

CROYDON VISION'S RESPONSE TO NORTH END CYCLING MITIGATIONS

April 08 2016

Croydon Vision representatives Keith Bill and Yusuf Osman met with Councillor Kathy Bee (Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment) and Councillor Robert Canning (her deputy), along with Mr Ian Ploughright (Head of the Transport Department), to discuss Croydon Vision's formal Objection to the continuation of the Council's 18 month Experimental Order allowing cyclists to ride up and down North End 24 hours a day.

At the outset Croydon Vision made it clear that its members support the Council's drive to encourage more cycling in the Borough for health reasons - but believe this does not have to be, and should not be, in the pedestrianised North End.

We expressed Croydon Vision members' concerns about sharing the North End with cyclists, and the fear that has led many to stop using North End altogether. We also discussed the two incidents Croydon Vision members had experienced with cyclists.

We were pleased to see that the representatives from the Council in attendance recognised Croydon Vision members' concerns.

The initial thing we were told was that there was little evidence of increased accidents when cyclists were permitted to share the space with pedestrians.

Secondly, we were told about a number of suggested mitigations designed to respond to the concerns express by Croydon Vision members and to reduce the health and safety risks to the borough's Blind and Partially Sighted residents using North End.

The Council would:

1. Create an alternative route for cyclists using Crown Hill and Frith Road and encourage cyclists to use that route instead of North End during busier periods.
2. Have a 'safe' strip down each side of North End which Blind and Partially Sighted residents could use which would be delineated by some form of tactile paving with street furniture removed. All A-Boards to be taken down in North End.
3. Put up signs telling cyclists amongst other things to give way to pedestrians and warning of a 10 MPH non-statutory speed limit.
4. Invite Croydon Vision members to participate in the training provided to cyclists to make them more aware of the needs of Blind and Sight Impaired residents.

Croydon Vision agreed to discuss the evidence and mitigations with its members and other interested parties and return to the Council with a response. This is that response.

We believe that the evidence concerning accidents between cyclists and pedestrians may underrepresent the experiences of people with sight problems because as soon as they realise that an area is shared use, they no longer use it. Furthermore when accidents do take place they are seldom reported as unless someone sighted is present it is very difficult for a Blind or Sight Impaired person to be able to take details from the cyclists, let alone find a police officer to complain to.

There is little evidence concerning Blind and Sight Impaired people and incidents with cyclists, however what there is does provide evidence to support the fears of Croydon Vision members.

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (GDBA) undertook a campaign in 2014 called Cycleyes. This was designed to educate cyclists on measures they could take to help Sight Impaired pedestrians. This was as a response to increasing reports from Guide Dog Owners about incidents with cyclists. There are around 320 Guide Dog Owners in London. A video from GDBA including people's experiences can be viewed here: www.guidedogs.org.uk/cycleyes

One respondent said:

"After being hit by a cyclist last time I had to take anti-anxiety medication... I still feel very anxious and nervous when crossing roads. Bad cyclists make my life a misery and I am less independent as a result..."

The appendix to this response includes some further quotes from reports made to GDBA on incidents between Blind and Sight Impaired people and cyclists.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) has a number of regional campaigns groups. Two members, one Blind the other Deaf-Blind, of the North Tyneside Campaign Group gave evidence to the local Council's Environment Committee in 2015 concerning the difficulties they had faced when walking along the path along the sea-front which was shared with cyclists. More about this can be read here:

<http://www.rnib.org.uk/north-tyneside-campaigners-speak-out-about-dangers-cycling-pavements>

Yusuf Osman asked the members of two blindness related email lists for experiences of sharing the same space with cyclists. ViGenAccess is a list made up of Blind and Sight Impaired people in which general access issues are discussed. The VITransport list is made up of both Sight Impaired and Sighted individuals where transport related topics are discussed. Appendix2 includes the questions asked and the responses received. These included one Guide Dog being struck by a bike, Long Canes being snapped, cyclists jumping the pedestrian phase at crossings and riding on pavements. Many of the accounts include verbal altercations with cyclists.

The above and the appendix include 14 different albeit it anecdotal accounts of incidents that have occurred between cyclists and Sight Impaired pedestrians on pavements and when crossing roads. It suggests that in an environment like North End such events would

be even more likely because of the large number of pedestrians and cyclists.

On the specific mitigations members of Croydon Vision, and other sight impaired residents who were consulted were, it has to be said, unanimous in the view that the Council's suggested mitigations fail to deal with the fact that Blind and Sight Impaired residents cannot see cyclists coming towards them and are unnerved by the 'whoosh' of cyclists swerving to avoid them and coming up close behind them.

Specifically:

1. Croydon Vision members believe that if the Council is prepared to create an alternative route for cyclists via Crown Hill and Frith Road to use during busy periods and encourage them to take that route then there should be no need for cyclists to use North End and such an alternative route should be compulsory.

2. The proposed safe zone does not take into account the desire of Sight Impaired people to cross North End in the same way that sighted pedestrians wish to do. The tactile delineator could easily be missed particularly by Sight Impaired people with diabetes. Research suggests that the best delineator is a curb of no less than 60 millimetres.

The proposal to remove all A-boards from North End is welcomed by Croydon Vision members. But this can be and should be done whether or not there is cycling in North End.

3. Croydon Vision members believe that warning signs are likely to be missed or ignored. Given the improbability of a speed limit of 5-10 MPH being legally enforceable, and because of the financial pressures on the Council and local police, we do not think the resources exist to monitor such a limit or check that cyclists cycle with care.

4. Croydon Vision is willing to participate in any cyclist education programme. However, Croydon Vision members firmly believe that sharing the pedestrianised North End places them at a risk which cannot be mitigated by education.

Croydon Vision members expressed scepticism about the Council's argument that few cyclists used North End. The figure of nineteen cyclists per hour given as the highest recorded average, for a week day between the hours of 10:00 and 18:00, did not accord with the observations of Croydon Vision members. However, accepting this figure, the number of cyclists using North End is likely to increase as the message gets out to more cyclists that North End can be used. With the potential Cycle Super Highway going down Bedford Park road, and linking to North End, cyclist numbers would again increase. Even if cyclist numbers remained low this does not change the basic fact that Blind and Sight Impaired

people are at a risk from sharing the same space with cyclists. The anecdotal evidence given above demonstrates that it only takes one cyclist using the same space as a blind pedestrian to cause an accident, or sufficient fear to the Blind or Sight Impaired person to significantly decrease their confidence when going out. North End will have considerably more than one cyclist.

Croydon Vision strongly urges the Council to end the Experimental Order and implement a route for cyclists bypassing North End altogether. We believe that this is the only way that the concerns of Blind and Sight Impaired people can be met, whilst still meeting the Council's legitimate desires to increase cycling and improve the health of residents in Croydon.

Croydon Vision believes that the Council may be in breach of its Public Sector Duty as defined by the Equality Act. People with disabilities are one of the nine protected groups given special status under the act and clearly Blind and Sight Impaired People fit into this category. The Council must proactively investigate the impact of proposed policies on protected groups prior to policy implementation. We do not believe that use of general statistics on accidents where cyclists and pedestrians share the same space would satisfy the act. It may also be a breach of the Equalities Act not to have consulted with relevant organisations prior to the Experimental Order coming into force in March 2015. We strongly urge you to take this into account, along with the anecdotal evidence in this response and the appendix attached when deciding how to proceed.

Keith Bill
Yusuf Osman