

THE ROYAL PARKS BOARD

Date of meeting: 23 July 2020

Subject: Movement Strategy: Richmond Park Trial

Prepared by: [REDACTED], Richmond Park Manager
[REDACTED], Head of Transport & Access

Presented by: [REDACTED]

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to propose an amendment to the Richmond Park movement trial project.

Recommendation:

1. Do not proceed with a trial to restrict commuter through traffic on weekdays before 09:00am, but instead implement a 6-month trial of the proposed all day cut through traffic restrictions on weekends only;
2. Implement a 6-month trial of:
 - a. A restriction of all cut through traffic on the link between Sheen Gate and Sheen Cross;
 - b. A restriction of all cut through traffic on the link between Broomfield Hill carpark and Robin Hood Gate.

Background:

The Board previously agreed to the implementation of the Movement Strategy by way of a series of 6-month trial projects across many of our parks.

Richmond Park

Specifically, the Board agreed:

Richmond Park – Move full road opening time to 9am on weekdays to discourage commuter traffic. Pre-Covid restrictions the park roads were open from 7am. Our studies show that over 90% of all motor traffic in Richmond Park is through traffic. The later opening would have limited impact on early morning users of the park as most car parks would remain open as normal at 7am.

During the discussion, the Board acknowledged that the Richmond Park trial was the most complex proposal, due to the size of the road network, with the potential for significant local challenge. In agreeing to the proposal, the Board asked us to consider the operational needs of park management, internal park stakeholders and the external implications on the outside roads that the proposed trial could create. As with

all of the proposals, they specifically asked that we discussed the proposals with the Local Authority.

We have used this analysis to determine if there are any amendments that should be considered prior to a final decision on the trial. Crucially, noting any trial will have implications on the wider road network and is likely to face some local opposition, we have also focused our planning on where we can make a difference to the greatest number of park visitors.

Key data

- Weekday AM peak hour (8am-9am) the park roads carries 2700 vehicles of which approx. only 300 are park visitors
- Saturday peak hour (1pm-2pm) the park roads carries approx. 1750 vehicles of which only 550 are park visitors
- Sunday peak hour (1pm-2pm) the park roads carries approx. 1850 vehicles of which only 750 are park visitors
- The western link road (Between Kingston and Richmond gates) carries approximately 30% of all traffic within Richmond Park
- Ipsos Mori data previously collected demonstrates that Richmond Park has approximately 17x the volume of park visitors on a typical Sunday than a typical weekday prior to 9am (30515 v 1763)

Historic comment:

The Jenkins Review of the Royal Parks in the 1990s acknowledged the detrimental pressure that cars were having on Richmond Park and recommended that TRP put forward options for restrictions at that time. This provoked a huge backlash from the surrounding communities, co-ordinated by local Councillors of all parties opposed to any change. After several huge public meetings we eventually introduced the 20mph speed limit, reduced the size of Pen Ponds car park (which was proposed to be closed completely) and shut Robin Hood Gate to incoming traffic which conducted long distance commuting traffic from the A3 to the South Circular at Sheen. These actions have endured and improved the park environment, but it was very clear that the main issue of contention was the Kingston to Richmond link. At the time there was no strong constituency of users to counter the desires of the motoring public. We also had the attempt to introduce pay and display parking charges repealed by DCMS in 2010 after significant local opposition.

Current situation:

Irrespective of the current crisis afflicting the country, changes in visitor use and in government policy suggests that now is the right time to take further action. It is the case that in the last decade there has been a significant increase in cycling, and this is reflected in a large increase in volumes of commuter cycling using park roads. In itself this has created tensions between cars, cycles and pedestrians that we need to mitigate.

With increasing volumes of visitors, the park is increasingly overwhelmed on busy weekends and Bank Holidays when demand for parking greatly exceeds supply. Pay and Display car parking may well help to control this problem.

In the next few months, all roads surrounding Richmond Park will be subject to 20mph limits. The effect of this means that the route through the park becomes more attractive and drivers using SATNAV are likely to find park through routes being prioritised over the trunk route via the A307. We must not accept a situation where park roads are more convenient to use than the public highway network.

Revised proposal:

Based upon the analysis below it is recommended that based on achieving the best balance of a traffic free park to benefit the most park visitors, the park operational needs, public car park access and the likely concerns of neighbouring residential communities, the first priority should be to restrict weekend through traffic.

Recommendation 1:

Implement the proposed through traffic restrictions on weekends (all day) only

Analysis

1. If we implement our current proposal (midweek 7-9am), the expected traffic reassignment in neighbouring residential areas would be significant with the A307 through Petersham expected to see a 50-60% increase in traffic. The A307 is the main road between Kingston and Richmond bounded by the park on one side and the Thames on the other.
2. The A307 carries all traffic between the Richmond and Kingston centres when the park roads are closed. It is also the only route out of the villages of Ham and Petersham. It is heavily congested at times and particularly if there are ever road works. These communities are from our previous experience, politically well organised and vocal when faced with any perceived threat to their ability to carry on their current transport modes – particularly maintain access to schools and the main Kingston Hospital.
3. Cut through traffic on the weekend is still very high (approx. 70% of vehicles not visiting the park on Saturday). The key issue is there are many additional park visitors at the weekend. Ipsos Mori data previously collected demonstrates that Richmond Park has approximately 17x the volume of park visitors on a typical Sunday than a typical weekday prior to 9am. (30515 v 1763)
4. External precinct wide traffic volumes are lower and more dispersed throughout the weekend, as opposed to the weekday morning when the highest volumes are concentrated during the key commuting time, thus external impacts are spread more widely.

Conclusions

1. Having considered it further, Richmond Park has many more visitors during the weekend than before 9am on weekday, so we considered what could be done at weekends to improve the park experience for as many park visitors as possible. There is also less traffic on surrounding roads so less local impact. We therefore believe the proposal to eliminate much of the cut through traffic on the weekend delivers benefits to the most park visitors, whilst attempting to limit the additional pressure on the roads external to the park. We would enable access to all the car parks.
2. We recommend continuing to permit through traffic between Kingston Gate, Ham Gate and Richmond Gate, as it will go some way towards limiting the traffic reassignment expected from Queens Road onto the public road network. Additionally, it enables disabled parking access to the Isabella Plantation, and serves to protect our commercial operations at Pembroke Lodge, enabling access to the car park from the south as well as the north. If necessary, we will take steps to manage speeds on this route to ensure that it is never the preferential choice to the external network.

Recommendation 2:

Further revise the Richmond Park trial project to include

A. Full time traffic restriction of the link between Sheen Gate and Sheen Cross

Analysis

1. Since the closure of Hammersmith Bridge, the park road between Roehampton Gate to Sheen has become increasingly used for through traffic seeking to avoid the South Circular (A205). From our studies, approximately 900 (AM) and 700 (PM) two-way through-movements which currently travel via Sheen Gate, of these only 10 (AM) and 7 (PM) two-way movements are estimated via Sheen Gate to access the car park. This traffic would be reassigned to the local highway network outside the park, namely the A205, A305, Queen's Road, Priory Lane and Roehampton Lane.

Conclusion

2. To allow access to the Sheen Gate car park only from Sheen Gate. To restrict through access beyond Sheen Gate car park entrance all week, on the rationale that Roehampton Gate to Sheen is one of the biggest through runs within Richmond Park (c 98-9% of traffic) and restricting all motor vehicle traffic beyond the car park has limited effect on park operations. Traffic will be displaced but it should be noted that this road did not used to be busy. This traffic has been forced from the South Circular due to the closure of Hammersmith Bridge.

B. Full time traffic restriction of the link between Broomfield Hill carpark and Robin Hood Gate

Analysis

3. The permanent closure of this link to cars would displace minimal amounts of through traffic onto the west and north links on weekdays (within the Park) and

approximately 350 movements Roehampton Lane/ A3/ A308 during the AM and PM weekday peak periods. It has little operational impact and residents and deliveries largely have no need to use this section of park road.

Recommendation

4. To create a restriction of through traffic between Broomfield Hill car park and Robin Hood Gate 7 days. This intervention would effectively sever all through movements on the eastern side of park whilst still enabling car park access. If access was required from Kingston to Roehampton, this is feasible within the park via Richmond Gate.

Maps summarising the proposals:

Weekday access



Weekend Access:



Financial implications:

There will still be infrastructure costs as per the previous Board paper. These proposals are likely to have less impact on on-going running costs because they remove the need for manpower to re-open road gates from 9am, five days a week.

Staff implications:

There are no additional staffing implications arising from this project and it will be managed by the Head of Transport & Access in conjunction with the park teams, as business as usual.

Risks:

We note a risk that these recommendations which reduce the volume of car traffic could lead to an increase in the speed of cyclists using the parks, with detriment to other park users. It should be noted that these proposals still enable car access to most areas of the park (to access car parks) which has the consequence of moderating cyclist's speeds. Before the trial, we will also consider what infrastructure should be placed on Broomfield Hill (as part of the road closure), which can act to slow cyclists down. As a consideration as part of the trial, we will consider whether there is actually an issue and what more can be done (for example, subject to funding, additional speed humps).

Presentational issues:

As previously agreed with the Board, we will conduct an extensive stakeholder consultation on this trial. This consultation will enable the trustees to make a final decision on the future of the Movement Strategy trials in each of the parks.

There is no doubt that this project will polarise public opinion. We have already received significant feedback regarding the Covid-19 related movement restrictions within the park. With many visitors calling for a permanent closure to cars and many drivers asking for the roads to be reopened. What we are trying to do with this proposal is come up with a balanced approach that limits the impacts on the outer road network but provides the most benefits to park visitors.

We believe undertaking this trial will enable both the park visitors, residents and stakeholders to provide informed feedback to the consultation scheduled for month four of the trial. In revising the recommendations we believe that we have a set of proposals that are most likely to survive the end of consultation review unchanged.

Equality and Diversity implications:

Specifically, this proposal ensures access to the Isabella Plantation disabled parking from both Richmond and Kingston Gates. Under this proposal, all car parks (with disabled parking) will remain open.

It is also recognised that a proportion of users will lose their ability to drive around the park and for some people of limited mobility this may be their only way to benefit from the park. These proposals might limit some of this ability, but reasonable access is retained.

Accessibility is intended to be a key focus of the strategy as highlighted by the draft Movement Principles.

Sustainability implications:

This proposal supports and further endorses TRP's sustainability agenda as it aims to reduce through traffic in the parks, which should improve air quality within the parks (while noting there might be a negative impact outside the parks). Generally fewer cars means less wear and tear on roads and some long term benefits in reduced maintenance costs

Conclusion:

We believe this amendment to the previously agreed trial scheme will provide a better basis for success locally and positively impact an increased number of park visitors.