

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

Accident information and cycling safety

STATEMENT

by MARK FOLEY - LOCAL CYCLIST

1. I am a local resident and cyclist. From the mid 1980s until recently I cycled regularly from my home in Judd Street to work in Oxford Circus. As a result I am very familiar with the cycle routes in the area and the way that they have changed over the years.
2. In the 80s and 90s cycling in Bloomsbury was a joy. Most of the roads were two-way so each day I could try different routes to work through the back streets. Then gradually the council made more and more of these streets one-way (nearly all eastbound), making it increasingly difficult to avoid main roads. Eventually the only road which remained two-way between Tottenham Court Road and Gray's Inn Road was the Tavistock/Torrington corridor. Tavistock Place remained two-way and had cycle lanes in each direction. They were narrow but I am not interested in cycling fast or overtaking so they suited me. I felt safe and I never witnessed any accidents. Then, around 2005, these lanes were removed and the two-way segregated cycle track was built on the north side of Tavistock/Torrington. It was badly thought out, too narrow and imposed without any consultation with local residents. I could go into some detail about why it was so unsuccessful, but that is not relevant to this inquiry. Like many cyclists, when travelling west I would avoid it and cycle on the main carriageway. Then, in 2015, the ETO was imposed and yet again the situation for cyclists deteriorated. I would like to explain why, as a cyclist and local resident, I feel the ETO layout is not a success.

Inconsistent widths, signage and signals

2. The cycle tracks vary considerably in width. In some places you can cycle side by side with other cyclists. In others it narrows down to a space sufficient for only one. This is confusing as, in the wider sections, some cyclists get the impression this is a cycle 'superhighway' and start travelling very fast, overtaking other cyclists then having to go into the vehicle lane (into the path of oncoming vehicles if they are travelling westbound) where the track narrows. This false impression of being a superhighway also leads to aggressive behaviour by some cyclists who feel this is exclusively their space and pedestrians and cars should get out of their way. Because the cycle lane is very wide in Gordon Square, Tavistock Square and Byng Place I have often seen cyclists sailing through red lights and ignoring pedestrians on the zebra crossing. Because in some places there are separate signals for the cycle lane I feel some cyclists believe they don't have to obey the ordinary traffic signals on most of the corridor.

Cycling against the flow of traffic

3. Because vehicle traffic is now only moving eastwards in Tavistock Place, when you are cycling west, although you are in a separate lane, you are facing oncoming vehicles. This feels unnatural and frightening compared to the normal situation of cycling in the same direction as vehicles. The council claims cyclists feel safer with the new lanes, but this is not my experience at all. In fact, it can be dangerous – on several occasions when cycling west I have had to slam on my brakes because a taxi or delivery truck has pulled in to the south curb to drop off a passenger or unload, blocking the cycle lane. I have also witnessed near accidents with pedestrians crossing the street. Naturally, when seeing cars only coming from the west they assume it is a one-way street and only look towards the west before crossing, unaware of cyclists coming from the east. Fortunately, in the incidents I personally witnessed the cyclists were going slowly enough to be able to stop in time otherwise there might have been some serious injuries (something other local residents have witnessed).
4. It is counter intuitive to have what is in effect a one-way street but with cyclists coming from both directions.

The cycle tracks are in the wrong streets

5. In the mayor of London's cycle grid the Torrington/Tavistock route is shown as part of the grid and described as a 'quietway'. That is a cycle route without physical separation from vehicles. It is not supposed to be a cycle superhighway. This is for the obvious reason that this route doesn't really go anywhere significant (except for hospital patients who are unlikely to be on bicycles). At the west end of the corridor it meets the T junction of Tottenham Court road. At the east end it meets the T junction of Gray's Inn Road. Because most cyclists want to get to/from central areas such as Covent Garden, Soho and Oxford Street they tend to only use part of the corridor and then zig-zag through the surrounding streets to get to Euston, King's Cross or Islington. As these streets are now often full of the displaced traffic from Tavistock Place, this is a dangerous side-effect of the ETO.
6. The cycle tracks would be much more useful if they were installed in more convenient routes for cyclists such as around the back of the British Museum and Bedford Square, around Russell Square, through Guilford Street, and along High Holborn.
7. I want to point out that although some cycling pressure groups support the ETO many cyclists, especially local residents, have a different opinion. Because the Torrington/Tavistock corridor is entirely within the central London congestion zone and reduced emissions zone it has fairly light vehicular traffic and almost no HGVs. It is therefore a fairly safe environment for cyclists and one in which heavily engineered and segregated cycling lanes are completely unnecessary and counter-productive.