CAMPAIGN

The new battle for Cable Street

As more London councils look to embrace the *Go Dutch* ethos, LCC suggests changes for a problematic location. Mike Cavenett reports

Look at our map (right) and you'll see an area of residential streets that we'd like to make safe and inviting for walking and cycling. The area includes an established cycling commuter route along Cycle Superhighway 3, the section on Cable Street, and our plan would expand the capacity of this cycling route in both directions and make all the surrounding streets safer for visitors and residents.

Our design, put together with expert help from our local group campaigners, involves reducing the speed limit to 20mph throughout, and preventing motor traffic racing through Cable Street and its surrounding streets. Motor vehicles would still be able toaccess every property, but no longer use the area as a rat-run. The existing narrow two-way segregated cycle track along Cable Street would be removed. All routes would be fully permeable by bike or on foot.

Removing a cycle track?

So why would we want to remove a cycle track here? Well, the existing segregated track is the wrong solution for such a small, mainly residential street. It's narrow, compromises space for pedestrians, and has conflict points at side streets, which create considerable hazards for pedestrians and cyclists, reducing potential cyclist flow. At the same time, this area is full of rat-running motor traffic cutting between the major arterial routes.

Cable Street has two major arterial roads running parallel to it: the Highway and Commercial Road. It makes sense to limit through motor traffic to those routes, and selected north-south roads. This will help calm Cable Street itself and its surrounding neighbourhood to local motor journeys.

Yes, our *Love London, Go Dutch* campaign advocates cycle tracks on major roads, but in the Netherlands urban planners use a range of street designs to make cycling safe and inviting for people of all abilities. When speeds and volumes of motor traffic are high then high-quality segregated cycle tracks are the favoured solution. However, if motor traffic is light and/or cycling volumes are high, particularly in residential or shopping streets, the Dutch are comfortable mixing bicycles and motor vehicles, as our design shows.

A typical Dutch solution

The Dutch are very good at removing rat-runs, which means discouraging or preventing motorists taking short-cuts through residential or shopping streets. Their principle is that where pedestrian footfall is high, such as outside shops and in areas where people live, then cars should drive slowly. Motorists are adept at finding routes through residential streets to shorten routes, avoid congestion and avoid waiting at traffic signals.

Rat-running results in motorists who are in a hurry driving fast through residential areas, something the Dutch see as fundamentally wrong. By removing rat-runs we can decrease the risk of serious injury or death from collisions with motor traffic. This helps residents regain ownership of where they live: for example, parents allowing their children to play in the street, and reduced noise and air pollution.

Research has also shown that people who live in heavily-trafficked streets are likely to know fewer

ALL MAPPED OUT: how the area around Cable Street could be transformed using Dutch-style design

neighbours. Removing rat-runs can also encourage more residents to leave their own cars at home, and walk or cycle for local journeys.

Many Dutch residential streets are access-only for motor vehicles. The people who live in these streets are comfortable with the fact their car journeys might take a fraction longer because this minor inconvenience is heavily outweighed by the advantage that they live in a safer and quieter neighbourhood.

Follow Hackney's example

Here in the UK, the good news is that some authorities already see removing rat-runs as good practice. And 20mph speed limits, proven to reduce casualties to all road users by around 40%, are also gaining in popularity. Reducing speed is a key component towards creating family-friendly neighbourhoods.

The London Borough of Hackney is one council that's had great success installing what engineers call 'modal filters' – ie, they allow some modes of transport (walking and cycling) but not others (cars or motorbikes) – to make its streets safer, and to encourage walking and cycling.

One pleasing thing to note is that

removing rat-runs costs relatively little. While in some quarters building high-quality segregated cycle tracks is considered expensive (even though in reality investment in cycling provision actually has a very high return), preventing through motor traffic is possible with bollards that cost very little in road-building terms.

Of course, mixing motor vehicles, bicycles and/or pedestrians only works if speeds and volumes of motor traffic are low. If not, then walkers and cyclists are likely to be pushed aside by the cars because flimsy flesh and bone will always lose out to heavy metal if there's a collision.

The Exhibition Road redevelopment in Kensington that opened in 2011 has been criticised for precisely this reason: large volumes of motor traffic (particularly black taxis) still use Exhibition Road as a through-route, even though cosmetically it's been redesigned as a 'shared space'.

Sadly, the high volumes of motor vehicles on some sections here frequently make sharing this space impossible, and walkers and cyclists must cower at the fringes – not what was intended. A solution would be simple: making the route access-only for motor cars, diverting through journeys to suitable parallel roads such as Queens Gate.

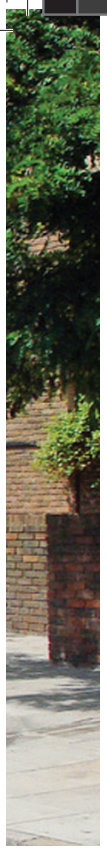
PERMEABILITY IN ACTION: a good example in Hackney

Ways to remove rat-runs

Schemes for removing rat-runs from residential streets work best when they calm a wide area, otherwise there's a danger car journeys are displaced to adjacent quiet streets, rather than to main roads. And that's what we've tried to do in the area around Cable Street. The process involves dividing up the area into cells, which are bounded by arterial routes that carry through motor traffic. No through traffic can pass through the middle of a cell, only from within the cell to one or more of the bounding arterial roads. The map shows where we propose blocking through traffic to create three cells. All the non-arterial streets have 20mph speed limits.

Designing streets is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution: it's important to take account of the composition and size of the area to be treated, the amount of traffic of all types, whether there are bus routes and, crucially, which streets should be used as arterial routes and which should be calmed.

It's also important these types of scheme aren't introduced in an autocratic way. They work only when there's support from local residents



RETRACTABLE BUS-GATE: one aid to greater permeability around Cable Street

PHOTO: DiamondGeezer/flickr

and, in particular, parents and schools. Residents need to understand the basics, such as the fact that every property is still easily accessible by car, as well as the subtleties such as the potential for wider pavements and reduced air pollution. Rolling out a scheme in stages is one strategy for minimising confusion about new road layouts and gaining resident buy-in.

Introducing bus lane technology

Today's technology allows the existing bus route on Cable Street to stay in place through use of a bus gate. This is a set of bollards that automatically lowers when a bus approaches, also giving access to emergency services if needed. Woe betide any driver that tries to nip through afterwards, though, as bus gates are liable to rise promptly if you're not carrying the required radio transponder.

To summarise, our design for Cable Street and its environs involves the simple application of tried-and-tested traffic management to a modestly-sized residential area. It's perhaps not the first solution one might think of because there's already a segregated cycle track there. But it's the solution that offers the greatest benefit to the entire neighbourhood, at little cost, yet still provides substantial potential for growth of Cycle Superhighway 3, which at present is limited by the narrow cycle tracks.