

THE ROYAL PARKS BOARD

Date of meeting: 22 September 2022

Subject: For decision – Traffic Reduction/Parks Improvement Trials Conclusion

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Issue:

The Movement Strategy traffic reduction/parks improvement trials were introduced in August 2020, following COVID enforced road closures in March 2020, and scheduled to conclude in March 2022. At the March Board meeting, management was asked to supply further information to help inform Trustees' decision making. Specifically, further clarification was sought around how the new car free spaces were being used by visitors, whether any pedestrian safety or access concerns had arisen, particularly for those with mobility issues, and for management to provide initial thoughts for future pedestrian enhancement proposals.

Recommendation:

This paper sets out of response to the Board's requests. It is still recommended that the trials to reduce cut through traffic in each of the parks be made permanent, as set out below and in parallel enhance the released amenity space for the benefit of visitors, including improved interface between pedestrians and cyclists The exception is the decision on the South Carriage Drive intervention in Hyde Park, which it is proposed to be delayed until the issue of the future of the Park Lane cycle lane is resolved.

1. St James's Park and The Green Park

- a. Closing The Mall and Constitution Hill to traffic on Saturdays until dusk (it has long been closed on Sundays). Traffic can still pass through the park via Horseguards Road and Birdcage Walk.

2. Greenwich Park

- a. Permanent closure of The Avenue.

3. Bushy Park

- a. Partial closure of Chestnut Avenue between Teddington and Hampton Court Gates.

4. Richmond Park

- a. Permanent closure of the carriage way between Broomfield Hill Car Park and Robin Hood Car Park;

- b. Permanent closure of the vehicle link between Sheen Gate and Sheen Cross; and
- c. At weekends and public holidays, closure of the carriageway between Roehampton and Richmond Gates.

5. Hyde Park

- a. Permanent closure of North Carriage Drive; and
- b. Maintain current trial and delay decision on closure of South Carriage Drive, from Prince of Wales Gates to Queen Mother Gates on Saturdays (it has long been closed on Sundays) until there is a clear position from TfL and other parties on the future of the Park Lane cycle path.

A summary of the closures set out with maps from each park is at [Appendix 1](#).

Options:

There are a number of options, including extending the trial again, implementing closures in some but not all parks, re-opening the roads, or permanently implementing the closures. It is management's recommendation that with the evidence we have available, we should conclude the trials and permanently implement the measures in each of the affected parks.

Background:

The traffic reduction trials were a series of interventions that followed on from the adoption by the Board of TRP's Movement Strategy, and the realisation of long-term aspirations held within our park management plans. The chronology of this work on movement is set out at [Appendix 2](#). The aim of these trials was to achieve the following strategic outcomes from the movement strategy

- Provide safe and enjoyable walking experiences for park visitors
- Reduce the amount of through traffic within our parks
- Minimise the movement of operational vehicles within the parks

Our thinking was accelerated by COVID. Following COVID enforced operational road closures in March 2020, we implemented a set of agreed formal road closure trials in August 2020. These trials were originally intended to run for 6 months but were extended by one year to March 2022 and again by six months to September 2022.

The initial trials incorporated widespread public consultation which received almost 18,000 responses. We also surveyed people within the parks. While the consultation response results varied across the parks, they indicated majority support and a desire to see a reduction cut through traffic in the parks. See details at [Appendix 2](#). Over the initial and extended trial duration, the closure of park roads to cut through traffic has achieved the aims of the movement strategy and has demonstrated benefits for both the park users and park environment delivering improved access and a more pleasant environment for visitors.

During the trial period we did an in depth analysis of traffic data to assess the consequences of the closures on roads outside the parks. A summary of this analysis is at [Appendix 3](#). This data, relying primarily on TfL cameras and TfL bus journey data but supported by TRP and local authority surveys, indicated at worst a marginal negative impact on traffic flows and volumes on the road network surrounding the parks. The most significant impact was on the outer parks. However, it is unclear to what extent this impact is directly as a result of our trials or other influencing factors such as Low Traffic Neighbourhood initiatives and the closure of Hammersmith Bridge alongside the continued evolution of London's transport system and the changing traffic patterns post COVID.

As requested at the March Board meeting, we have done further research set out below.

Additional Insights for the last Board meeting

To address further questions posed by Trustees, we undertook the following exercises:

- Additional monitoring and observation studies (by [REDACTED]) of key locations across Greenwich, Bushy, St James's and Hyde Parks to clarify how the car free spaces are being used, identifying safety and access concerns and opportunities for improvements to address these. (Richmond Park was excluded as an initial programme of pedestrian safety improvement works has already been identified and is planned for installation in Spring 2023);
- Face-to-face park visitor interviews;
- Visioning exercise to develop initial concept designs for key park locations within the trial spaces to improve pedestrian safety and the experience of park visitors;
- Identifying opportunities to improve access for visitors with restricted mobility in Bushy, Greenwich and Richmond Parks.

Visitor monitoring and safety

Throughout the trials we have continued to record and review how visitors interact with these new park spaces. We have undertaken numerous observations and monitoring studies across all trial sites. A park-by-park summary is provided in the attached [Appendix 4](#). It sets out the issues and the mitigations we suggest putting in place.

Face-to-face Park visitor interviews

Additionally, we facilitated a series of park visitor interviews across the trial sites, with the aim of gaining a further understanding of how visitors used these new spaces and how they would like to see them developed over time, if we continued to restrict the volume of cars on these roads. With over 330 interviews conducted over the five parks the following key themes emerged.

- Substituting the hard road space for a more natural environment including greening the grey, tree planting and soft flexible spaces for activities;
- Additional programming of the spaces for temporary or semi-permanent events and activities including events, market day and play activities;
- Increasing the provision of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure including, new pedestrian crossings, cycle lane demarcation and way finding signage.

Visioning exercises

Working with our transport consultants, [REDACTED], and our inhouse landscape studio, TRP sought to develop a range of initial concept ideas for key park locations within the trial spaces following on from recent monitoring with the clear aims of enhancing pedestrian safety and the experience of all park visitors. If the trials are approved by Trustees, these concept designs would be progressed to final design for approval and implementation in FY 20s23/24 subject to budget approval.

Identify opportunities

Details of the initial concept designs are included in the park-by-park Observations and Mitigation reports and have been summarised in [Appendix 4](#). The opportunities are broadly set out under four headings:

- **Physical / landscape changes**

In addition to the proposals at Richmond for raised tables and crossing points, there are a range of physical interventions applicable for the outer parks including changing the colour of the road surfaces in Bushy Park and the angle of the junction at the top of the Avenue in Greenwich Park. As the road closure proposals for Hyde and St James's Parks are only implemented on Saturday and Sunday, we do not see the possibility of permanent interventions. We would aim to investigate further whether improvements could be made to the Hyde Park corner / South Carriage Drive junction but this is not dependent on the implementation of the movement trials.

In Bushy Park plans to improve access for visitors by surfacing and improving the footpath linking the Diana Car Park to the Woodland Gardens (which has the other main carpark) are being developed and are identified as a key objective in the next financial year.

- **Signage / other interventions**

We can make improvements by covering traffic lights in St James and Green park at the weekends to reduce confusion and ensure the public realise they are not active; add signage to key locations across the parks; and open additional gates at St Mary's Gate Greenwich Park (and possibly Hyde Park corner – see above) to deconflict the movements of pedestrians and cyclists.

- **Access**

Trials of volunteer driven electric buggies are underway in both Bushy and Greenwich Parks and these will continue over coming months.

Within Richmond Park plans to extend the operation of the existing volunteer minibus service are underway with an overall objective to run the service over 7 days of the week and potentially operate outside of the park. The service is currently provided in association with Kingston and Richmond Accessible Transport and the plan is to develop the volunteer rangers scheme to support an extended service in the coming financial year.

- **Other uses of the space**

We could “activate” car free spaces within the parks, as requested by visitors and change the perception of these spaces as “roads”. Potential programme to include small events, food fairs, temporary sports or art installations. We have discussed this with the Serpentine Gallery and could do so with event organisers.

Conclusions:

The trials have now been in place for over two years and The Board is invited to decide on their future. Making the trials permanent gives us an opportunity to improve many of the parks by increasing park amenity space and enhancing the visitor experience. While the trial interventions have restricted cut through motor vehicles in the TRP estate we have and will continue to look at opportunities this presents to improving the experience for pedestrians. The Board has made clear, and it is a position that management agrees with, that the car free spaces are an opportunity for us to rethink and improve the way these spaces work. In particular there has been concern that without mitigations the new spaces could be monopolised by cyclists at the expense of pedestrians. Following these trials there is an opportunity to continue work on visitor movement related projects to support pedestrians, and capital works will be required for the next couple of years.

In addition to the movement strategy trials, we have developed other projects to benefit pedestrians, notably the visitor dispersal strategies in Richmond and Greenwich Parks and our planned improvements in wayfaring, interpretation and signage. We accept there is a lot more to do and this has been confirmed by the we have data recently collected.

Financial implications:

If Trustees agree to implement the proposals, a programme of capital investment will be required in FY 2023/24 & 2024/25 to implement final designs for improved pedestrian safety and visitor experience alongside accessibility improvements for visitors with limited mobility. Early initial estimates indicate a capital budget of £500K over the next two years.

Further investment is required to undertake continued monitoring and data collection across all parks. In particular this will focus on Hyde and St James's Parks

where further data is required to inform further design work for improving pedestrian safety and visitor experience at Hyde Park Corner and on Constitution Hill and in Richmond Park to monitor the pedestrian safety crossings once these are installed. Initial estimates for survey and data collection indicate a budget of £100-200K over two years.

Further investment would be required to “activate” car free spaces within the parks, as requested by visitors and change the perception of these spaces as “roads”. Potential programme to include small events, food fairs, temporary sports or art installations. We would look to engage with existing stakeholders such as The Serpentine Gallery and event organisers.

Presentational issues:

We will develop a communications plan to announce the Board’s decision that reinforces the rationale behind the next steps. This will include briefing sessions with key stakeholders including the local authorities, elected representatives, Friends groups and campaign groups. We will issue tailored press releases to London-wide and local media; post strategic social media posts across our channels; update information on our website and place updated posters in park notice boards.

A detailed Q&A will help the communications team and park teams dealing with queries via press, social media, our movement strategy inbox or park inboxes, to respond consistently as to how and why the decision was made, what it means for the future and how it will work operationally. Responses will be resilient and ultimately be supported by the guiding principles of our charitable objects. Incoming communication will be carefully monitored to determine how the decision has been received by park users.

TRP is likely to receive complaints from those opposed to the trials being made permanent. Current patterns of correspondence indicate these will primarily be focused on Bushy and Richmond Parks. For example, in recent weeks we have received a number of complaints about the closure of Sheen Gate, previously it related to Chestnut Avenue in Bushy Park. Whilst this correspondence reflects the views of a minority of park visitors, the majority of whom remain supportive the communications plan will specifically reference and account for managing these challenges.

Risk and legal issues:

The charity’s objects include the following:

1. to protect, conserve, maintain and care for the Royal Parks, including their natural and designed landscapes and built environment, to a high standard consistent with their historic, horticultural, environmental and architectural importance;
2. to promote the use and enjoyment of the Royal Parks for public recreation, health and well-being including through the provision of sporting and cultural activities and events which effectively advance the Objects;

3. to maintain and develop the biodiversity of the Royal Parks, including the protection of their wildlife and natural environment, together with promoting sustainability in the management and use of the Royal Parks

The proposal to make permanent the measures that are being trialled are consistent with the charity's objects. Support for this comes from the phrases protecting the parks and promote the use and enjoyment for public recreation. There is nothing in the Articles that would support an argument that all roads must be available for cut through traffic.

The Royal Parks and Other Open Spaces Regulations 1997 as amended (the "Regulations") provide that no person using a Park shall...drive or ride a vehicle off a Park road (being one that is open to vehicular traffic). The Secretary of State has power of management of the Royal Parks under the 1851 which have been delegated to the charity and this would include the power to designate whether roads within the Parks should be open to vehicular traffic. As with all such powers, the authority exercising them must act reasonably and in good faith and any decision would be susceptible to judicial review.

In making any decision, Trustees should also bear in mind the provisions of the Companies Act 2006 as amended. Sections 170 *et seq* set out the general duties of company directors including a duty to act in accordance with the company's Articles (section 171) and to act in a way that would be most likely to promote the success of the company and in doing so have regard (*inter alios*) to (c) the need to foster relationships with suppliers, customers and other and (d) the impact of the company's operations on the community and the environment (section 172). These duties are harder to interpret but do require us to take account of the impact on our neighbours including the relevant local councils. These are, of course, general duties and therefore arguably subordinate to a specific legal duty such as to act in accordance with the Articles.

Equality and Diversity implications:

We have updated our Equalities Impact Assessments (EIA) for each trial project. These assessments identify the impact of the trials on protected groups with impaired mobility as minimal. Access to all parks by vehicle remains possible and all car parks remain accessible and open and the existing external road network continues to provide vehicular access to services outside of the park. However, by effectively splitting access to Bushy and Richmond Parks, there is an impact. The journey times for visitors to specific car-parks could be increased.

We are aware of the potential for challenge and will continue to monitor the impacts and will actively engage with stakeholders and groups to address accessibility concerns and seek opportunities to improve access. Monitoring of this impact will form the basis for the ongoing post project review as we seek to mitigate any impact on these visitors.

Sustainability implications:

This proposal supports and further endorses TRP's sustainability agenda and directly reinforces sustainable travel as a focus for all future transport and access, when travelling to and within the parks.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Maps of current trials and recommendations per park

Appendix 2: Chronology of the movement work and consultation results

Appendix 3: Summary of the traffic data on surrounding roads

Appendix 4: The high-level summary of recommendations per park

We have put the Individual Park Observation and Mitigation Reports, produced by [REDACTED], onto the Board portal.