

# A38 Infrastructure Safari

Cyclenation Conference November 2018

This infrastructure safari will take you out to and along part of the A38-A34 cycleway that Birmingham City Council is building using part of its CCAG money. It is being built (and in the form taken) largely because Push Bikes lobbied for quality over quantity for a long period of time. Birmingham spent much of its CCAG money on giving bikes to people, in order to get people cycling. Whilst that project has been successful, the feedback from the recipients was that Birmingham was an awful place to cycle, and that proper cycling infrastructure was required, not poor quality paths through parks, or magic paint, confirming what Push Bikes had been saying for years.

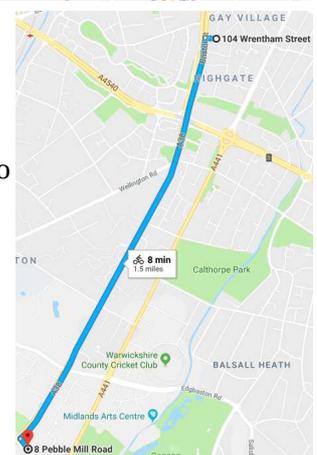
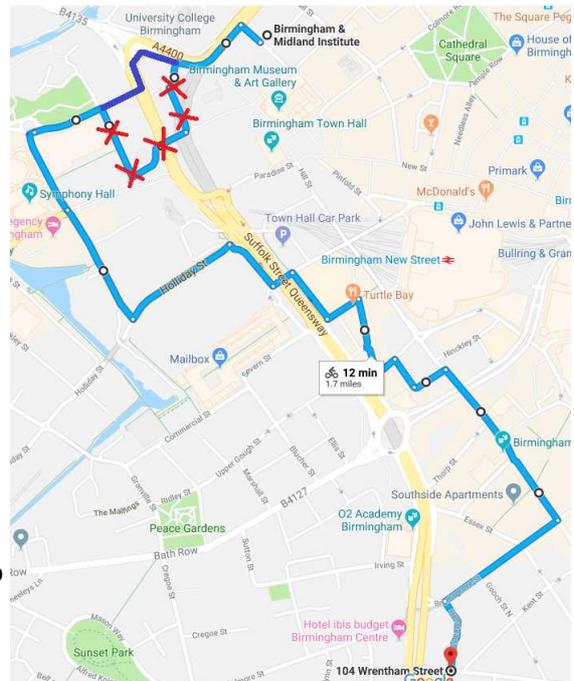
The cycleway is still under construction, so we will not be able to ride it. **Although most of the route will be on quiet roads or the pavement, we will have to cross a very busy and dangerous junction with no cycle or pedestrian phase – twice. Also, this will be quite a long ride (Birmingham being quite large), so we will need to keep up a reasonable pace where there is nothing to see.**

## Getting There

Unfortunately getting there is not straightforward, as cycle permeability across Birmingham city centre has fallen in recent years, particularly since the construction of the tram line in the city centre

(<http://www.pushbikes.org.uk/blog/problem-tram>). Now that the German Christmas market is in place, cycle permeability has fallen to zero.

From the Birmingham and Midland Institute we will ride down Margaret Street and on to the bus lane on the Queensway. Google Maps (right) insisted we take an extra detour via the Cophorne Hotel and the Hall of Memory, but since this would be really awkward and inconvenient, we wont be doing that. Instead we are going to ride along Queensway until we get to the road block, and use it to get to Cambridge Street. We will cycle down Cambridge Street and join National Cycle Route Five where it passes between The Rep theatre and Symphony Hall. This being Birmingham, NCN5 is closed to cyclists as far as Bridge Street, and we will probably have to get off and push. The closure is caused by a combination of the reconstruction of the recently built Centenary Square and, of course the new tram line. Having got past the road block at the end of Bridge Street, we will go back to cycling, following NCN5. Be particularly alert as we pass under Suffolk Street Queensway, as it is totally unclear what cyclists are supposed to do, and there will be plenty of half-asleep motorists blocking the way. For safety we will abuse the zebra crossing. When we get to Bromsgrove Street we will leave NCN5. The new cycleway will follow the next road along, Kent Street, but the necessary cycling contraflow and segregated lane have not yet been built. We will join the route of the new cycleway at Wrentham Street.



# A38 Cycleway

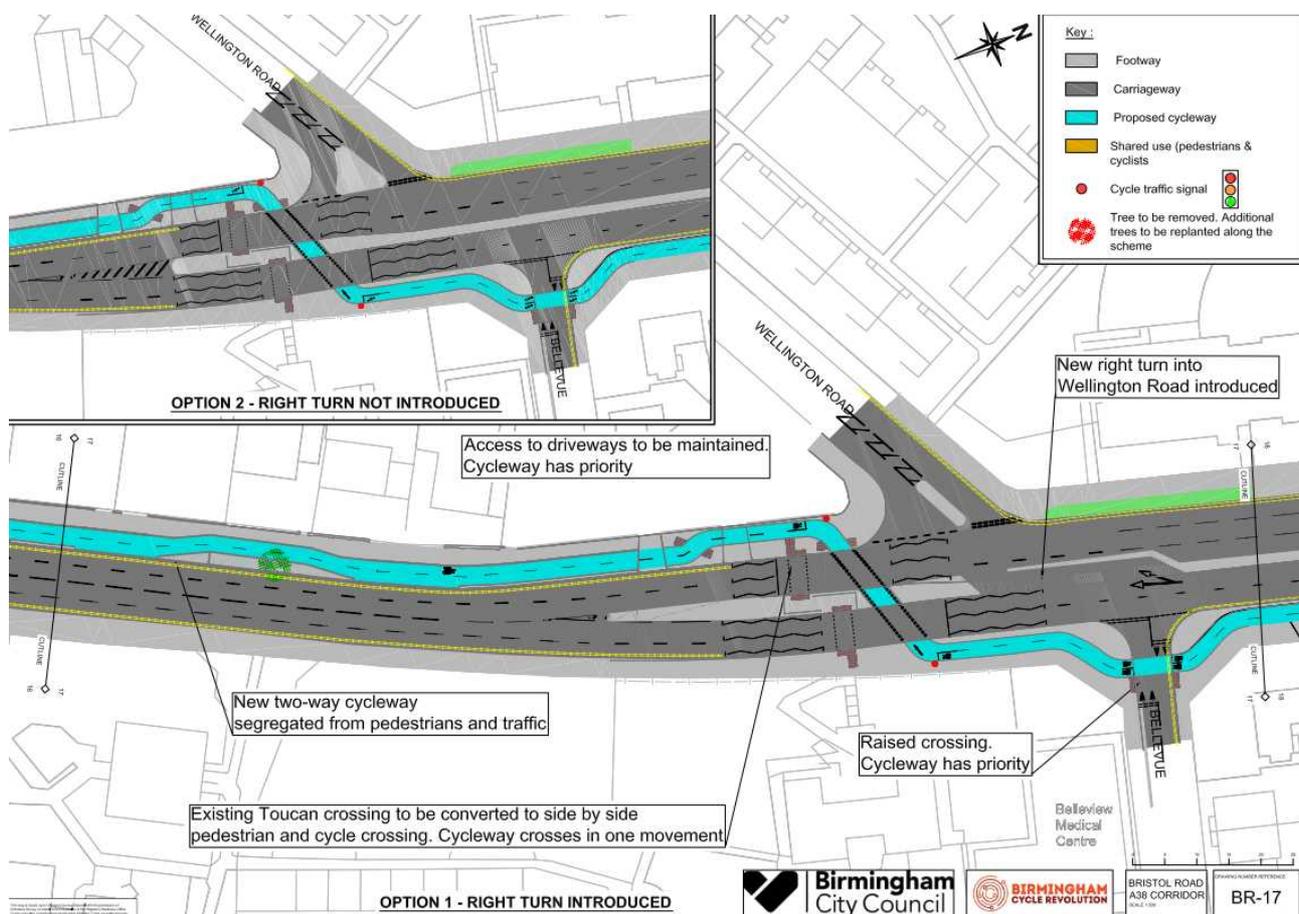
In Wrentham Street there will be a protected two-way cycleway that hops on to what is currently the pavement at Bristol Street (the A38). There will be a two-way cycleway here that is segregated from pedestrians and traffic, but it has not yet been built. So move along please, nothing to see. However, we will be following the course of the cycleway, on the pavement. The first piece of the A38 cycleway that you will actually be able to see is at the monstrous junction with Belgrave Middleway.



Push Bikes has been told that the traffic light phasing on the two-stage crossing will be set so that even though it will not be a single stage green, delays for cyclists will be minimal.

Getting across Belgrave Middleway safely at the junction may be impossible at the time of our visit, in which case we will need to detour a short way down Belgrave Middleway to the first controlled crossing.

After this junction, the cycleway continues as far as Wellington Road, where it crosses the A38 with a single stage diagonal crossing.

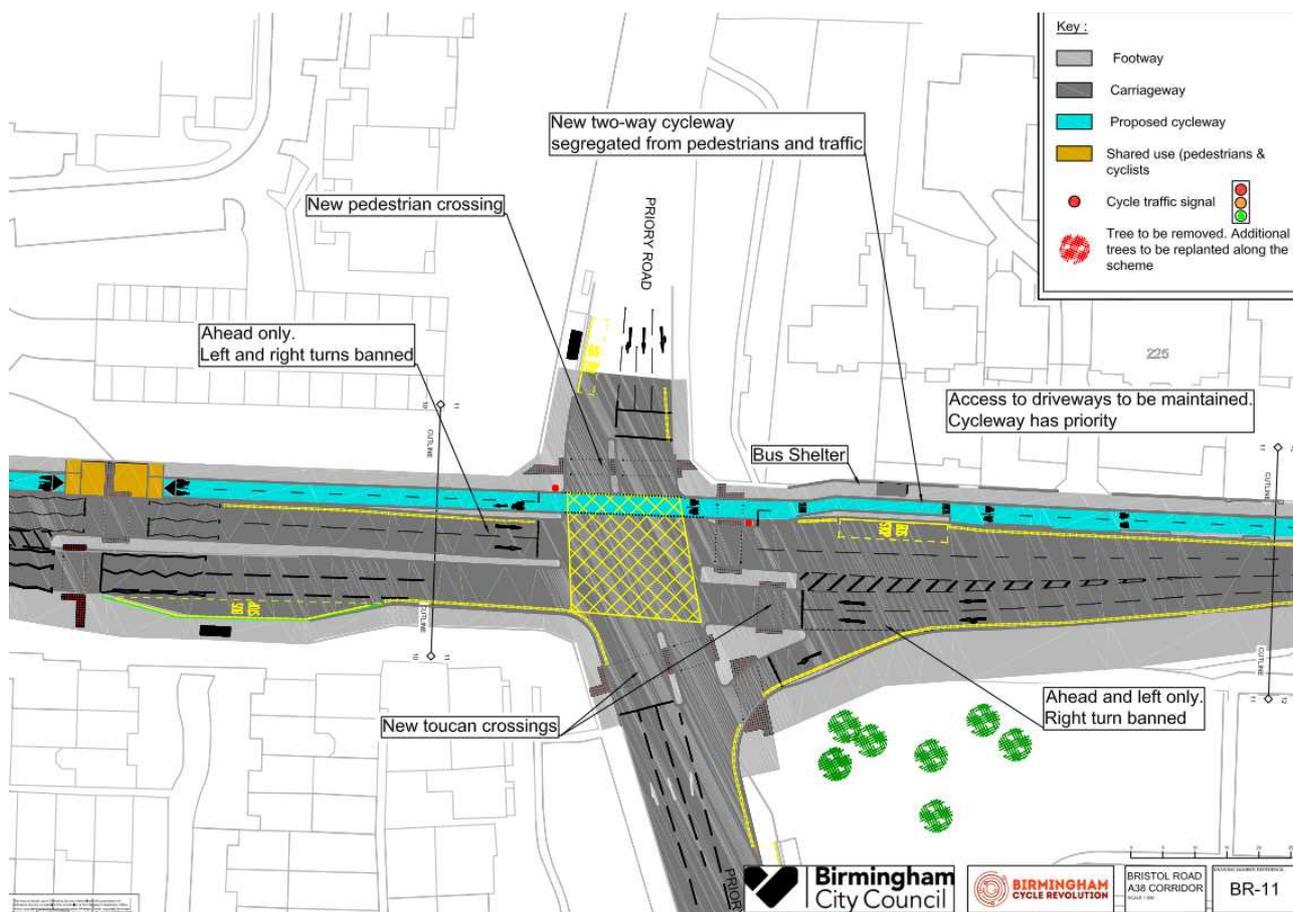


The highways engineers pushed strongly for creating a right turn for motor traffic at Wellington Road, and certain councillors supported that. Push Bikes objected, as did the residents of Wellington Road, but the objections were ignored. We think it will create a dangerous junction and encourage rat-running in what is a residential road (there is already a problem with rat-running and queuing traffic in the roads that Wellington Road leads to).

We will not cross the road here because the next major junction would be impassable. Fortunately, there is nothing to see until we get to that junction, so we will cycle along the pavement, keeping up a good pace, please.

A few years ago Push Bikes was approached by the city council highways engineers because they have a problem. The A38/Priory Road junction is operating at its maximum capacity (<http://www.pushbikes.org.uk/blog/problem-priory-road-bristol-road-junction>). The highways department have pushed the inter-greens to the legal minimum, and still the junction is overloaded. There is no pedestrian phase whatsoever, because “it would interfere with traffic flow”. We told them that their problem was caused by over-use of private cars, which needed to be addressed, and that cycling was a proven means of doing so. They didn’t believe the problem was caused by cars until the representative of the local bus company told them that of the many tens of thousands of vehicle movements across the junction every day, less than two hundred of them were buses, despite the high frequency of the bus services. So no matter what people believe, the traffic levels must be due to something else; the elephant in the room.

Moving on a few years, one of the Birmingham Cycling Revolution highways engineers realised that not only was the percentage of the traffic turning into Priory Road small, but also it acted to impede the main traffic flows through the junction, especially following the inevitable collisions. Blocking the small traffic flow would assist the major traffic flow, and allow for pedestrian phases and the creation of a cycleway with its own phase. And that is exactly what is happening.



We understand that getting this plan approved was not an easy task; that it is actually getting built is a great achievement.

Unfortunately it is not all good news. Push Bikes recommended that consideration was given to the need for a cycleway down Priory Road and across Pershore Road to join with NCN5. The junction across Pershore Road is similar to this one, and last year a young doctor from the Children’s Hospital was killed whilst trying to negotiate it on her bike (<http://www.pushbikes.org.uk/event/slow-roll-and-candlelight-vigil>). It is great news that the Pershore Road junction has now been given the funding for the necessary safety upgrade, along with a cycleway between the A38 and NCN5, but its connection with the A38 cycleway will be the three stage staggered toucan crossing (with a narrow central island), a recipe for inconvenience, long delays, and conflict. Such solutions just encourage cycle users to either to hop back on to the carriageway, or drive their journey, both of which are bad for all transport users. The Dutch have shown how to handle large junctions with simultaneous green, and there is a British regulations compliant way of doing the same, but it would seem to be a case of “not invented here”.

**Anyhow, now you are aware that these junctions are (at present) killers, we still have to get across the road here. We will do so using the carriageway, but only as far as the other side, where we will use the dropped kerb to rejoin the carriageway. There is a bike box, so we will wait for the red phase and use it to fill the left-hand lane with bikes. Don’t move back to the left until clear of cars making a left turn.** We will continue along the A38 on the Pavement as far as Pebble Mill Road. The cycleway, which is on the other side of the road, will switch to the central reservation at the earliest opportunity. The central reservation is wide, because, ironically, it used to be a tram line. The central reservation cycleway will link here with a cycleway down Pebble Mill Road, and continue along the A38 as far as Bournbrook. There it will link with the grossly substandard cycle paths on the new relief road that take people on bikes away from what should be and could be a pleasant high street, but which is in reality a four-lane, motor-vehicle infested bypass for the relief road (<http://www.pushbikes.org.uk/blog/smelly-oak-revisited>).



At this point we will use the existing crossing to get to the other side of the A38, pausing to look at the cycleway, and then return back to the city centre on the other side of the A38. **We will have to cross the Priory Road junction a second time. The safest way to do this is to join the A38 at the bike box when the traffic light is on red, cross the junction, and then rejoin the pavement using the dropped kerbs on the other side. Once again, try to fill the left-hand lane with bikes, and don't move to the left until clear of cars making a left turn.** From there we will continue along the A38 on the pavement as far as Wellington Road, where we will cross back and retrace our path. Once back at Wrentham Street, we can take the path of the cycleway along Kent Street. When we get to the road block that we used to get to Cambridge Street, rather than crossing back we will stay on this side of the road, cross the B4135 using a controlled crossing, continue alongside Queensway using Summer Row, and then use the controlled crossing at the end of Margaret Street to get back to Margaret Street, and hence back to the Birmingham and Midland Institute.

Thank you for riding with Push Bikes. We wish you a safe and pleasant onward journey.



The Birmingham  
Cycling Campaign