

Colchester

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TRAF/4741

TrafficRegulation.Order@essex.gov.uk

Dear Sir or Madam

This is my personal objection to the removal of pedestrian crossings in High Street, Osborne Street and St Botolph's Street, Colchester. I have previously commented on the Colne Bank Avenue crossing in my role as planning officer of Colchester Cycling Campaign.

I urge you to retain the crossings and to investigate other ways to reduce congestion in the town centre that are better suited to its unique status as a destination for shopping, tourism and study as well as being a key residential area, especially for a relatively large number of elderly people.

1. The TRO states that the reason for removing these crossings is the concern over possible delays to park and ride buses. ECC should produce robust data showing
  - i) the effect and extent of the crossings on overall congestion, and
  - ii) the effect and extent of the crossings on overall congestion if the town centre trial of January 2014 was reinstated to run for its full six-month trial period.

I recall ECC using similar anti-congestion arguments to support the change from zebras to pelicans at the Albert roundabout, Colchester; the consultants' final report said that this expensive scheme had, to paraphrase, "only one statistically significant effect on one arm of the roundabout during one of the peak traffic periods": the inference was that any other changes were statistically insignificant.

These town centre crossings hold up buses for seconds at a time; what adds to delays is unnecessary cars on the town centre circuit that are in front of the buses. I urge you to consider reimposing the town centre trial of January 2014 and to allow it to run for a full six-month pilot period (NB: this would also solve ECC's problem over retention of the right-turn bus lane into Queen Street, unsafe U-turns in Lewis Gardens, and the Priory Street traffic flow).

2. I am concerned about pedestrian safety at two sites, High Street and Osborne Street. Local people know how quickly cars whip into High Street from Head Street and North Hill (the latter is still open to taxis). The same applies to Osborne Street, which is also a blind corner (for both pedestrians and motorists). Removing these crossings will make collisions more likely, even though the maximum impact speed is likely to be 20mph. Both these crossings are on walking desire lines. A barrier on both sides of the road to force pedestrians to walk to the next crossing is neither desirable nor practical. I urge you to make public your officers' safety audit as a means of informing public debate.

3. I note that ECC is introducing other crossings within greater Colchester, and one of the reasons given on the TROs is that a crossing formalises a location where drivers expect to see pedestrians. Although much of the town is covered by a 20mph limit, the current volume of traffic means that drivers will not expect pedestrians to be crossing the road everywhere and anywhere. Besides which, crossings offer younger and older pedestrians, parents with prams, the disabled, and those unfamiliar with the locality, a chance to cross the road with confidence and relative safety.
4. This scheme should have been subject to wider debate before being formalised with a TRO, in line with local government good practice. Town centre shoppers should have been consulted, as well as sixth-form students and elderly people living close to the town centre, who usually walk to the shops. Without such consultation ECC cannot expect an informed debate or to be able to reach a balanced decision, and response to the publication of the TRO will be correspondingly small.
5. I would like to see how ECC has contrasted its policies/guidelines for walking, shopping, the town centre and its desire for “behaviour change” to reduce congestion against its policy/guidelines on congestion. ECC should demonstrate how it has met best practice and also show written evidence of its decisions and rationale for any deviation from guidelines and/or best practice.
6. I would like to see how ECC has considered the special status of Colchester town centre as a tourist attraction. Tourists value towns that are not choked with traffic, where speeds are low and where roads are easy to cross. I would argue that the status quo, combined with the removal of the crossings, is not the best way to achieve ECC’s policy aims, or the aims of Colchester Borough Council.
7. Finally, I would like to see how ECC has complied with the law on Public Sector Equality Duty. This should include the budget set aside for PSED consultation, together with a transparent terms of reference for these particular schemes. I would argue that these proposals place the health and safety of protected groups of people<sup>1</sup> at greater risk. Can ECC demonstrate how it has paid due regard to such people under PSED legislation?

William Bramhill

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<sup>1</sup> Children and young people, older people, parents with prams and the disabled