Team London Bridge (TLB) response to the Bermondsey Street Walking and Cycling Scheme, October 2021.

Executive Summary

1. TLB is responding to the experimental traffic order implemented in 2020 to support walking and cycling as a response to the health pandemic, including a traffic filter. Our comments relate specifically to the impact of the scheme in the London Bridge area (the Bermondsey Street junction with Crucifix Lane and St Thomas Street) on behalf of the business community.

Fig 1: Bermondsey Street Walking and Cycling improvement trial

2. Team London Bridge (TLB) has done significant work since 2015 focused on placeshaping, as set out in the London Bridge Plan. Our commitment to making a green and healthy street environment that puts walking and cycling first is central to our vision for the area.

3. To inform our response, we have requested feedback from our business community and done traffic counts, which we have compared with previous counts since the station was completed and St Thomas Street opened to traffic in 2018.

4. TLB supports making the scheme permanent, with amendments as set out below to further improve the junction for walking and cycling. The trial has reduced the number of motor vehicles coming into London Bridge at this junction by 22% and has supported an increase in cycling of 77%.

5. The scheme will be part of an ongoing package of measures to enable London Bridge and Southwark to become carbon neutral by 2030. We are supporting the aims of the trial through our own Bikes for Business project, facilitating business deliveries through e-cargo bikes.

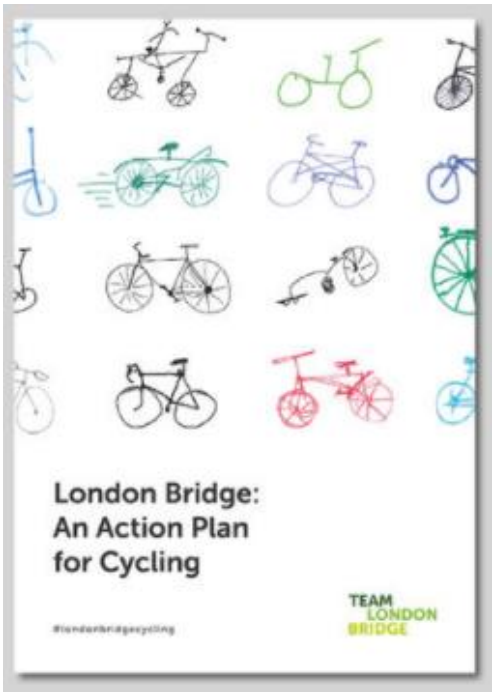
6. Our findings are set out in the report below.

Background and context

7. Team London Bridge (TLB) is a Business Improvement District representing over 300 businesses in the area between Tower Bridge and London Bridge. Our district boundary is on the southern arm of the Bermondsey Street junction with St Thomas Street and Crucifix Lane, so this consultation is directly relevant to our area, although the actual traffic filter sits outside our area. The District includes a network of quiet, historic streets and larger strategic roads. About 50,000 people work in the area pre-pandemic, and it is one of the UK's busiest transport interchanges.

8. The **TLB vision,** strongly mandated by our business community during ballot this year, is *to make London Bridge one of the most sustainable, culturally innovative and compelling places for business and tourism in the world*. To achieve this vision, two of our six commitments with particular relevance to transport:
    - Make London Bridge part of a Carbon Zero Southwark by 2030
    - Make a green and healthy street environment that puts walking and cycling first, providing an exemplar for London

9. During the pandemic, TLB's role in promoting the area has never been more important, particularly to provide reassurance for people to return to work according to guidance, and to support the use of active travel and public transport. Our businesses have expressed need for cycling provision, and in some cases despite an overall reduction of people working in the area there has been an increase in commuting by bike, for example at Guy's Hospital (GSTT).



Cycling Action Plan


Cargo bike convoy

10. TLB plays a proactive role in trying to reduce business related freight through the area, which can conflict with other area placeshaping priorities. This has involved working with some of the largest businesses to consolidate their deliveries. We are working with Impact for Urban Health and area partners along the Low Line to shift business-related trips from motor vehicles to e-cargo bike through the Bikes for Business project. We are a member of the Clean Air Villages consortium (with Southwark Council, led by Cross

River Partnership and funded by Defra) to reduce the impact across London of business freight, such as through river freight.

11. The London Bridge Cycling Strategy, launched in 2019 by Will Norman, London's Walking and Cycling Commissioner, sets out a vision that cycling will play a major part in the ongoing transformation of London Bridge as a globally significant place of modern commerce, enterprise and creativity, and in creating one of the UK's flagship transport hubs. Our strategy has gained added importance in the context of the pandemic, offering a way towards delivering excellent accessibility at low cost and providing added resilience to future economic shocks.

12. The London Bridge Cycling Strategy highlighted the poor cycling networks through the area, and as such improving these are critical for making London Bridge a well-connected and safe area for cycling. Of particular concern has been the junction of St Thomas Street, Bermondsey Street, Crucifix Lane and Snowsfields (hereby called Bermondsey Street junction). The lack of contraflow cycling on all arms has meant that many cyclists use this junction illegally, because of lack of other available or intuitive options.

13. The London Bridge Plan, endorsed by Southwark Council in 2015, sets out how we will *prioritise clean travel, by providing convenient safe and attractive walking and cycle routes*. Since then, we have commissioned or fed into several reports relevant to this scheme to support this:

    - Bermondsey Street point closure study (PJA, 2015)
    - Connectivity Study (Jacobs, 2016) suggesting the use of traffic filters
    - London Bridge Outcome Report (TfL, 2018) suggesting prioritisation for walking and cycling over vehicle flows
    - Bermondsey Street Junction public realm options study (Urban Movement, 2018)
    - Public space on Bermondsey Street (Sustrans, 2018)
    - The Low Line Movement Strategy (Urban Movement, 2021) which identifies this junction as a priority measure.

14. TLB has long advocated for a review of the Bermondsey Street junction and supported the initial aims of the experimental traffic order, in particular to create a contraflow cycle lane as a response to the pandemic and need for access (Fig 1). Other elements of the scheme are to create wider pavement space and install a traffic filter at the junction with Tanner Street. Our response following this trial is set out below.

Traffic monitoring

15. TLB has commissioned traffic counts on this junction in September 2021 to get a better picture of traffic movement from this scheme for this response. This is on top of similar counts produced in 2018 and 2019, before the pandemic. All counts were out of holiday period, and midweek. The data analysed is for Thursdays for consistency.

16. Data in Fig 1 shows:

    - Motor vehicles travelling through the junction has decreased from 6,368 to 4,822 since March 2019 – a reduction of 22%.
    - Cyclists through the junction increased from 1,810 to 3,210, an increase of 77%.
    - The proportion of cycles to total vehicles has increased from 23% in 2019 (and 19% in 2018) to 40% now.

This means that fewer polluting vehicles are now entering the London Bridge area from this junction, which is of benefit to a healthy street environment.

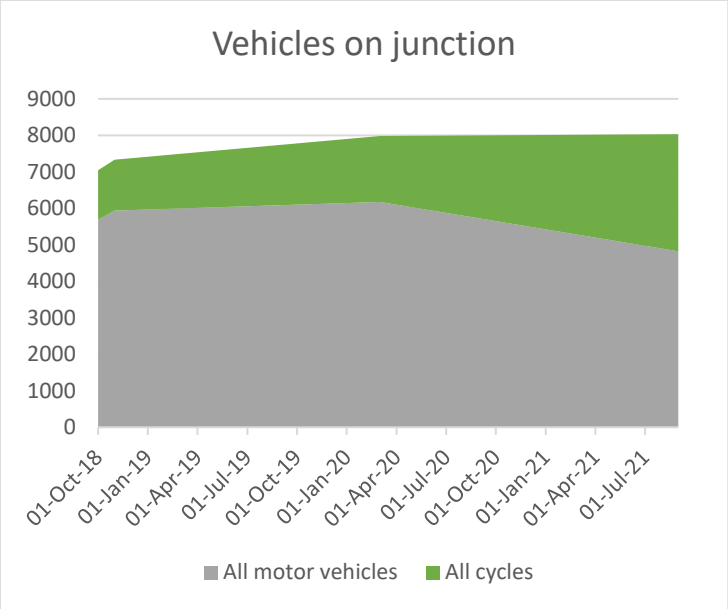


Fig 2: Reduction in motor vehicles compared with the increase in cycles at the junction.

17. 25% of bikes are classified as cargo bikes in this count, a substantial increase. This includes food delivery firms like Uber Eats. This mode accounts for over half the growth in cycling. The highest proportion of these bikes are moving in both directions along Bermondsey Street, at lunch time and the evening.

18. It should be noted that other policies and events have impacted on local traffic, and it can be difficult to isolate the Bermondsey traffic filter from these other impacts. These include the health pandemic, changes to the congestion charge, and other traffic management orders, such as the removal of the ‘access only’ restriction on St Thomas Street.

19. The data in Fig 3 and Fig 4 shows that the direction of travel of motor vehicles through the junction has changed since the previous count.

    - Before the traffic filter more vehicles were arriving at the junction from Bermondsey Street, now there are more vehicles arriving from Crucifix Lane.
    - The number of motor vehicles overall is significantly lower, however there is additional traffic on Druid Street (west) and Crucifix Lane.
    - It is noticeable that significantly less traffic is heading through the tunnel (towards Tooley Street) or along Snowsfields, which is positive for the area.
    - Traffic on St Thomas Street has increased from a low base (from 294 to 494 vehicles). It appears that the removal of the traffic restriction in this road (a separate pandemic related measure by TfL) has encouraged more traffic (thereby increasing traffic between a station and hospital). It is unclear if this is necessary for wider TLRN network resilience, but we hope this restriction can be restored.

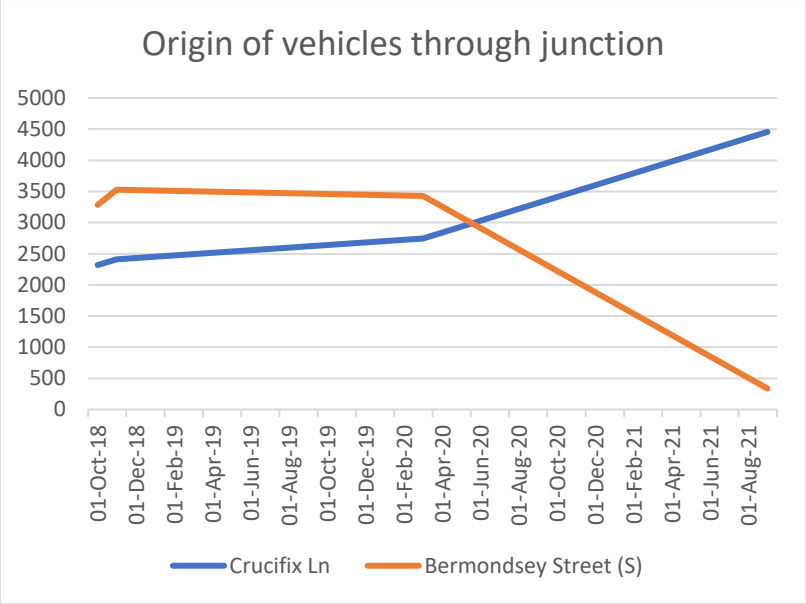


Fig 3: Number of motor vehicles entering the junction

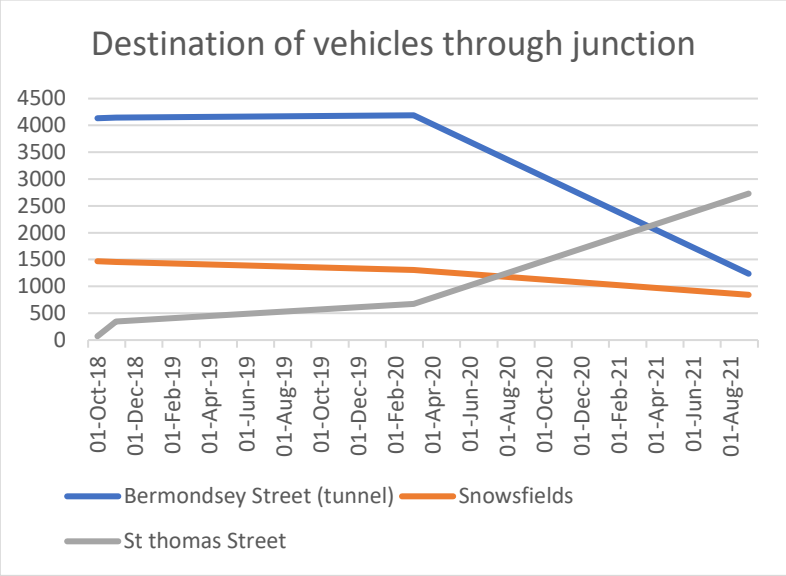


Fig 4: Number of motor vehicles exiting the junction

20. As indicated, cycling has increased overall through the junction. It has also increased on every arm of the junction (Fig 5), whether permitted or not. The main growth has been seen through the Bermondsey Street junction: heading south, where in 2019 there were 200 banned cycle movements, in 2021 there were 699 permitted movements on the contraflow (also Fig 6). This is a very successful aspect of the scheme, and we would like this to be retained in any future scheme. It suggests that contraflows should be extended to all arms, as the contraflow also has a positive impact on both directions of that arm (as cycling has increased significantly heading north also).

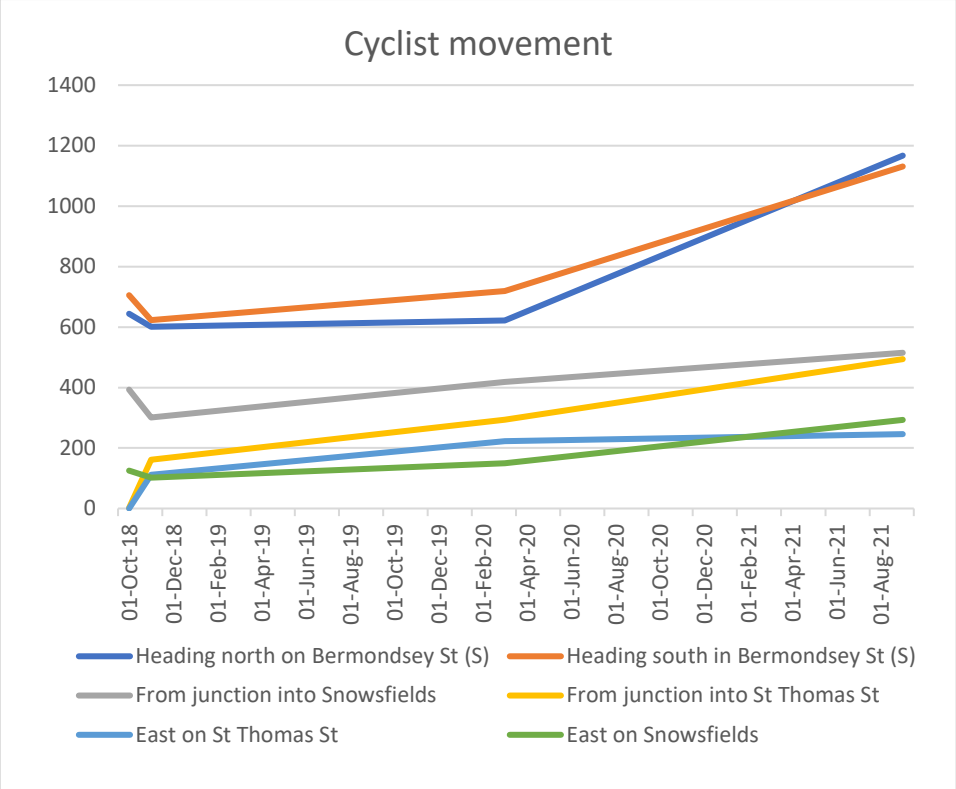


Fig 5: There is clear and increasing demand from cyclists to travel north and south on Bermondsey St. Smaller increased flows can be seen eastbound on Snowsfield and St Thomas St, despite not being facilitated

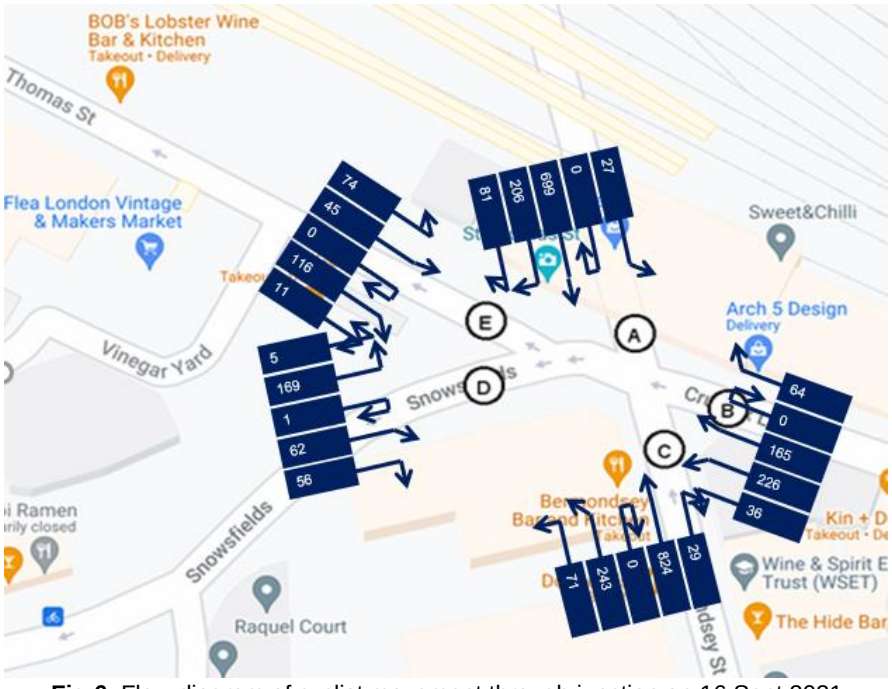


Fig 6: Flow diagram of cyclist movement through junction on 16 Sept 2021

Deliveries

21. TLB has reached out to businesses concerning their deliveries that we expect would respond if there was an issue. We know there were teething problems, but these reduced as wayfinding apps were updated. One small business indicated a concern with couriers. A large construction firm (St Thomas Street building site) and the hospital has

indicated they have not had issues getting vehicles into the area. As indicated by the data (and is visually obvious), there is an increase in the number of cargo bikes.

Amenity

22. There has been some benefit in amenity for staff based in London Bridge. There has been a positive response from businesses about efforts to create space for social distancing where pavements are narrow and for increased seating outside restaurants and cafes. This has helped to keep F&B businesses trading, and also encouraged more people back to the office, and in the area generally. The need for these outdoor spaces will continue well into 2022 as businesses and the visitor economy recover.

Future scheme following the trial

23. TLB commissioned a public realm options study of the Bermondsey Street junction in 2019, making the case to upgrade, it linked to new developments on St Thomas Street (two of those buildings now have planning consent). Three design options were put forward, Fig 7 being perhaps the most ambitious. The following reasons were provided for change:
    - Walking volumes deserves far greater priority
    - Most walking (90%) takes place on a 'red man'
    - Motor traffic flows are comparatively low
    - Peak period cycle flows are comparable to motor traffic flows
    - Banned movements regularly made by cyclists
    - High place function heavily constrained by movement of vehicles
    - Rapidly changing area with likely increase in footfall putting further pressure on the junction
    - The existing layout and method of control (traffic signals) are inefficient
    - Improved cycling provision would reduce efficiency of junction

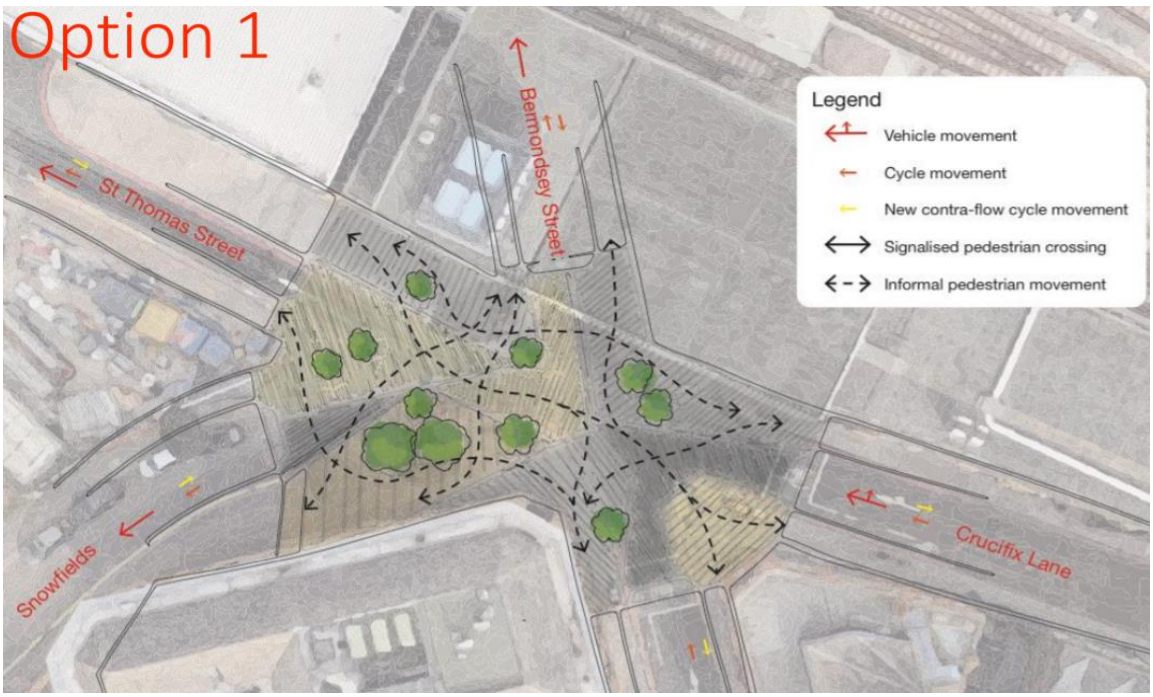


Fig 7: Full shared space with no priority given to vehicles in any direction. Drivers must negotiate various features (street trees etc) intended to create uncertainty and thereby reduce speeds.

24. The concept vision sketched above remains a desirable outcome as part of the St. Thomas Street framework. Indeed, the success of this trial has highlighted the potential to improve the junction for walking and cycling on all arms.

25. Following this trial, we hope that the new scheme will retain the cycling contraflow, as cyclists are now used to this route. Its removal would only lead to increased banned movements. A new scheme should aim to build on the success and implement new contraflow cycling on other arms. It should also give consideration to how walking and cycling modes interact given the increase in cycling.

26. TLB has commissioned new concept drawings of the junction for consideration based on initial conversations with Southwark Council and TfL to achieve some of the benefits of Fig 7, but without the need for high capital investment. Both drawings in Fig 8 and 9 below indicate how removal of signals at this low traffic junction will make it run more efficiently, making it less confusing for pedestrians (that mainly ignore the signals) and for cycling, which remains very restricted. The state of the art green-man authority signals on St Thomas street (which we match funded) mean speeding vehicles through this area are curtailed – what we have called 'London's slowest street'.

Fig 8: Simple junction changes introducing a slight stagger to emphasise priority and improve visibility of cycles travelling along Bermondsey Street. Minimal kerb adjustment / island construction.

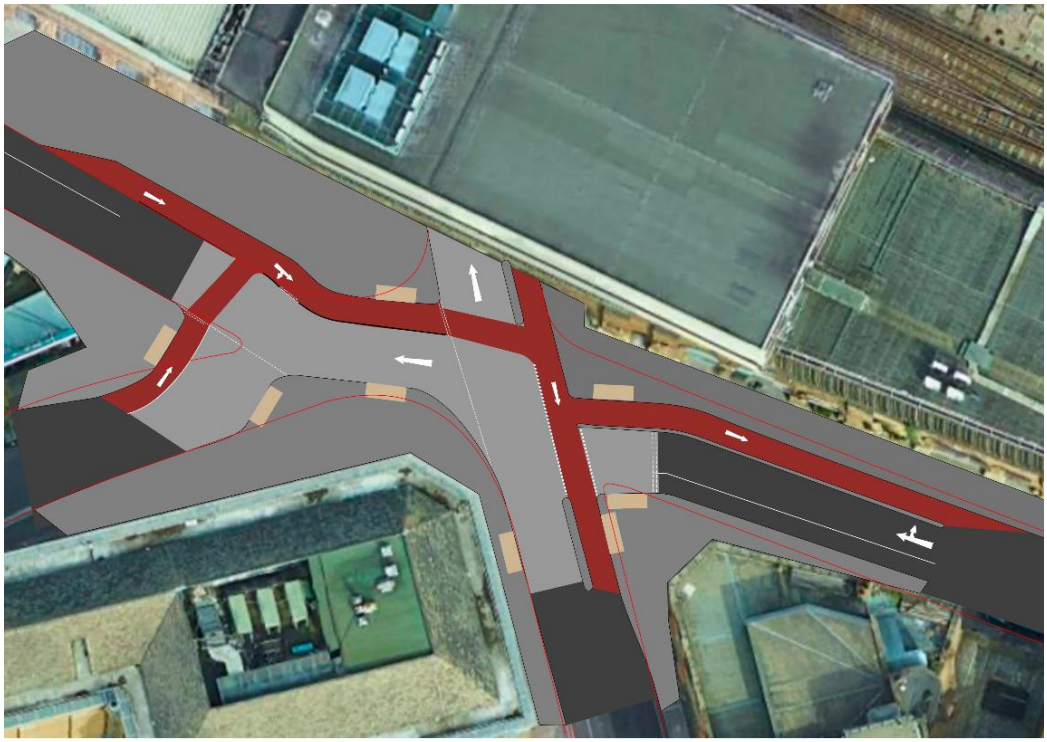


Fig 9: Major junction changes to introduce a priority junction with stagger and stepped contraflow cycle tracks. Incorporates significant kerb realignment and footway construction to shorten pedestrian crossing distances. Possible option to consider a zebra crossing on the St Thomas Street arm (not shown).

Conclusion

27. TLB has been advocating ambitious schemes to reduce motor vehicle traffic in London Bridge since 2015. The Bermondsey Street filter has achieved a significant step in modal shift away from motor vehicles, progressing our objectives of healthy streets. It is also an example of the progress required to meet carbon neutral objectives by 2030.

28. This response does not focus on the location of the point closure as this falls outside the TLB area. In addition, we would welcome more data linked to potential externalities of the scheme in Tower Bridge Road, Druid Street and Barnham Street.

29. TLB supports making the street closure permanent as reducing motor traffic has a significant beneficial impact on improving the experience of the public realm, and has supported the growth in cycling. There have been some business voices suggesting some negative impact on deliveries, but mainly this seems to have been overcome and the area is functioning well for business, particularly with the growth of zero emission cargo bikes that we continue to support.

30. This scheme should be amended to go further. The results from this trial should pave the way for an improved design of the junction as a whole, as an important element of the ongoing transformation underway in this area.

31. Community cohesion with neighbouring residents and businesses is very important for TLB. We are supportive that Southwark is doing wider consultation to draw on views that may not be raised through our own members.