

The Caledonian Road (south) two-way traffic scheme

Introduction

The current operation of the new traffic scheme has created traffic conditions on Wharfdale Road which are adversely affecting the quality of life for people living on, and adjacent to, Wharfdale Road. At various times of the day, queues of slow-moving traffic are causing noise and polluting the air.

The volume of vehicles on Wharfdale Road has not increased as a result of the scheme but the flow of traffic is irregular because the phasing of traffic lights at the corner of Wharfdale Road and Caledonian Road does not allow sufficient time for traffic to move from Wharfdale Road into Caledonian Road.

The Council is committed to resolving these problems.

The reasons for implementing the current scheme

In November 2014, Islington Council removed the one-way working on Caledonian Road between Wharfdale Road and Caledonia Street. As a result, 3 southbound lanes were replaced by 2 southbound lanes (one of which is a peak hours bus lane) and a new single northbound lane. At Wharfdale Road's junction with Caledonian Road, traffic signals were installed to control the merging of traffic from Wharfdale Road, Killick Street (south section) and Caledonian Road whilst a new arrangement for pedestrian crossing was introduced.

The reasons for introducing the new scheme were to:

- reduce the congestion and queuing that had affected the lower parts of Caledonian Road;
- achieve a traffic calming effect on the lower parts of Caledonian Road, especially high speed driving
- improve the pedestrian environment around the Killick Street junction;
- create a safe cycle route from Wharfdale Road into Killick Street (south) and towards Pentonville Road

The scheme also anticipated progress towards removing the overall one-way system around Kings Cross. Both Islington and Camden Councils are committed to removing the gyratory systems for which there is strong public support. By returning conventional two-way traffic in these roads, we hope to reconfigure the area's roads so they are less engineered for the benefit of vehicles and more engineered for the benefit of people who live, work, study or visit the area. It is essential that we change the balance between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists so that pedestrians become the main users of the area around what is now Europe's largest public transport interchange, a growing business district and a densely populated residential neighbourhood.

Transport for London – the Mayor's agency that controls all the major roads through Kings Cross – has agreed to consider the removal of the gyratory system. At the time of implementing the Caledonian Road scheme, we expected TfL to be publicly consulting on options during 2015 but this timescale has slipped by more than a year. If we are able to implement some of the options which will be considered by TfL, we could reach a scenario where very little through traffic would use Wharfdale Road.

Right now, the traffic signals are not working properly

The key problem which is causing the queues is that the traffic lights are not properly "phased" i.e. the length of green light time given to different sources of traffic and pedestrians. In early March 2015, a piece of electronic "traffic optimisation" kit was installed which adjusts the red/green phases according to the levels of traffic on the each of the roads. This system uses an electromagnetic sensor to detect vehicles and it appears that scaffolding erected on the pavement around the corner building is interfering with the sensors and the system is not working correctly as a result. The Council has been promised this scaffolding will be removed quite shortly and the SCOOT system can then work properly.

Solutions to the current situation

Fixing the lights phasing is a necessary measure but not the only change to be considered which can reduce queuing traffic on Wharfdale Road:

- **Close-off entry from Killick Street (south) into Caledonian Road.** There's not many vehicles use this junction to join Caledonian Road and there are alternative routes for such traffic. At present vehicles using the junction trigger a full green light phase which then stops traffic southbound on Caledonian Road and on Wharfdale Road.
- **Impose HGV restrictions on Wharfdale Road.** Whilst this is feasible, the road forms part of the Strategic Route Network and would require the approval of TfL. Nonetheless, it is worth trying.
- **Change the lights phasing at the junction of Wharfdale Road and York Way.** One reason so much traffic enters Wharfdale Road is the free flowing nature of the lights phasing at this junction. Re-phasing, particularly for pedestrian crossing, so that some of the traffic is queued on York Way rather than Wharfdale Road. This requires Camden's agreement because that is the highways authority for York Way.
- **Retaining no-right turn from Goods Way into York Way southbound.** This is a key protection which Islington agreed with Camden on a temporary basis a decade ago covering the main construction phases of St Pancras station and the KX development. On Islington's urging, Camden has retained this measure for a further temporary period, but is now considering a permanent remodelling of the junction.
- **Reviewing the parking conditions on Caledonian Road bus lane.** Parking is permitted at certain non-peak times in the bus lane and, when this happens, in effect there is only one southbound lane available for traffic. At times, this may also contribute to queuing on Wharfdale Road.

What else has been done in response to public concerns?

Since March when public concerns were raised, the Council has:

- Introduced 24/7 parking restrictions on the new northbound lane. This dealt with parked vehicles blocking the lane, creating a risk of northbound traffic pulling into the southbound lane
- Begun a pollution monitoring project at locations on Wharfdale Road, Caledonian Road, York Way and Caledonia Street. The results are not yet available but we hope to have initial conclusions back from the lab service in a few weeks time.
- Asked TfL's commissioning engineer to confirm that the audible pedestrian crossing warning is switched off between 22:00 – 07:00

Conclusion

The scheme in its current form has caused severe inconvenience and distress, particularly to people living alongside the new lights, and I am very sorry that we were unable to implement the correct phasing of the lights from the very start. I hope that the proposed measures will return traffic flow to previously experienced patterns and that, over the longer term, we can fundamentally reduce the amount of traffic on Wharfdale Road and the surrounding streets which make up the north section of the Kings Cross gyratory.

Cllr Paul Convery, June 8th 2015