



Highways Committee

27th July 2011

Report from the Head of Transportation

For Action

Wards Affected:
Dollis Hill

Response to a petition against the removal of Traffic Lights on the North Circular Road

1.0 Summary

This report informs members of a petition entitled “North Circular Road – Push Button Signal Removal.” The report outlines officer’s investigations into the matter.

Members will be aware that the responsibility for the North Circular Road (NCR) and for the operation of traffic signals within London lies with Transport for London (TfL) and not the Council.

For historic reasons there is a set of signals on the NCR which facilitates vehicular access into a private road serving an industrial/commercial estate. In February/March 2011 residents and businesses in the vicinity of the estate were consulted by TfL on the possible removal of the traffic signals. TfL subsequently decided to remove the signals.

Following TfL’s decision, the petitioners submitted their report to the Council.

The report describes the dialogue between officers and TfL in which officers have sought to ensure that TfL (i) consider local concerns, (ii) have taken all relevant issues into account and (iii) delay removal until the Committee has considered the petition and this report.

The report recommends that the Committee note the action taken by officers and decide whether or not a different course of action should be pursued.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the contents of the petition and the issues raised.
- 2.2 That the Committee notes the course of action taken by officers in relation to the issue.
- 2.3 That the Committee decide whether, having given consideration to the petition and the action taken by officers, to instruct the Head of Transportation to take a different course of action.

3.0 Petition

- 3.1 The petition received by the Council from residents and businesses of the area around the Fleetway Business Centre requests that the traffic lights (signals) at the access to the business centre are not removed.
- 3.2 The full wording of the petition is;

“Many companies operating between Neasden and Staples Corner Roundabout have containers and long vehicles visiting due to its industrial environment. The traffic lights, allow safe manoeuvring of such vehicles, without posing a risk to traffic and maintaining road safety.

We request that the traffic lights are not disconnected for the benefit of both the public and surrounding businesses.”

- 3.3 The petition includes 50 signatures and was received in June late 2010.

4.0 Detail

- 4.1 The A406 North Circular Road (NCR) is a red route and as such forms part of Transport for London’s Road Network (TLRN). TfL are the Highway Authority for the road and operate all traffic signals across London.

The Council cannot take any direct action in regards to the operation of the road or the operation of the traffic signals, but can raise any concerns with TfL and encourage them to consider those concerns adequately.

- 4.2 In response to the Mayor of London’s Transport Strategy and direction TfL are looking at ways of smoothing traffic flow which will mean less stop-start traffic movement, more predictable journey times and fewer obstacles for pedestrians.
- 4.3 Many factors can affect traffic flow in London including traffic signals. To this end, last year, TfL identified 145 traffic signals across London (24 on the TfL roads and 121 on borough roads) for possible removal on the basis that they may no longer be serving a useful purpose and the network would benefit from their absence or an alternative measure.

4.4 At the end of 2010, TfL began implementation of an initiative focused on signals located on the TLRN. Of the 24 TLRN sites initially identified, this initiative comprised progressing the permanent removal of signals at 5 locations and the removal of signals at 2 sites on a trial basis.

4.5 The signals at Fleetway Business Centre were part of this initiative. These signals are located on the eastbound side of the NCR west of the Staples Corner inter-section. They are located at the junction of a private access road into the estate and the NCR – which is a dual carriageway at this point. The signals have been in place for many years. They are manually controlled “on demand” by use of a push button located at the junction.

The original purpose of the signals appears to be to allow vehicles to exit from the access road by stopping the traffic on the NCR. This would have been particularly useful for larger vehicles that need to cross into the outer lanes of the NCR when turning left.

The signals serve no other purpose than stopping traffic on the main NCR to allow movements from the access road. There are numerous examples of similar junctions along the NCR, including within Brent, which operate in the absence of traffic signals.

The location of the Fleetway Business Centre signals is shown on the drawing at Appendix “A”.

4.6 The signals at Fleetway Business Centre were selected for removal by TfL because TfL identified that demand for the signals was exceptionally low and because the signal arrangement does not conform to current Department for Transport (DfT) regulations.

TfL undertook consultation and engagement on their proposals by delivering letters to residents and businesses within a 400 metre radius of Fleetway Business Centre. This took place between the 11th February 2011 and 15th March 2011.

4.7 The traffic signals were disabled (covered up) two weeks after the end date of the consultation period on 1st April 2011. This was undertaken as a temporary measure to assist in the determination of the impact of their removal whilst TfL (i) undertook further investigations and (ii) gave consideration to feedback received after the consultation end date.

4.8 Following concerns expressed by the community about the removal of the signals, TfL have undertaken mobile CCTV monitoring to analyse how the access operated. This analysis has covered operation during peak hours.

TfL’s view was that, although at times it may take longer to exit from the Business Park without traffic signals, video and eye witness evidence suggested many vehicles, including large HGV’s exited the side road unassisted.

The analysis revealed that many HGV's did not use the push-button operation to stop the A406 traffic. Instead vehicles opted to pull out between flows of traffic with no considerable waiting time entailed and with minimal disruption to the A406.

- 4.9 Following receipt of the petition, officers have observed the operation of the signals at the Fleetway Business Centre access. It was noted that when HGV's exited on to the NCR that they were physically required to use all three lanes.

Although there is very good forward visibility for traffic approaching these slow moving vehicles, and therefore adequate time to slow down, officers are of the view that this manoeuvre is potentially hazardous.

Officers are not aware of any accidents having occurred at the junction since the signals were taken out of operation.

- 4.10 Officers have been in contact with TfL to determine whether safety audits were undertaken on the proposed removal of the traffic lights pre or post suspension of the their operation. They have been asked to share the results of any audits undertaken. The issue of whether or not TfL are proposing any mitigation measures has also been raised.

TfL have been made aware of the petition and have been asked to suspend making a final decision on the removal of the signals until the Committee have had the opportunity to consider the petition and the contents of this report.

- 4.11 A response to officer's representations to TfL was received on the 13th July.

The response is shown at Appendix 2 and outlines TfL's reasons for the removal of the signals.

In essence TfL are of the (implicit) view that the signals are not necessary to ensure the safety of vehicles exiting from the access road.

They are of the view that their monitoring has demonstrated that many vehicles, including HGVs, safely enter and exit from the access road without using the signals and this is evidence that they are not needed.

TfL have also suggested that there is evidence that a number of drivers (of larger vehicles) use the signals to stop the traffic so as to reverse into the access road. They are of the view that this is an abuse of the rationale for the signals, presents a hazard to road users and is an additional reason to support the proposed removal.

TfL have advised that they do not propose to undertake a (stage) road safety audit after removal because, without the signals in place, the junction will operate in the same manner as many other similar junctions along the A406 NCR.

TfL have advised that the most important factor behind their decision was that, although the signals would have conformed with DfT regulations and were legal at the time of installation, they no longer conform with the regulations or current standards. They state that this factor was critical in their decision.

The response confirms that TfL have carefully considered the feedback they received but intend to proceed with the permanent removal of the signals. They have confirmed, however that they will delay the works until after Committee have been able to consider this report.

5.0 Discussion

Officers appreciate the concerns of the petitioners in relation to the removal of the signals. Although TfL advise that the signals are used infrequently, they do provide an additional level of protection to those drivers that use them. It is unfortunate that a number of drivers appear to use the signals in a way that was never intended and put themselves and other road users at risk.

The signals are anomalous in that there are numerous other locations along the NCR (including within Brent) where there are exit/entry points onto the NCR without the benefit of signal controls.

Officers have ensured that TfL have considered the views of the petitioners and officers concerns with regard to road safety when reaching their decision.

In the final reckoning, any decision in regard to the signals is for TfL to make. Officers are of the view that further representations or challenges are unlikely to achieve a different result and would not necessarily be a sound use of the Council's resources.

However, although TfL have not altered their view as a result of the representations, their decision to delay removal does afford the Committee opportunity to instruct officers to pursue any actions they believe are appropriate.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 This is essentially an information item and has no financial implications at this time.

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1 None at this time

8.0 Diversity Implications

- 8.1 No significant issues

9.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

9.1 None at this time

9.0 Environmental Implications

9.1 None at this time

Background Papers

Petition submitted June 2011

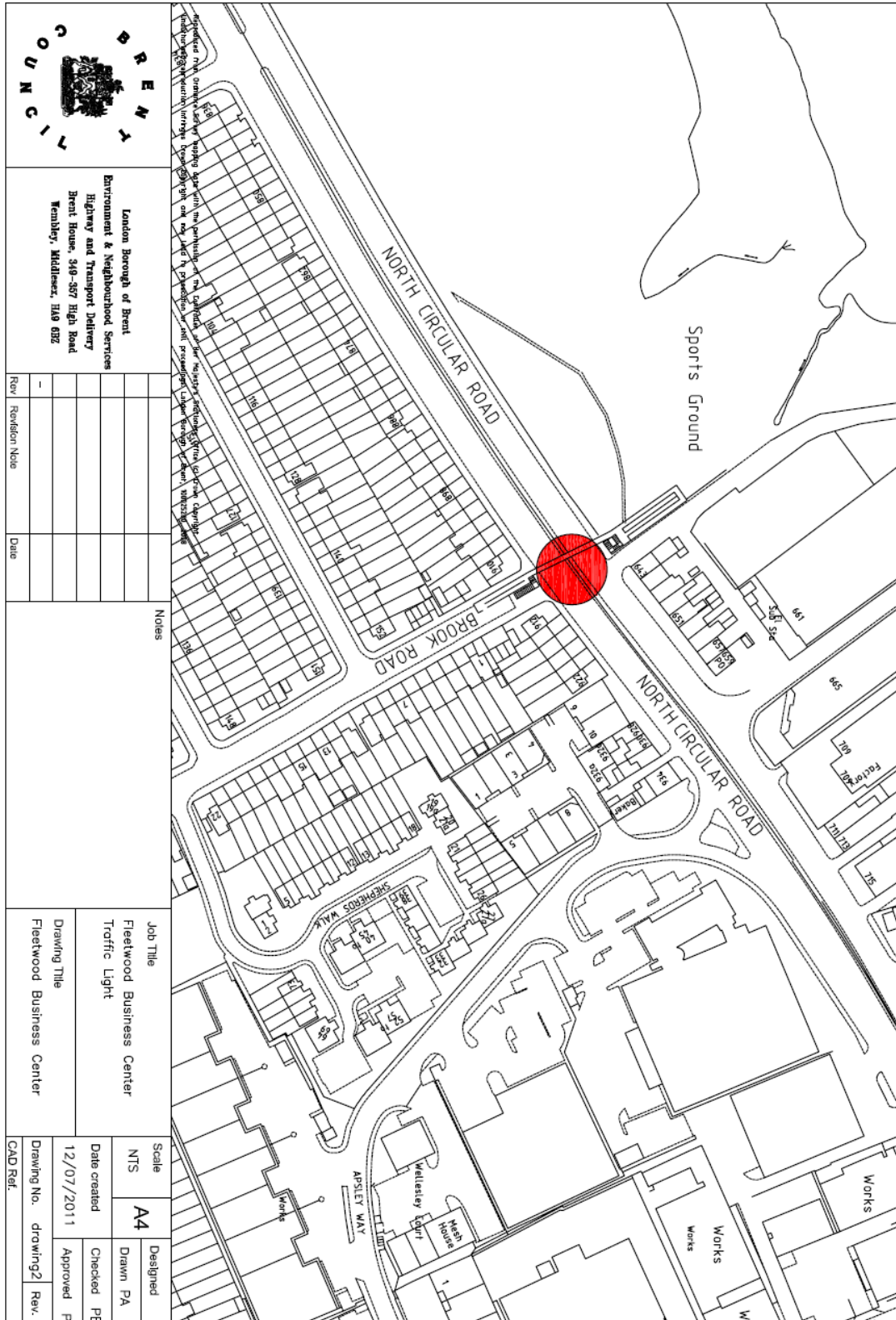
Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Location Plan
- Appendix 2 – Response letter from TfL

Contact Officers

Tim Jackson, Transportation Service Unit, 2nd Floor East, Brent House, 349-357 High Road, Wembley, Middlesex, HA2 8TT. Telephone: 020 8937 5446

Appendix 1: Location Plan



London Borough of Brent
 Environment & Neighbourhood Services
 Highway and Transport Delivery
 Brent House, 346-357 High Road
 Wembley, Middlesex, HA9 6BZ

| Rev | Revision Note | Date |
|-----|---------------|------|
| - | | |

Notes

| Job Title |
|---------------------------|
| Fleetwood Business Center |
| Traffic Light |
| Drawing Title |
| Fleetwood Business Center |

| Scale | Designed |
|----------------------|------------|
| NTS | A4 |
| Date created | Drawn PA |
| 12/07/2011 | Checked PE |
| Drawing No. drawing2 | Approved P |
| CAD Ref. | Rev. |

Appendix 2: Text of response letter from TfL (dated 13th July 2011)

“Thank you for getting back to me about TfL’s notification to remove the traffic signals at Fleetway Business Centre, informing us that Brent is in receipt of a petition opposed to our proposals and this will be heard at the next Highways Committee on 27th July.

To provide some background, as you are no doubt aware, TfL see signal removal as a necessary step towards delivering the Mayor’s Smoothing Traffic Flow programme. Since July 2010, TfL and the boroughs have been collaborating to identify and remove signals deemed unnecessary to help smooth traffic flow through the Capital. The signals at Brent Fleetway Business Centre form part of this initiative. www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/projectsandschemes/11351.aspx.

As you say, decisions on issues as they impact on the TLRN reside with TfL but the views and insight of boroughs, residents and businesses are also central to the delivery of the TfL’s traffic signal removal programme. Feedback informs TfL considerations through affirmation or perspective which may not have been evident at signal selection stage. To this end, we are delivering their removal programme in parallel with consultation and engagement, giving detailed consideration to feedback sought at strategic, borough and local levels.

I note that after more consideration, Brent Council after further review has concerns regarding the removal signals at Fleetway Business Park especially in relation to exiting on the North Circular Road (which is the intended purpose) and accessing the site.

As you no doubt aware, the Fleetway Business Centre signals are manually controlled by three push buttons at the exit of the estate. TfL identified the signals at Fleetway Business Centre for proposed removal due to low demand and as a priority, as they no longer conformed with Department of Transport regulations.

The signals were originally installed to ease exit only as the vehicles emerged from the site given oncoming traffic in peak conditions. They were not installed on the basis they would be used by vehicles accessing the site, holding up traffic by parking and pushing the buttons (which for the few that do, do so in the face of free flowing traffic until the signals come into operation) and allowing these slow moving large vehicles time to undertake a 180 degree turn and reverse into the site and halting free flowing traffic. It is regret that we did not see that the provision of the exit facility may be miss-used for this purpose at the time. However, under present day review and DfT compliance notwithstanding, your report may want to review how these signals serve the Mayor’s Smoothing Traffic Flow programme.

However, TfL have found that largely this practice takes place without the use of the signals. TfL stationed mobile CCTV footage and conducted on-site observations to gather more information and this indicated vehicles including large HGV's enter and exit this site in an unsafe manner, unassisted - vehicles and banks people do not use the push-button to stop the A406 traffic. The footage provided strong evidence to confirm TfL's initial view (in addition to parking violations) that this activity takes place without the protection of the signals in the access or egress/exit of this site and supports the case for removal. I attach stills of the CCTV footage for you to view, which demonstrate that the traffic signals are clearly surplus to requirements. TfL do not intend to carry out a stage 3 road safety audit as it is felt that these priority junctions will operate in the same manner as the many other priority junctions along the A406 route.

The most important factor however to influence our decision to remove these signals is that following a review of all 6000 signals in the Capital, they were selected because they no longer conform with Department of Transport's Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 1994 - Section 5 Regulation 30 which states that light signals should be used for controlling vehicular traffic at road junctions. Prior to this, it was not a requirement (TSRGD 2002 continues to invoke this under Regulation 33). The traffic signals at Fleetway Business Centre at 28/113 were installed before the 1994 regulations were introduced, thus they were legal at the time of installation but no longer conform to current standards. It is this issue overall which takes precedence.

I do hope this helps further clarify the basis on which a decision was made. I hope it helps to ease some of the concerns that you have. We have carefully considered feedback and comment from businesses (support and opposition) but we are progressing with removal as planned for the reasons above.

As you know, we are planning to decommission end of July. It has now been confirmed that these works will commence 25th July. However, we are aware that your committee meeting is set for the 27th July and have agreed to postpone the removal. It should be noted that unless any evidence is presented at the meeting that we are not aware of, we will proceed with the removal within the next few days post meeting.

**Chief Engineer – Traffic Infrastructure Delivery Teams, ,
Traffic Directorate - London Streets
Transport for London**