Transport for London's commitment on Chelsea

March 2024

Making Chelsea safer

We are committed to making Chelsea safer for everyone. Chelsea Embankment is a popular place to walk and has become a well-used east-west cycle route (c. 10,000 cyclists daily). We have a responsibility to protect all road users, in particular vulnerable road users, from danger. This is in line with our Vision Zero Action Plan, which aims to eradicate death and serious injury from London's transport network by 2041. We are pleased to be working alongside the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to achieve this aim in Chelsea.

Battersea Bridge Safety Scheme: bus lane compromise

The junction at the northern end of Battersea Bridge is one of London's most dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. The most recent collision data shows that in the 36 months to October 2023 two pedestrians and 11 cyclists were involved in collisions. Sadly, two of these cyclist collisions were serious and one of the pedestrian collisions was fatal[1]. (Collision data publicly available at https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/safety-and-security/road-safety.)

For this reason we proposed changes at the junction, which include signalised crossings over all four arms and better protection for cyclists. (More details about these proposals available at https://tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/improvements-and-projects/battersea-bridge-safety.)

We also proposed to install a new bus lane along Chelsea Embankment, from Royal Hospital Road to the Battersea Bridge junction. Following productive discussions with the Royal Borough and having listened to the feedback from the local community we have agreed to drastically reduce the bus lane in our proposals and instead create two general westbound traffic lanes. We now plan to install just c.35 metres of bus lane at the westbound approach to the Battersea Bridge junction only.

Battersea Bridge: banned left turn into Beaufort Street

We are proposing to ban this movement for several reasons: to protect pedestrians crossing over Beaufort Street from left turning vehicles[2], to protect cyclists travelling eastbound along the Embankment from left turning vehicles, and to make the junction operate more efficiently (by removing the dedicated

[1] There was also one cyclist fatality (August 2023) 75 metres from the junction, which is not included in these figures.

[2] Banning the left turn will allow us to expand the pavement at the north-western corner of the junction to make pedestrians more visible to motorists, reducing the likelihood of a collision as pedestrians cross the road.

left turn lane from the eastbound carriageway, which currently contributes to congestion at the southern end of Beaufort Street).

When developing our plans for the safety scheme we looked at several options which would retain the left turn into Beaufort Street. Traffic modelling showed that if we kept the left turn three things would occur: severe congestion for all traffic at the junction, traffic queues on Cheyne Walk towards King's Road, and longer bus journey times.

Banning traffic movements is not something we do lightly. It is only ever a last resort when all other alternatives are found to be unworkable. In this location, not banning the left turn into Beaufort Street would mean we would have to keep a dedicated left turn in the traffic signal cycle at the junction. This would cause the junction to operate less efficiently and we would see traffic queueing along the A3220, sometimes as far as King's Road.

We would be happy to share our modelling output for the scheme.[3]

The number of vehicles currently making this movement is very low, at c.60 per hour. This volume of traffic (approx. one vehicle per minute) is too low to be picked up by our strategic traffic model.

Chelsea Bridge: impact of banned left turns on local traffic

Since the left turns at Chelsea Bridge were restricted we have been closely monitoring traffic volumes along the Embankment and movements into and out from side roads. You will find data for all side road movements attached covering periods before the changes were made (traffic counts performed at various dates pre-Covid. See the attached 'Traffic Counts (Diagrams)' for specific dates), as well as averages for the years 2021 and 2022. This enables us to directly compare traffic volumes pre and post the banned left turns.

E.g. Summary of findings for the junction of Albert Bridge / Chelsea Embankment / Oakley Street:

- Pre-Covid, 151 motorised vehicles per hour turned right into Oakley Street from the Embankment during the morning peak. 128 during the evening peak
    - In September 2021 these figures fell to 48 (am) and 34 (pm)
    - In May 2022 these figures were 90 (am) and 41 (pm)
    - Based on May 2022 figures, this represents reductions of c.40 per cent in the morning peak and c.68 per cent in the evening peak.

- Pre-Covid, 58 motorised vehicles per hour turned left into Oakley Street from the Embankment during the morning peak. 47 during the evening peak
    - In September 2021 these figures fell to 12 (am) and 28 (pm)
    - In May 2022 these figures were 33 (am) and 53 (pm)

[3] This data shows predicted journey times for buses and general traffic.

    - Based on May 2022 figures, this represents a reduction of c.43 per cent in the morning peak and an increase of c.12 per cent in the evening peak.

- Pre-Covid, 445 motorised vehicles per hour entered Oakley Street from Albert Bridge during the morning peak. 239 during the evening peak
    - In September 2021 these figures were 300 (am) and 179 (pm)
    - In May 2022 these figures were 270 (am) and 180 (pm)
    - Based on May 2022 figures, this represents reductions of c.39 per cent in the morning peak and c.25 per cent in the evening peak.

The full dataset is provided in the attached PDF documents. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the data.

Heavy goods vehicle (HGV) movements since banned turns

We have not observed a marked increase in HGVs turning left onto Battersea Bridge since the left turn onto Chelsea Bridge was banned. We believe most of these vehicles have instead diverted via Vauxhall Bridge.

- Pre-Covid, 100 motorised vehicles turned left onto Battersea Bridge in the morning peak (including eight HGVs). 259 in the evening peak (including 11 HGVs)
- In May 2022, i.e. after the banned turn was implemented, 114 motorised vehicles turned left onto Battersea Bridge in the morning peak (including nine HGVs). 305 in the evening peak (zero HGVs).

Chelsea Bridge: request to reinstate banned left turns

Like Battersea Bridge junction, historically the Chelsea Bridge junction had one of the poorest collision records in London. Alongside 72 other junctions across London (including Battersea Bridge / Cheyne Walk), this location was identified in 2017 as a high priority for improvements as part of TfL's Safer Junction programme.

Through our discussions with the Royal Borough about the Battersea Bridge Safety Scheme we also agreed to assess potential alternative design options for reinstating the currently restricted left turn onto Chelsea Bridge[4].

The assessment of three alternative design options was completed in early-February 2024. This work attempted to retain some safety benefits for cyclists (noting that c.10,000 cyclists use the junction daily) while reopening the restricted left turn. The results were shared with the Royal Borough on 5 February. You will find a full report of our findings in the attached letter. These are summarised below.

[4] The banned turn was introduced in 2020 to protect bus journey times and to protect cyclists from left-turning vehicles, i.e. 'left-hook' collisions.

- All three alternative design options would lead to longer queues of traffic and increased congestion on surrounding roads
- All three options would result in drivers seeking alternative routes through the area to avoid the junction
- All three options would lead to cyclists having to wait longer for a green signal (potentially leading to unsafe behaviours)
- All three options would lead to pedestrians having to wait significantly longer than safe or optimal for a green man signal (potentially leading to unsafe behaviours)
- All three options would lead to buses taking longer to traverse the junction.

Our engineers working on the project therefore recommended that the best solution for road danger reduction and highway network efficiency was to retain the existing layout.

Given our joint commitment with the Royal Borough to make Chelsea safer, we cannot therefore support the replacement of the current restricted left turn at Chelsea Bridge with any of the alternative design options assessed[5].

Five-year commitment

We have listened to the local community's concerns about the risks of taking a piecemeal approach to Chelsea Embankment and its side roads, and we understand and agree with the importance of taking a holistic approach to transport planning in the wider Chelsea area.

The Battersea Bridge Safety Scheme has been brought forward at pace in response to an urgent need to address a known safety risk to vulnerable road users. Beyond the introduction of these much-needed safety improvements (which we plan to start building during the financial year 2024/25), we can assure residents there are no further proposals for changes to the TfL road network in the Royal Borough along Cheyne Walk, Chelsea Embankment and Grosvenor Road for at least the next five years (to March 2029).

This does not preclude us from working with the community, and we would be happy to do so, should residents feel improvements are needed.

We hope, in sharing the traffic and modelling data which has helped to inform our professional judgment at Battersea Bridge and Chelsea Bridge, that we have demonstrated our commitment to transparency and future collaboration.

[5] No formal road safety audits were carried out on any of the three alternative design options as the results of the traffic modelling adequately demonstrated a fundamental lack of safety.