

Fisher's Lane closure to motor traffic except buses – response to public concerns

Introduction

In July 2020, as part of its response to the COVID pandemic, Ealing Council closed Fisher's Lane in Southfield Ward to all motor traffic, except buses. The closure was implemented using an Experimental Traffic Order (ETO) which allows for an initial six-month consultation period. At the end of this period, feedback from residents and others is included in a review of the scheme.

Southfield Ward Councillors organised a resident survey in October 2020. Details of the survey method are unknown, but it is assumed that the survey was publicised locally via websites and social media and the responses collected on-line.

809 responses were analysed, excluding responses from outside the ward, multiple responses from the same address, and responses received after the 11 Oct cut-off. Grand total number of responses up to 25 October was 1213. Given that there are an estimated 6000 households in Southfield ward this represents a response rate of around 13%.

Responses to results of survey carried out by Ward Councillors in October 2020

- **Seventy-four percent of respondents said they were against the changes to Fisher's Lane.**

There is often resistance to change and none more so than when it involves changes that have a direct effect on peoples travel choices. It is worth noting though that at the time of the survey, Turnham Green Terrace was also closed. This would have contributed to some localised congestion in the area. Subsequently Turnham Green Terrace has been re-opened to traffic and is expected to stay that way.

- **All groups (totalling sixty-eight percent) said they have seen things getting worse since the changes were made by Ealing Council.**

It's not clear what 'things' this statement refers to, so it is difficult to respond directly. The comments above regarding the timing of the survey and the situation at Turnham Green Terrace applies here also.

The council is analysing all available data, and commissioning surveys to gather more, to understand the exact effect of the Fisher's Lane restriction on traffic volume, congestion and journey times. This takes time, and data gathered during lockdown are unlikely to be representative, which means surveys planned for this month will have to be delayed.

- **Eighty-nine percent wanted Ealing Council to have consulted them before making the changes.**

The Streetspace Programme required that schemes were implemented quickly to offset the reduction in public transport capacity brought about by the need for social distancing and to provide safe and attractive alternatives to the private car. Changes to Fisher's Lane were already under consideration prior to lockdown, but the scheme needed to be introduced quickly after Hounslow closed Turnham Green Terrace, to avoid the road being overwhelmed with diverted

traffic. In common with other schemes implemented with experimental traffic orders (ETOs) there is a consultation and monitoring period after implementation. Consultation is arguably more meaningful when people can see actual, rather than predicted, effects of a change.

- **Thirteen percent of people say they have been encouraged to cycle or walk more often.**

This is encouraging but it is not clear if this is related to the Fisher's Lane changes or other factors.

- **Eighty-two percent of respondents felt that the signage is inadequate.**

The signage has been increased from its initial level. Ealing Parking Services have agreed that signage is adequate for enforcement, without significant risk of penalties being cancelled on appeal. The number of private motor vehicles using the road declined to a fraction of its original level when the restriction was imposed, suggesting that most people saw the signs. The number has declined further since the camera was installed.

It is noted that many drivers rely on satellite navigation rather than signs, and it takes time for Satnav companies to update their data – nevertheless drivers should be paying attention to the road ahead and arguably this should not be an issue for local residents on familiar roads.

- **Seventy-nine percent of respondents have not seen enforcement cameras when driving in the area.**

An enforcement camera was installed in November 2020 to record southbound violations of the Fisher's Lane restriction. This was initially used to issue warning notices, but penalty charges have been issued since 7 December 2020.

- **Sixty-seven percent want enforcement cameras to be present and clear for drivers.**

As above. Regulations do not require advance warning of enforcement cameras for this restriction.

- **Forty-nine percent of respondents would like to attend a virtual public meeting to discuss this topic with a Council officer.**

Council officers have provided briefings to Ward Councillors at regular intervals during the last six months and have responded to other enquiries as required. In addition, information has been available on the Council's website.

- **Most respondents who were in favour of the Fisher's Lane scheme said they walk or cycle more often, but it can be seen that 42% of those who now cycle or walk more often, prefer not to travel using those modes.**

This would seem to underline the need for safe, high quality pedestrian and cycle facilities.

- **Of the four alternatives, respondents were only interested in the option where Fisher's Lane and Turnham Green Terrace were opened up as one-way streets: Fisher's Lane southbound and Turnham Green Terrace northbound.**

Making Fisher's Lane and Turnham Green Terrace one-way in opposite directions is not a practical option, as many vehicles cannot use Fisher's Lane, and the connecting roads south of the railway are not suitable for heavy traffic.

- **Eighty percent of respondents want to see a review of the scheme take place as soon as possible or within the next few weeks.**

The scheme was implemented in late July 2020 and the six months consultation for the ETO expires in January 2021. Interim traffic surveys undertaken in October 2020 showed that cyclist numbers had increased by two to three times pre-pandemic levels., however a reliable before/after comparison may only be possible once road traffic returns to more normal levels.

Further responses to comments received on the scheme, both via the survey and direct

The total number of individual responses to the scheme received either via the Councillor survey or via other means totals 950. The great majority come from the councillors' survey, in which about 500 respondents made one or more comments, for a total of 818 comments. Responses received in other ways included a further 132 comments. The total also included 52 positive responses supporting the scheme (with 49 of these in the Councillor's survey).

The biggest concerns of residents (in terms of the number of responses received) were as follows:

1. Delays to motor traffic, increased congestion and pollution.
2. Anticipated effect on local shops and delivery services.
3. Enforcement (the survey was carried out pre-enforcement)
4. Lack of consultation
5. Impacts on surrounding roads e.g. rat running, reduced safety etc

The text of all comments made in survey responses has been reviewed and combined giving a total of over 40 separate concerns raised by residents. The points are listed in descending order of the total number of people who made them. Comments only made by a single respondent may not be included. Numbers in brackets in the headings below are the number of comments received in the Councillor survey, followed by the number received in other ways¹.

1. Delays to motor traffic, congestion, pollution (207 survey, 37 other)

There can be residual traffic delays for up to a year after changes are introduced while drivers adapt their journeys. The result of this is that initial congestion levels following a change do not give a good indication of the long-term effects, so enough time must be allowed to pass before considering reversal of measures. Experience shows that in most cases traffic levels settle down to a similar level as previously. This is because drivers who find any additional delay too long will seek alternative routes or mode of transport, until the level of delay reduces to a point that those who remain find acceptable.

The evidence gathered so far shows no increased congestion on South Parade and further surveys will be carried out once lockdown is over and traffic returns to near normal levels. There will always be occasional incidents and the roadworks in Acton Lane in October and November 2020 did cause problems, but have now finished.

2. Opposition to scheme, reasons not stated (84, 10)

Both Ealing and Hounslow have policies to promote walking and cycling, and to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. They are also legally required to facilitate movement of traffic, including pedestrian and cycle traffic.

¹ Other ways" includes direct email, emails to COVIDtransport and TrafficNotices in-boxes and paper letters.

3. Effect on small business, especially shops and delivery services (68, 12)

Experience in Waltham Abbey and elsewhere shows that improving pedestrian and cycle access to local high streets produces an overall increase in trade. As far as delivery services are concerned these will simply adapt their journeys to take account of the change at Fisher's Lane. Services are in general provided outside of peak hours and are therefore unlikely to suffer from additional delay.

It is worth noting that there is scope for a high proportion of delivery work to be done by bicycle, e-bike, or freight bike, all of which are allowed through Fisher's Lane. There are already companies in London that offer this service, and their market is expanding fast.

4. Delays to journeys for those who can't walk or cycle for various reasons (54, 7)

We do not seek to prevent necessary car and van travel. Once the changes have settled down, traffic speeds are expected to be similar to before, but at lower volume. Those who need to drive will do so as they do now. Where journeys distances increase, for example to and from the doctor's surgery on Dolman Road, it may be necessary to avoid travelling at peak times or allow extra time for the extra distance.

The change to Fisher's Lane is aimed at reducing the number of people who can't or won't cycle, by improving cycling conditions.

5. Messages of support (49, 3)

3 people emailed to support the scheme unconditionally, and 49 people supported it in responses to the councillors' survey.

6. More enforcement is needed (39, 8)

Immediately after the restriction was imposed on Fisher's Lane in July 2020, the level of motor traffic dropped significantly. In October, when we did some initial traffic counts, it was down by around 80% northbound, and by 90% southbound. However, this reduction (with about 6000 contraventions a week), was not enough for less confident cyclists to feel safe on the road. An enforcement camera was therefore brought into operation on 7 December, producing a further reduction in southbound contraventions to about 800 a week in January. This is being reviewed regularly, and additional enforcement will be done if necessary. Note though, that northbound enforcement is a matter for L.B. Hounslow.

7. Not enough consultation (35, 9)

The opportunity to undertake pre-implementation consultation was limited, due to the requirements of the London Streetspace Programme to implement schemes quickly. Since implementation, there has been continuous consultation, and some changes made, for example additional signs. There will be a full-scale review before the temporary traffic order expires, but this cannot fairly be done until the country comes out of lockdown. In the meantime, all feedback is captured and will be considered in future reviews of the scheme.

8. Status quo ante was fine (35, 1)

Motor traffic levels were very high for such a small road. Most cyclists did not feel safe, suppressing cycling in the area. The motor traffic levels were higher than TfL now permits for signed cycle routes without segregation. Since there is no possible space for cycle segregation on this road, the only options were reduction of motor traffic or diversion of the route via paths on Chiswick

Common to Turnham Green Terrace, which would make the route much longer and less attractive for north-south cyclists.

9. The change has worsened cycling conditions on other nearby roads (29, 0)

This may be true of South Parade in the short term, due to increased congestion there. But the scheme should eventually reduce motor traffic volumes, which will benefit cyclists in the whole area.

10. Make Fisher's Lane one-way instead of closing it both ways (21, 5)

If this were done, cyclists would continue to be allowed through both ways. While the road is wide enough for a motor vehicle and a cyclist to pass in opposite directions, it needs to be done carefully and at low speed. It is possible to instruct bus drivers to do this, but not random drivers who know they will not meet a motor vehicle. Similarly, there is no room to overtake a cyclist safely under the bridge, but some drivers would try. The overall result would be cycling conditions nearly as bad as they were before, and the additional cyclists seen since the closure would stop coming.

Change has increased rat-running and speeding on other nearby roads (20, 3)

This will be kept under review. There was a general increase in speeding during the first lockdown due to reduced traffic levels. We have information on motor traffic speeds and volumes on various roads in the area from before the first lockdown. These roads can be resurveyed, and action taken if traffic speeds and/or volumes have increased significantly. As stated above, overall motor traffic volume is expected to reduce as people adapt to the changes.

11. Unclear signage (22, 1)

The signage is adequate and conforms with regulations. Drivers were initially disobeying the restriction due to lack of enforcement.

No benefit, and/or some dis-benefit for pedestrians (21, 1)

There are no significant dis-benefits to pedestrians. The scheme should improve conditions for pedestrians, by reducing the number of cyclists who only feel safe using the footway to go through Fisher's Lane. If the closure is made permanent, there may be opportunities to make the carriageway a shared space for pedestrians, cyclists and buses, or to widen the footway – though that would be very expensive.

12. No increase in cycling (12, 5)

Our before and after traffic surveys show that in October 2020 the number of cyclists using Fisher's Lane was 2.5 times the number in November 2019, except on one day when it rained all day. This was at a time when there were still 6000 motor vehicles per day driving through illegally. With the further reduction in motor traffic due to enforcement, cycling numbers are expected to rise further.

13. Re-open Turnham Green Terrace to through traffic (14, 1)

Of the two roads, Turnham Green Terrace is the more suited to heavy traffic. It has now been re-opened, and is expected to remain so – although this is a matter for LB Hounslow. Future traffic surveys, once traffic levels are more representative, will allow us to monitor the effect of Fisher's Lane being closed with Turnham Green open.

14. Closure causes delays to buses (13, 2)

We have iBus data for the two routes affected, the 94 and 272, between October 2019 and November 2020 inclusive, and there is no noticeable impacts on bus journey times.

For route 94, journey times were longer in August to November 2020 than April to June, but were still quicker than before the first lockdown. This may be partly due to lower passenger numbers, but the closure has not caused serious delays.

For route 272, which use Fisher's Lane, the pattern is similar, but journey time improvements are slightly better, and most likely to be partly due to the closure to general traffic. The figures might have been better still with fewer motorist contraventions of the closure.

15. Delays to emergency vehicles (6, 3)

At the request of the police, the traffic order and associated signage was amended to allow emergency vehicles to use Fisher's Lane, which gives them a way to avoid any congestion on other roads. This should more than offset any delays from traffic queueing on South Parade and Acton Lane.

16. Unnecessary, or no benefit for cyclists (7, 2)

See answers 8 and 14.

17. General complaints about pavement cycling and scooting (4, 4)

The benefits of cycling to the individual and society are so large that it is counter-productive to do anything to discourage it. But that doesn't give cyclists the right to endanger pedestrians. Priorities are to improve cycling conditions on-carriageway, to educate cyclists on how to ride with traffic and in pedestrian areas, and to dispel the myth that cycling is dangerous.

18. Re-phase traffic signals on the High Road (7, 1)

This may be necessary as a result of changed traffic patterns resulting from the closure. It will be considered if the Fisher's Lane closure is made permanent.

19. Fisher's Lane is flooded, so unusable by cyclists (8, 0)

This has been reported for gully-cleaning. It is not a permanent problem.

20. Buses still going through - means it's still not good for cyclists (5, 2)

There are only 6-8 buses an hour and the effect on cyclists' safety is considered to be very small. The benefit to bus passengers of letting buses use the road is considered to outweigh the minor deterrence of cycling. Bus drivers are professionals who are trained to be aware of the correct behaviour to keep cyclists safe.

21. Allow access for residents, and/or at school run times (5, 2)

Both would completely remove the benefit to cyclists of the closure to general traffic. We particularly want to encourage cycling to/from school along Fisher's Lane, so school run times are the most important times to keep general traffic out.

22. Insufficient justification for the change (5, 2)

See most of the answers above.

23. Criteria for success need to be clearly stated (4, 2)

The main criterion for success is an increase in cycling in the area, in particular along Fisher's Lane, as measured by before and after traffic surveys. This should be accompanied by no increase in cycle casualties (which would mean a reduction in the casualty rate), and (after the initial period) no major increase in motor traffic volume or congestion on nearby roads.

Whilst the criteria listed above are important locally and ultimately quantifiable, there are other broader aims which also have to be taken into account. We know for example that an increase in active travel i.e. walking and cycling is good, both for individual health and the wider environment and these objectives are supported at local and national government level.

24. Any review will be invalid until conditions are more normal (5, 0)

Comparison against pre-pandemic traffic levels is not something that is likely to be achievable for some time and may well be complicated by other confounding factors such as a potential long-term increase in home working and a reluctance to return to public transport.

Environment in Turnham Green Terrace needs to be improved (5, 0)

This is a matter for LB Hounslow. Major changes cannot be made until and unless a scheme is made permanent.

25. Undemocratic (2, 2)

The arrangements for COVID-related schemes required quick implementation, and it was important not to leave Fisher's Lane open after Turnham Green Terrace was closed, to prevent Turnham Green traffic diverting to Fisher's Lane. As promised, there has been a long consultation period since implementation.

26. Buses not a viable alternative for everyone during a pandemic (0, 4)

We accept this. The diversion route for general motor traffic is not too long now that Turnham Green Terrace has reopened, and the changes are expected to discourage unnecessary car journeys, freeing up road space for necessary ones.

27. If Turnham Green Terrace closed, no need / essential to close Fisher's Lane (4, 0)

Two opposing views, both superseded by the reopening of Turnham Green Terrace.

28. Money-making scheme (4, 0)

A light-touch has been used for enforcement, with no penalty charges issued until the scheme had been live for more than 4 months. With stricter enforcement, the council could have been making a lot of money, but has not done this.

29. Consider a wider area (3, 0)

The review will consider the effect of the closure on traffic in the wider area, not just Fisher's Lane itself.

30. Allow taxis and private hire vehicles through Fisher's Lane (3, 0)

While we appreciate the value of taxis and private hire vehicles to those who have no access to a private car, they are very numerous. Allowing them through would remove almost all the benefit for cyclists.

31. Suggestions of alternatives, keeping Fisher's Lane closed (3, 0)

The main one is to keep Turnham Green Terrace open, which has now happened.

32. Should build segregated cycle infrastructure (2, 0)

Closing the road to general motor traffic makes it virtually cycles only. This is a very high level of service for cyclists. A segregated cycle route on Turnham Green Terrace or Acton Lane would be expensive, and offer a worse level of service, due to junctions and frontage activity.

33. Requests for extra zebra crossings on South Parade (2, 0)

Can be considered on their merits, but not in the scope of the present scheme.

34. Review delayed (0, 2)

See answer 26.

35. No benefit for social distancing (1, 1)

This is largely true, but was not an objective of the scheme. Enabling more people to cycle helps reduce the number of people needing to use public transport. Some runners now use the carriageway in Fisher's Lane instead of the footway.

36. Widen Fisher's Lane (1, 0)

This would be prohibitively expensive and take many years to achieve. And it would be even harder to increase the headroom.

37. Add a second footway under the bridge (1, 0)

This would have to be narrow. Better to widen the existing footway, if anything.

38. Lift restriction when there are other problems in the area (1, 0)

This will be considered, as and when necessary, in the same way as bus lanes are sometimes temporarily opened to other traffic.

39. Propose peak time only restrictions (1, 0)

This would reduce the benefit to cyclists without benefiting drivers much. But not totally ruled out.

Colin McKenzie

January 2021