

**BLOOMSBURY RESIDENTS' ACTION GROUP
PROOF OF EVIDENCE 5**

Accident information and cycling safety

STATEMENT

by DEBBIE RADCLIFFE - LOCAL CYCLIST

**[Witness statement slightly amended from
original in Statement of Case]**

Summary

1. I do not support the aspiration of Camden Council to make the trial layout of Tavistock Place permanent. I do not feel that it has necessarily made cycling safer for cyclists – especially in the wider context of cycling around the city. Why should a scheme cater only for cyclists whose destination lies only along the route? What happens when less confident cyclists (for whom the intervention has been made) have to cycle elsewhere? The displaced traffic (resulting from the scheme) has made it much more hazardous for cyclists negotiating their way around the surrounding gridlocked streets.

Personal statement

2. I am a cyclist. I do not own a car. I occasionally use a car club car if I need to transport something large. I rarely take a taxi. I walk within the local area, sometimes make use of public transport but a bicycle is my main mode of travel. I am a cyclist who uses a bike for my every day life, on and off all day, every day.
3. I have worked, and therefore cycled, in many cities and towns in Europe and elsewhere including Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Hamburg and San Francisco - places in which cycling predominates. I work freelance as a community planner for a firm of architects, masterplanners and placemakers. I am fully aware of the beneficial effect of reducing motor traffic in towns and cities, especially in terms of health and wellbeing.
4. I love cycling and the freedom it presents, but I do not support the loss of a westbound route along Tavistock Place and a presumption in favour of cyclists. A bicycle is indeed an excellent way of getting around a city. But it is a mode of transport that is not possible for everyone, for a variety of reasons – such as physical (or mental) incapacity and work constraints. As such there has to be a balance. Tavistock Place should not be a privileged domain for commuting cyclists simply passing through the area.

Impact of ETO on local residents

5. I moved to a flat in Judd Street in 1981, and my principal concern is for the welfare of the whole community, among whom I have lived happily for 36 years.

6. Many elderly residents live in the Brunswick Centre (which includes a large number of sheltered flats) and want to walk to the popular local pharmacy in Leigh Street. I know from Kirti (the pharmacist) that they are now fearful of crossing Tavistock Place, as many cyclists go at a considerable speed, and red traffic lights appear to be a hindrance. [*Kirti's statement in CP Day Report, page 67*]
7. What has been most distressing is the way that the scheme has pitted 'cyclists' (good) against 'residents' (bad). Many of us are both residents and cyclists. Where has a sense of perspective gone? There is a feeling of 'fundamentalism' in the prevailing attitude of cycle campaigners, that the new traffic layout MUST be better. Why must it?

Interventions to Tavistock Place

8. In 2014 I agreed to do the voiceover narration for a video produced by Camden Cyclists to show that the segregated bi-directional cycle track along the north side of Tavistock Place was inappropriate and unsafe.
9. The trial scheme that replaced it is not the answer. The number of commuters on two wheels may have increased but the quality of life for local residents has decreased significantly. Cyclists certainly do not need a special space to go at speed, which the current very wide 'motorway' situation along the corridor encourages.

Problems with segregated cycle ways

10. Although segregated tracks are promoted as being the safest form of protection for cyclists, I personally do not agree. The concrete kerbs that define a route may keep vehicles at a distance, but they also impose a barrier – which can be dangerous in its own right.
11. The 'stepped' tracks, which are already in existence near St Pancras Church, are being proposed for Tavistock Place. These are dangerous in wet conditions as tyres can easily slip off the edge, leading to a potential fall. There is a lack of clear definition as to what is flat space and what is raised. What about at night, when light is dim, or when there is a very large cluster of cyclists vying for space? What if a tyre slips by accident off the raised kerb and the cyclist falls into the carriageway?
12. The physical segregation of a cycle lane may give nervous cyclists more confidence, but what happens when the protection ends and these same riders have to merge with heavy traffic at Upper Woburn Place to cycle to Holborn or elsewhere in central London? Destinations vary. If a cyclist is "cushioned" into "feeling safe" by a segregated cycle track, he or she may become complacent and less attentive to the immediate road conditions. In my view this "protection" leads to a false sense of security.

Personal experience of segregated cycle lanes

13. As I cycle along Tavistock Place I do not feel any safer than when I am in other parts of London where there is only a white line as a source of protection. It can be alarming when a bike hurtles past me along the

corridor, sometimes at extraordinary speed. And then has to brake if ahead there are a couple of slower cyclists riding side by side, chatting.

14. I do not like to feel that I cannot escape from the space I am in, if there is a situation in which I need to get off the cycle track. I know there are occasional gaps to permit entry to side streets on the opposite side of the road, but the street scene feels rigid, I feel "hemmed in" by the imposition of cycle infrastructure.
15. It certainly does not feel safe when cyclists on Santander bikes are riding in the opposite direction, thinking they are still in Europe. Or when one comes across an ambulance forced to park across the cycle tracks to get to a resident in need.



Or when a car chooses to drive westbound along the one way street - in the wrong direction.



16. Or when I cycle to the supermarket in the Brunswick Centre and watch many cyclists zoom with apparent impunity through red lights at junctions, even when there are pedestrians crossing. This may get them to work or college quickly but shows a lack of respect to the residential community who live here. And this is dangerous.

Wider London cycling

17. I accept that there are sections of London where extra safety measures are required, especially at key junctions and roundabouts, and where cars travel at speed. But Tavistock Place does not present the same hazards as at a major roundabout, such as Elephant and Castle or Old Street (where I have been knocked off my bike in the past by a driver who thought I too could accelerate at 40 miles an hour).
18. I have used the Super Highway route to cycle to Wandsworth and note that these blue-painted sections of road are generally not physically segregated, but are clearly defined for cyclists, not cars, to use. The lanes change in width according to location. They have a flexibility that permanent segregated cycle infrastructure simply does not have. I feel safely separated from vehicles by being on a clearly defined cycle lane, and not "barricaded in" by physical infrastructure, which give limited options to change direction. When there is no physical barrier and the lanes are narrow, a faster cyclist can, if necessary, simply overtake the one in front, when it is safe to do so.

Impact of gridlocked streets on cyclists

19. The increase in displaced traffic and resulting jams means that cyclists are extremely vulnerable on local streets, especially when emergency vehicles are forced to drive, at speed, on the wrong side of the road. From my balcony on Judd Street I have seen this happen. I have watched bicycles weaving dangerously in and out of gridlocked traffic. I have seen them wobble as a car driver, in frustration, decides to do a sudden three point turn. Is this the safety for cyclists we want?

Personal aspirations for cycling

20. Tavistock Place bisects a dense residential area of WC1. The streets south of the Euston Road form a distinct neighbourhood, and are full of people's homes. Residents matter. I support the return of Tavistock Place corridor as a two-way road for vehicles, i.e. a normal street within the conservation area. It should have a cycle lane in direction of travel on either side of the carriageway, defined by a white line, which is quite sufficient to keep cars away from cyclists (as elsewhere in London and other cities). In this way the street layout provides freedom of movement for all.
21. I personally think that it is the responsibility of all cyclists to be conscious of their own safety, and that of other people – whether pedestrians, or drivers. We are not an endangered species, and we are not above the law.
22. I am an enthusiastic cyclist, and want to see cycling promoted as an excellent means of getting around London – for those who are fit enough and do not need a vehicle to earn a living.
23. Cycling should be encouraged so we need cycle lanes. Residents also need to be able to get around in a vehicle – if necessary.
24. First and foremost, we all need to SHARE the space.