

Dear Tony and Craig,

Here are CTC's comments on The Plain roundabout plans. The committee of Cyclox has also reviewed your proposals and fully supports and endorses both CTC's comments and the points made by Oxford Civic Society¹. We are grateful for the way you have kept us informed about the planners' thinking before the formal consultation has gone out. We have felt much more engaged with you in a meaningful way than on many previous projects. That has been a very good part of the process.

First: some general comments:

1. This scheme is mostly funded by the DfT's **Cycle City Ambition Fund**. At each stage of the design process we see less and less "Cycle Ambition", to such an extent that we no longer believe that the large expense and the upheaval of the road works will be worth the benefit to cyclists at all.
2. You refer to "mixed messages" in the Cyclox public meeting. That is hardly surprising. There will be **less confident** cyclists and **more confident** cyclists. There are also **would-be-but-frightened potential cyclists** who don't use their bikes at present. Each will give a different message. The Ambition Fund intends that those who don't cycle now should be facilitated to do so. (That is why completion of the Oxford dual network matters so much). As they have progressed, your plans for The Plain have catered less and less for the less-experienced and the non-cyclists. Taking half the mixed message and paying little attention to the other half does not satisfy the purpose of the Ambition Fund. You need to satisfy both the less confident and the confident/assertive cyclist. It is a very difficult trick to pull off, but that's the core of the problem that needs your professional expertise. If 20% growth in cycling through The Plain is the target it is **the less confident for whom you need to make much better provision**.

We have heard a number of cyclists who are **surprised and astonished that no segregated provision** will be forthcoming². These people are likely to be a source of objections in the public consultation. No evidence has been produced to show that segregation is not possible, and while we agree that there is not enough room for the "full Dutch", as tested out on Richard Mann's diagram, there could be opportunities, for instance at the exits from Iffley Road and Cowley Place. If segregation is indeed impossible anywhere around The Plain, you need drawings to prove your case that there's no space for it. What about segregation on feasible parts, e.g. over the bridge both out- and in-bound; and along Iffley and Cowley Roads inbound? Have you consulted TRL about the current state of their trials with Jislon Traffic Islands and Zicla Zebra "Armadillo" separators³? While full segregated provision all the way round is not achievable within the project time available unless the central island is altered, we think you overstate the sanctity of the former graveyard. This was already substantially interfered with in 2007.

¹ www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/index.php/travel-and-transport/26-travel-and-transport-major-planning-consultations/219-plain-cycling-comments

² See, for instance, the comments in Cyclox Forum

³ <http://en.zicla.com/products/65/cycle-track-traffic-separators-cycle-lanes-armadillos-zebra-bumps> and http://www.trl.co.uk/transport_research_development/sustainability/sustainable_transport/cycling_facility_trials/segregated_cycleways.htm

3. Confident cyclists will appreciate the following aspects of your proposals:
 - a. the proposed slightly wider cycle lanes over the bridge (easier to pass slower cyclists and perhaps marginally easier to pull out, outbound as the bridge ends, to the right-hand lane for the Plain),
 - b. the proposed single-lane carriageway around the east side, which should reduce the ambiguity of the intentions of vehicles exiting to Cowley and Iffley Roads, and to Cowley Place
 - c. the consequent probable reduced risk to cycles coming from Cowley Road hitting on-roundabout traffic with ambiguous exit intentions, that fails to give way.
 - d. the retention of the outbound cycle lane off the bridge into St Clements
 - e. the retention of the cycle lane separator exiting Cowley Road onto the roundabout. The prohibited left turn for vehicles from Cowley into Iffley Road needs to be made physically impossible.
 - f. the inbound route from Iffley Road being kept segregated at its mouth. The judgement of the exact position of the peninsula between Iffley Road and Cowley Place will be crucial to minimise the conflict between westbound cyclists and vehicles entering Cowley Place

However, confident cyclists have long ridden round The Plain without too much apprehension, on the whole. Indeed, a number of these cyclists have commented that they could not understand why The Plain is to receive yet further attention only a few years after the last revision.

Regarding the less confident/experienced:

1. A major concern is how to facilitate **the move from the single to the right-hand lane** of the two lanes outbound at the east end of the bridge. While we welcome the between-carriageway cycle lane, we still think your proposal, with simply a gap in the marking of the St Clements-bound lane to reach it, is completely insufficient. Your argument that cyclists might overconfidently interpret a join-up is wrong and lacks evidence. An example of what could be done is shown in fig 9.7, p 59 of LTN 02-08 (red lane in photo on the right). Locally, the southbound cycle lane from St Giles leading to the right turn at the Beaumont Street lights crosses the left vehicle lane (photo) and riders are at least part-steered towards it⁴. Your proposal to deal with the hazard for this manoeuvre at The Plain offers no significant improvement over the present – minimal Ambition. You have shied away from signage to indicate the lane markings – have you really tested the supposed heritage guardians on this suggestion?



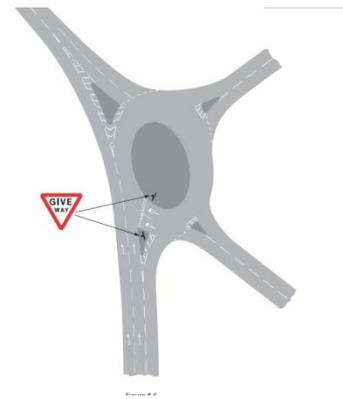
Figure 9.7 Cycle lead-in lane leading to ASL on the off-side of a filter lane (Patrick Lingwood)



2. A second major concern is the design speed. **What are the design speeds** in your proposal in its currently planned dimensions, for (i) cars (ii) larger vehicles? LTN 02-08 para 9.8.5 recommends judicious use of sight-screens on the drivers' right to inhibit speeding by entering traffic. Have you considered this treatment especially for the Cowley Road entry, and what was the outcome?

⁴ STATS19 figures show no cycle injury-incidents here between 2005 and 2012 (<http://tinyurl.com/l386eok>)

3. We are disappointed that the suggestion of measures to **inhibit speeds of on-roundabout traffic** in conflict with emerging off-bridge cyclists aiming for Cowley/Iffley exits has been rejected without sufficient explanation. What is the flowrate round this section, and how often each day would the capacity of the carriageway to absorb waiting vehicles without blocking bridge-bound traffic be exceeded? (Reproduced at left, for example, is Fig 8.6 of the Traffic Signs Manual, which could apply here:



https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/223667/traffic-signs-manual-chapter-05.pdf)

4. Since smaller vehicles will be faster and may still be too high, **what further speed reduction is proposed to calm them?** There could be over-runnable but definite texturing/roughening of the aprons around the island, projecting outwards further from the current granite-stepped kerb. Merely imprinting a resin/tar coating will not be a speed deterrent and it wears poorly. In concrete, or extension of granite, perhaps?
5. The funding application form on p21 of your application to the Ambition Fund under “monitoring” refers to:

Interviews with cyclists and pedestrians will be conducted to establish current users views on the roundabout. If possible interviews will be carried out with people who do not cycle through The Plain to understand why they do not. These repeatable surveys will be used to assess the impacts of the proposals on people’s perceptions of safety on the roundabout and its approaches.

If you have such data, could you please share it with us, especially your **survey of non-cyclists?** Are these still planned? If not, what stopped them? We have not heard anything about the outcome of these interviews.

6. The roundabout will have a single running lane, and this should definitely be an improvement, as discussed above. For the less confident, **a single running lane is likely still be daunting**, though perhaps marginally less discouraging than currently. Thus, the only selling point of your plans to the less confident cyclist will be the possibly slower vehicle speed.
7. There was a possibility of a **hybrid cycle lane** inbound from Cowley Place: Graham Smith suggested a kerb-like treatment if not actual kerbs, with double yellow lines outside the cycle lane. With kerbs, we observe that recent highway authority work is unsatisfactory (granite kerbs in Queen St dislodging; in places, 30% of manholes in the rebuilt Abingdon Rd have sunk even after being repaired/levelled). **What was the outcome of your promised study** of this suggestion, please? In your proposal for the bid, you listed hybrid cycle lanes under stage 2⁵ of The Plain improvements (p8 section A in the funding application document⁶)
8. You propose to move the school coach pick-up and set-down from its present location in the wide inbound carriageway area ahead of the bridge to the indentation mid-way across the bridge. If you keep the present kerb-line neither the length nor the width look to us anything like capacious enough to take a standard school coach, so **inbound cyclists will be forced to veer into the carriageway** to avoid them, for considerable time periods

⁵ We aren’t clear if you still plan two Stages: Stage 1 with 1.8m cycle lanes followed by stage 2 hybrid cycle lanes? This would mean building things twice - surely more expensive?

⁶ <http://tinyurl.com/pkstfnw>

while the coach waits. Do you intend to restrict this stopping point just to mini-buses?
What are the coaches meant to do?

We sent you a compilation of the problems identified by Cyclox members at the initial stages of consultation on The Plain project. We'll shortly submit to you a comparison between these with what we understand to be your solutions. We think there will be some, but rather small, gains emerging from the current proposals, but too many of the originally stated difficulties remain. They could be ameliorated even at this stage.

Sincerely and with best wishes,

James Dawton (CTC)
Simon Hunt (Cyclox)

23 Feb 2014