pancras, King's Cross and Euston stations. Their awkwardness is documented well in the 2008 study prepared for TfL (<https://kingscrossenvironment.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/kings-cross-st-pancras-pers-csa-final-report-walkability.pdf>). The Forum trusts that this will be considered in "the pedestrian, cycle and safety improvements on the Euston Road".

An overall view of the initial proposals

The Forum agrees with the list of objectives of the proposals that TfL has laid down. It places particular stress on the need to maintain high quality bus routes and improve local air quality, which occur at the bottom of the list. It notes that the word "bus" does not otherwise occur in the initial proposals, which do not make clear what would happen to the existing bus stops, especially those serving the stations.

Measures on a larger scale could be brought to bear on the problem, especially by removing traffic that is not really necessary. Possible demand management techniques include extending the congestion charge zone, extending the ultra low emission zone, restricting delivery hours, and indeed just ensuring police enforcement of existing restrictions. No doubt there are many others that TfL is considering; the Forum urges that they be brought into play to see how they could help.

In particular, electronic methods of vehicle tagging and barrier control are now feasible on a scale unthinkable some years ago, and that electric vehicles, and even autonomous vehicles, will be becoming familiar by the time the gyratory is changed and will predominate over the twenty years that the replacement can be expected to last. There are externalities incurred by road users when others benefit from the lower prices due to “click to buy” and “tap to ride”; these could be reduced by constraining the vehicle technology.

The Forum has reservations about making so many roads revert to two way working. The case for this needs to be made, taking into account other possible uses of the space, by pedestrians, cyclist and public transport, even though the arguments for one way working are now thought to be less relevant or convincing than they once were.

Overall, then, the Forum regards the initial proposals as being insufficiently far-reaching. It suggests that in the next stage of the work TfL should consider two or three proposals, based on the premise that the space should be planned to accommodate the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. In this respect it welcomes particularly the response of the Camden and Islington branches of London Cycling Campaign (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1Z9bhkhTdR-UDRTd2YxOWhBbUxRWTZjVkh3ZjdneFJESnlZ/view?pref=2&pli=1>) to the consultation; it agrees with several of the principles and details suggested there.

The remainder of this response specifically addresses the initial proposals for the roads that are the subject of the consultation.

Euston Road and Pentonville Road

Though the changes already implemented for pedestrians crossing Euston Road might have helped, much remains to be done; for instance, diagonal crossings might help. The problems and potential actions are discussed usefully in a 2014 workshop report ([http://urbed.coop/sites/default/files/Kings Cross Crossing draft report.pdf](http://urbed.coop/sites/default/files/Kings%20Cross%20Crossing%20draft%20report.pdf)). This is specifically concerned with what might be done in the short term within the budget allocated for this mayoral priority. A long term aim might be to make the area near King's Cross Square resemble Exhibition Road more than North Circular Road.

Pentonville Road, Gray's Inn Road and King's Cross Bridge

The Forum suggests that one way working for private transport might be retained on Pentonville Road between York Way and Caledonian Road, with some of the space re-allocated to pedestrians, cyclists or public transport users. If this is infeasible because of the corners or undesirable because of the congestion, there could be properly segregated cycle lanes around King's Cross Bridge and Gray's Inn Road.

Pentonville Road, King's Cross Road and Penton Rise

The Forum regrets the proposed disappearance of the segregated bus lane in Pentonville Road and the absence of segregated cycle lanes. It suggests that westbound private transport might be directed along Penton Rise and King's Cross Road instead, in order to accommodate the bus and cycle lanes.

Acton Street and Swinton Street

The caution expressed below in relation to Caledonian Road and Wharfdale Road could well apply also to Acton Street and Swinton Street: there could be longer tailbacks and, in the absence of enough pedestrian crossings and calming measures, more difficulties for pedestrians. Without filtering and calming measures they could also be vulnerable to becoming rat runs especially if, as in the initial proposals, there is two way working throughout both Gray's Inn Road and King's Cross Road.

Midland Road and Pancras Road

The proposals for new or improved pedestrian crossings at the intersections of Midland Road, Pancras Road and Goods Way will benefit pedestrians wishing to enter and exit the stations, the British Library or the Francis Crick Institute from the north; already each day there are tens of thousands of pedestrians doing this.

Drivers coming from the north currently have no way of dropping off passengers and turning around to return to the north on Midland Road or Pancras Road; they have to enter Euston Road, thereby adding to congestion and pollution. The proposals for two way working on Midland Road and Pancras Road will make an improvement, if in both roads drivers can drop off, pick up and turn around, pedestrians are not deterred or subject to even greater dangers than at present, and Goods Way is prevented from becoming into a rat run (perhaps through the prohibition of right turns into it).

Goods Way

When Goods Way was rebuilt recently, it was not obviously given adequate provision for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. Instead it became an overflow zone for taxis, with their engines idling. Perhaps now it should have one way working, or at least the prohibition of right turns as above, so space can be allocated to other uses.

York Way, Caledonian Road and Wharfdale Road

The Forum welcomes cautiously the proposals for two way working in Caledonian Road and Wharfdale Road. In particular, Wharfdale Road, like Acton Street and Swinton Street, is a residential road that is unsuitable for its current traffic; such roads should be classified as 'B' roads instead of 'A' roads, to discourage unnecessary use.

Two way working might calm traffic in York Way, but traffic is already stationary near the south end of Caledonian Road. Two way working without enough crossings would make matters harder for pedestrians: those crossing by the desire lines to enter the Regent Quarter or Caledonia Street currently peer around busses and look in only one direction before crossing, but the initial proposals would oblige them to look in two.

The recent change to two way working in part of Caledonian Road appears to have been a failure, despite repeated adjustments to the traffic lights on Wharfdale Road. That change was done without the elimination of the other gyratory routes, and without any traffic modelling whatsoever, so it is not indicative of what would happen in a well-considered scheme; however, the Forum urges caution and requests that there be a full and frank account of what went wrong, from which lessons can be learned.