Note of the fifth Old Kent Road Community Forum meeting

Tuesday 27th July 2015,
At Christchurch, next to Treasure House and the Ledbury Estate

Presentations

Clare Woodcock, Continuous Growth Area Planning Officer, Transport for London. Clare talked about the challenges of transport along the Old Kent Road, namely high volumes of traffic in the rush hours, the resulting congestion, and inconsistent road widths, which mean vehicles speed up then slow down then speed up. The good news was about the creation of a "quiet" route for cyclists parallel to the south of the road; and so away from heavy traffic, and investigations of future opportunities to build segregated cycle lanes, plus significant improvements to pedestrian crossings.

Bruce Lynn of Southwark Cyclists. Bruce gave the meeting an impassioned plea for making cycling easier, safer and much more accessible for all. Bruce talked about how cycling makes you live longer, except that road pollution does the exact opposite. People do not cycle because often it is not safe, routes can be unattractive, and storing bikes is often a problem. These problems apply to the Old Kent Road area as much as anywhere else, plus in addition the Old Kent Road area lacks continuous routes for both cyclists and pedestrians, except along the road itself and the quiet way to the south.

Val Shawcross, London Assembly member for Lambeth and Southwark. Val presented how changes have been made to road safety and the environment of Streatham High Street, a very similar major road into and out of London. These improvements include improved pedestrians crossings by removing guardrails, widening the area for pedestrians to use, and high tactile paving for those with impaired vision. Accepting that people do cross away from formal crossings, and therefore making it safer by removing centre guardrails. And tree planting, cycle locking stands, seating, improved street lighting, and recycling facilities on the street. Val talked about work still to be done, including slowing down traffic speeds, less noise, and more facilities for cyclists.

Small group discussions

Jeanette, Margot and colleague at the workshops

There were four groups who each looked at the same questions about cycling, walking and safety. Each group had exactly the same concerns, and even more interestingly, the same solutions. Four different groups of confident and articulate people independently thinking the same things suggests these ideas have considerable validity, even more so when we remember that each group had the benefit of the information and data and facts given to them by the speakers.

Few people travelled around by car, most walked or took buses, and a number also cycled.

Cycling problems; the Old Kent Road is considered "too dangerous even for an experienced cyclist" by many, because of the speed and volume of the traffic. Right turns are a particular problem, as a cyclist would need to cut across fast moving traffic to succeed. It is a "scary, hostile environment" for cyclists. The parallel route (along Willow Walk, Oxley Close and Abercorn Way) is more popular, if less direct. However, the convenience of using the Old Kent Road to go all the way into and out of central London will mean that some cyclists will always make up a significant section of the Old Kent Road traffic. Lack of space to store bikes was also seen my many as the reason why they did not cycle.

Cycling solutions are continuous and safe cycle lanes separate from the traffic, so this would mean another parallel route to the north of the Old Kent Road (medium to longer term). Moreover changing junctions is necessary, so that cyclists crossing across the Old Kent Road are given the time and space to do that safely. Removing railings on the side of roads would help too, as these are death traps if a cyclist is caught between a vehicle and a railing. Fewer lorries and HGVs would also help. And lock up stores, huts or hangers for bikes near to home would also help, especially as many people live in flats.

Walking is equally difficult, due to "dangerous crossings", "speeding traffic", and air pollution which makes the main road very unpleasant and unhealthy as a walking route. Furthermore, some people think that the less then perfect appearance of many Old Kent Road buildings

creates an unwelcoming feel for pedestrians. An "unpleasant environment" which is "smelly, noisy, and there's nothing visually appealing about the Old Kent Road".

Walking solutions are about making the environment more attractive – "more trees and planting", "perhaps a continuous trip of greenery running down the centre of the road", "more signage that recognises pedestrian priority", "smarten it up, better quality shops", and once again fewer lorries and HGVs. Also make crossing the road easier by getting rid of clutter, as has happened at the Bricklayers Arms roundabout. The crossing point near East Street library is very difficult. In the future all development to incorporate significant improvements to walking, and moreover the preservation of historic places of interest, and an explanation of these, will mean more interesting destinations that will encourage more walking.

Getting around on buses, especially travelling along the Old Kent Road is very good and popular, and affordable. Waiting times are much better then in the recent past, "better then Walworth Road; more buses moving more quickly". Carrying shopping for older people can however be tricky and difficult.

Bus improvements; a continuous bus lane all the way down the Old Kent Road is needed, and the possibility of "busways" as at North Greenwich and Cambridge should be explored..

Cars. Some people with children to transport around say that they are more likely to drive, although most people thought that the vast majority of vehicle movements in the area are the result of people driving through rather then local journeys.

Road widening was considered good and bad; good because because it helped reduce congestion, bad because it helped vehicles speed up.