

Team London Bridge response to the London Bridge and Borough High Street walking and cycling changes, January 2023.

Background

Team London Bridge is a business improvement district with almost 400 member businesses. We cover an area between London Bridge and Tower Bridge, including More London, The Shard, London Bridge Station and Guy's hospital. Borough High Street is just outside our boundary, but St Thomas Street is inside our boundary, and the scheme under consultation is directly relevant to our members.

As part of the vision set out in our 2021 ballot and supported by 97% of our members, our ambition is to be a London exemplar for walking and cycling. Towards this goal, we have worked closely with TfL, Southwark Council and partners for many years, including supporting the Streetspace response through Covid 19 lockdowns.

Our [Cycling Action Plan](#) was launched by TfL Cycling and Walking Commissioner, Dr Will Norman in 2018 and 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". One of the key actions is to make sure the local network is better connected and legible, as currently there are many one-way streets, unauthorised turns, busy junctions and lack of dedicated cycle infrastructure.

Response

The response below sets out how the temporary scheme has impacted on the area in terms of cycling, walking and general traffic. Most of the response relates to feeding back on this temporary layout (which is currently being made semi-permanent). We also set out some long term objectives.

It should be stated that the scheme no longer needs to deliver social distancing – one of its' original main objectives. However, other scheme objectives remain relevant, such as improving improve walking, cycling, public transport and air quality.

We would like greater clarity over whether this is a consultation towards a permanent scheme, or just comments on the success of the experimental measures. Consultation on a permanent scheme should give more information on traffic movements, the specifics of the scheme, and look at linkage between this scheme and other schemes on Tooley Street and the junction of Borough High Street / King William Street and Duke Street Hill.

Cycling in London Bridge

i. London Bridge

The cycling experience on London Bridge is much improved with dedicated lanes and reduced traffic. Wands work well because their spacing enables faster cyclists to overtake outside the dedicated cycle lane – particularly important given the slopes here. There is some merging with buses at either end of the bridge, but given there is very little traffic during the day, there does not appear to be much of a problem of conflicting movements between buses and cycles.

This route connects London Bridge and the City of London, providing a new, quieter connection to the new C4 route. The main barrier is the junction of Duke Street Hill / Borough High Street / King William Street, and improvements here that give additional protection for cyclists making right turn manoeuvres will support a more seamless, safe cycling experience.

ii. St Thomas Street (west)

The existing temporary scheme has removed eastbound cycling on St Thomas Street, despite this being an important cycling destination, for example, the Shard and News UK secure cycle parking, and the spaces outside the station, hospital and university. Cyclists continue to use this unauthorised route, indeed many simply cycle on the pedestrian side of the barriers.

We commissioned traffic counts on St Thomas Street by the Old Operating Theatre in September 2022 over two 24hr periods (Tues 27th and Thurs 29th). Both days were very similar, with a slight increase on the Thursday across all modes. Results for Thursday 29th Sept show:

	Cycles	Cargo bikes	All other vehicles
Eastbound (not permitted)	438	4	1
Westbound (permitted)	918	31	3476

This means that 442 of the movements (eastbound) which were previously permitted are now not permitted, and are less safe due to lack of provision on the carriageway. There are still almost half as many movements in this direction – largely because there is no practical alternative. This scheme therefore definitely reduces cycle network connectivity. There is no legible access to these destinations on bicycle, unless arriving from south east London. We heard from one worker that they now cycle along the pedestrian space through the hospital now, Great Maze Pond.

Also, for (permitted) westbound cycling movements, there is no right turn on to Borough High Street. To cycle from The Shard to the City of London requires a U-turn or dismount. More likely, cyclists are choosing to turn right, through the pedestrian crossing. In both above-mentioned cases, the scheme leads cyclists to make unauthorised turns.

iii. Borough High Street

One lane has been removed and given over to pedestrian space outside the post office (possible by removing the left turn into St Thomas Street). Cyclists are now forced to merge with buses for a short stretch on what is a fast downhill section of road. This creates conflict at speed, and this needs to be audited in terms of safety. On the positive side, there is less general traffic through this junction at peak times, creating an improved overall street environment.

Walking in London Bridge

In general, the temporary schemes have improved walking in the area by providing additional space, particularly at the junction of St Thomas Street with Borough High Street, which could get very congested. This will be further improved with temporary pavements creating a flush surface. The barriers have been an obstacle to informal crossing on the street – and perhaps a reason why barriers are often moved as people create gaps to pass through. The barriers have reduced or removed carriageway space for cyclists, and there is a noticeable increase in conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists behind these barriers.

General traffic

i. St Thomas Street

As part of the TLRN temporary scheme in 2020, TfL removed the Access Only sign on the eastern entrance to St Thomas Street (from Bermondsey Street) – a traffic reduction measure that had been delivered carefully in 2018 through consultation with local stakeholders to improve St Thomas Street in the long term. This has not been mentioned as

one of the elements of this scheme. Traffic counts at that junction show the following significant impact before and after the temporary scheme:

	Thurs 28 March 2019	Thurs 29 Sept 2022
Motor vehicles	676	2,719
Bicycles and cargo bikes	254	557
Total	930	3,276

The removal of the Access Only measure has led to a fourfold increase (over 400%) in motorised vehicles along St Thomas Street (moving west). This is significant, particularly in an area where we are working hard to reduce traffic volumes and improve air quality by a major hospital (a hospital which has reduced its own logistics significantly during this period through a consolidation centre) and development site.

The positive news here is that cycling has more than doubled, although the significant illegal cycle contraflow movement indicates a clear desire line demand and a lack of suitable alternative routes.

Business has fed back that the taxi stand is currently working acceptably.

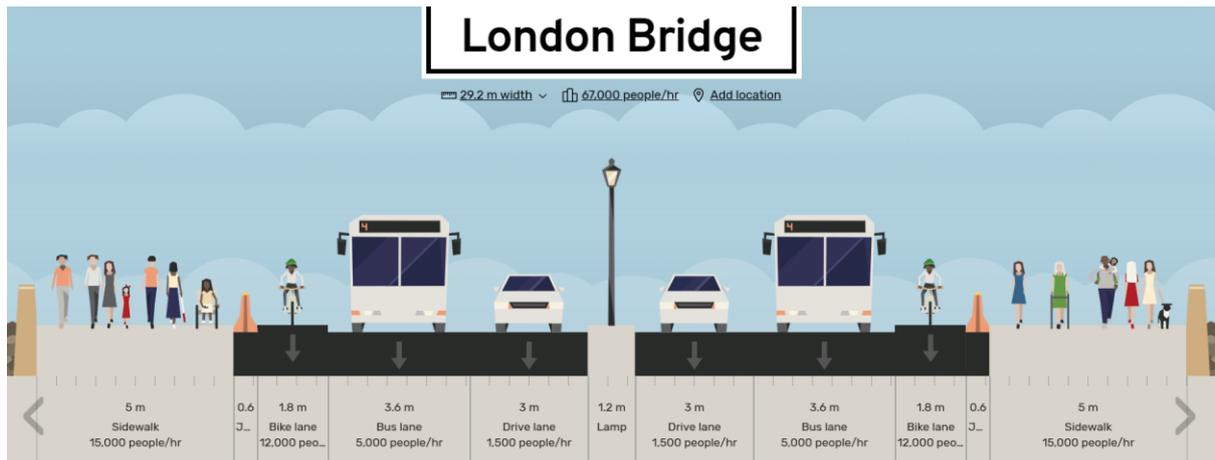
ii. Borough High Street and London Bridge (King William Street)

The removal of general traffic across King William Street (London Bridge) has been beneficial for the area in terms of buses flowing without congestion. Businesses have indicated that there have been some delays for deliveries, but this is perhaps more linked to restrictions on Tooley Street and increased congestion on Tower Bridge Road (possibly a result of restrictions on London Bridge). However, deliveries are still occurring and there is a significant increase in take-up of options by cargo bike – promoted through our Bikes for Business project. For example, all Amazon packages in the area are now delivered by cargo bike.

We have seen some additional large vehicles using Montague Close and exiting on to Tooley Street / Duke Street Hill. This has damaged the underside of London Bridge, and conflicts with a busy pedestrian stretch of Thames Path lacking in pavements and where people often walk in the carriageway. This should be looked at: why is it occurring, is it related to this scheme, and what can be done to mitigate it.

Long term London Bridge ambition

There is a dramatic change in traffic movement on London Bridge, which if maintained, presents enormous placeshaping opportunities on one of London's most iconic locations. The designs below show the existing traffic arrangement. With so little traffic, which could fit in one combined lane, there is space for additional public space, which could be used for seating, with greenery, creating a form of garden bridge. This could be a huge driver of visitors from around the world. We welcome a discussion on how such a scheme could initially be trialled before embarking on any final scheme.



Existing street arrangement (using Streetmix)



Potential pedestrian and public space

Suggestions to TfL

1. Widen the carriageway or provide dedicated space on the footway on the one-way section of St Thomas Street to enable contraflow cycling. While some of the contraflow will be alongside parked vehicles facing the other direction, the low traffic levels reduce risks from any conflict.

The City of London has introduced many exemptions for cyclists from one-way streets, allowing contraflow cycling, without any significant issues. Indeed, any risk is mitigated by drivers' and cyclists' improved intervisibility as they face each other. International experience confirms this view and we see no reason why contraflow cycling cannot be introduced here.

2. Create a right turn for cyclists from St Thomas Street on to Borough High Street (and a left turn from Borough High Street into St Thomas Street).
3. Re-insert the Access Only sign at the eastern junction of St Thomas Street.
4. Reduce the expanded pedestrian space on Borough High Street so that cyclists and buses either share 5m carriageway width, or create a cycle lane using some segregation.
5. Monitor any impact from these measures on additional motor traffic at Montague Close and Tower Bridge Road, and if there are mitigations that can be put in place.