

Common cycling myths busted:

- * cycle routes cause congestion
 - * cycle routes cause pollution
 - * cycle routes reduce shop trade
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Cycle routes cause congestion.

Of course all traffic, if there is too much of it, causes congestion. Since motor vehicles are most of traffic, they are by far the biggest contributor. Too much means too much for the available road capacity. So the question becomes – do cycle routes reduce road capacity for motor vehicles? Well it's obvious -- less road for motors, more congestion innit?

The true answer depends on the scheme. If motor traffic lanes are reduced in number or if signals at junctions give less time to motor traffic, then capacity will be reduced at that point. However, this will not necessarily cause congestion if that part of the route is not limiting for the route as a whole. For example, if a cycle crossing is given increased time at the expense of other traffic, this reduces capacity. But if the congestion is actually caused by the low capacity of the next or next-but-one junction then giving cyclists more time on a segment that is not limiting will not increase congestion.

Often safe cycle routes can be created without impacting on motor traffic capacity. A good example is Jamaica Rd in the CS4 scheme. Jamaica Road capacity is limited by the Rotherhithe Tunnel roundabout. So you could do a lot at junctions east and west of this without affecting peak-time traffic flows on the A200. In fact the CS4 scheme does not change capacity much along Jamaica Rd. There is just one general traffic lane now and this is retained.

Space is created in other ways, for example by taking out much of the central reservation. There are changes to some journey times due to the proposed scheme for CS4 but these are NOT due to the cycle route itself, but to other road changes (side road closures, a bus gate) that are nothing to do with CS4. These other changes may be merited, but are not needed for CS4 and should really have been consulted on separately.

On the CS4 proposals for Jamaica Rd there will be reductions in capacity at some junctions due to signal changes. TfL are proposing to add a cycle phase to the lights at Abbey St. This will reduce capacity for general traffic at the Abbey St/Jamaica Rd junction. However it will not cause congestion. This is because the limiting junctions are at the Rotherhithe Tunnel and at Tower Bridge Rd. The Abbey St junction has capacity to spare.

Oh dear this is complicated isn't it? Do you mean to tell me that pulling down Bermondsey and making Jamaica Road 10 lanes wide wouldn't necessarily reduce congestion? Well I'm afraid I do. Bits of the Old Kent Road are (believe it or not) seven lanes wide and it jams up even so.

Cycle routes cause pollution

This seems like a nonsense – cycles do not have internal combustion engines pumping out fumes. What some people think is that because cycle routes cause congestion, the motor vehicles stuck in traffic will

cause more pollution. So basically this comes down to the same issues as the previous section. Do cycle routes cause congestion? And as explained above, they do not. If cycle routes encourage more cycling and less use of motor transport, then they will contribute to reducing pollution.

Cycle routes reduce shop trade

In general, cyclists and pedestrians are good for shops on their routes. Few motorists stop at local shops, few people get off a bus mid-route to do shopping. But pedestrians and cyclists often stop en route to shop (or in my case at times past to get their hair cut). What often seems to concern shop keepers is loss of parking close to their businesses. There will certainly be instances where removal of parking can impact on trade. Here the question is, do cycle routes lead to loss of parking close to retail premises? Our experience in Southwark is that schemes for new cycle routes seldom involve a significant reduction in parking.

There is interesting data from New York where a lot of cycle routes were installed in Manhattan between 2007 and 2013 when Michael Bloomberg was Mayor. The plans were condemned in advance by many shopkeepers. But the reality was very different. In areas with cycle tracks, and other improvements, retail trade increased more than in routes without these improvements. The evidence is quite different to the myth, cycle routes do not reduce shop trade – they will often increase it.