

# King's Crossing

## **Closing the Divide: Report of an action planning workshop**

Tuesday 29th April 2014

DRAFT



*King's Cross took its name from a monument which,*



## Participants

Jamie Atkinson	Planning & Consents Assistant, HS1 Limited
Esther Caplin	Founder of Redhanded and Camden Resident
George Coulouris	Camden Cycling Campaign
Rob Cowan	Director, Urban Design Skills
Paul Dodd	Director at Out Design Limited
Nicholas Falk	Director, London Office URBED (Urbanism Environment Design)
John Fatcher	Head of Streets and spaces at Camden Council
John Hartley	Local resident & member of Camden Cycling Campaign
Tom Johnson	Advocacy Officer, British Library
Max Martinez	Associate Director at Space Syntax
Sally Parekh	Project Coordinator, URBED (Urbanism Environment Design)
Alan Powers	Resident and researcher and writer specialising in architecture and design
Paul Reynolds	Chairman of the UK Urban Design Group
Dickon Robinson	Chairman at Living Architecture
Caroline Russell	Chair, Islington Living Streets
Alan Stones	Architect/Planner, Urban Design
Andrew Stuck	Founder at Talk the Walk Networking/Producer at Talking Walking/Owner at Rethinking Cities Ltd
Tim Thomas	Senior Programme Manager, Projects & Programmes, Surface Planning, Surface Transport, Transport for London
Sue Vincent	Chair of the Development Control Committee, London Borough of Camden

## Apologies

Patrick Fleming	British Library
Eleanor Hoyle	Programme Mgr, Regen Del & Econ Dev, LB Bexley
Robert Huxford	Urban Design Group
Massimo Ingegno	MSc Student at University College London
Robert Milne	Antelope Consulting
Camilla Ween	Goldstein Ween Architects
Marcus Wilshire	IBI Taylor Young
Matthias Wunderlich	UI Studio



## Why action is needed

As one of Europe's major regeneration projects, the transformation of the area around the London termini of King's Cross and St Pancras should meet the highest standards. Named after a monument to King George IV that was demolished before the station was opened, the surrounding area has suffered from a bad image for well over a century.

Now with huge investment – over £1000 million in the two stations alone- it is attracting thousands of new jobs as well as residents, and a growing number of international visitors as well as regular commuters. The walk from the new Northern concourse along King's Boulevard and across the Regent's Canal to the Granary now houses the University of the Arts. A new 'knowledge quarter' is emerging promoted by 30 organisations that are now based in the area.

By contrast, crossing the Euston Road or York Way is a great let-down, and a poor gateway to what London offers. Yet the stations' cramped positions at the crossing of London's East West Inner Ring Road, and North South traffic routes make it exceptionally difficult to handle the vast crowds of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicular traffic that all want to cross the road. So what can be done to 'close the divide'?

Taking advantage of a suitable venue at the REDHANDED art space in Cromer Street, which is a pop-up shop owned by Camden Council, and with encouragement from Robert Huxford, Director of the Urban Design Group, and positive responses from both Transport for London and Camden Council, URBED organised a half day action planning workshop. This drew together over 20 experts, many of them local, to discuss what might be done in the short-term within the budget that Transport for London has been allocated for this key Mayoral priority.

This short report sets out the main conclusions and suggests next steps. It is being circulated to all who attended for comments. Our hope is that it can not only provide a useful record for the next stage of designing a set of improvements to be implemented over the next year and a half, but also lead to a crossing worthy of a king!



King's Boulevard



Granary Square



Overcrowded crossing on Euston Rd, Rob Cowan



Visitors arriving at King's Cross Station



Introducing the event Nicholas Falk summarised the challenge:

- » Nicholas has worked in Camden for three decades, but has been interested in King's Cross since watching steam trains there as a schoolboy. Back in 1985 he campaigned to save the Coal and Fish Offices from demolition and to make the most of the area's unique industrial heritage.<sup>1</sup> He subsequently was asked to advise both the Railway Lands Group and the London Regeneration Consortium. He has a personal as well as a professional interest in seeing the area improved.
- » Up until quite recently the area around King's Cross Station was generally run-down; back in 1995, 'the area surrounding it was seedy and soul-sapping – its Georgian terraces rotting and unloved, its industry defunct, its railway lands a daunting terra incognita, and its roads clogged by fume-spewing traffic' Nicholas Pevsner described it as a 'haven for noxious industries', albeit in the 1830, but the epithet was still curiously apt 150 years later.'<sup>2</sup>



1 Peter Hall & Nicholas Falk, *Great Opportunity in Central London*, Town and Country Planning, September 1997

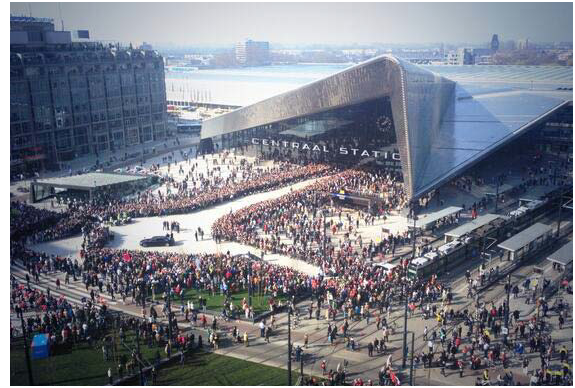
2 Catherine Slessor in *Redefining London*, New London Architecture, 2005



- » Since then opportunities for upgrading the stations and developing the wasteland have been realised, with a high quality public realm outside London's new gateway to the Continent. Major attractions such as the British Library (which draws a million visitors a year) and the forthcoming Crick Institute, a multidisciplinary research centre (with 2,000 research staff), are drawing visitors and researchers into the area. Plus the University of the Arts and the planned Google UK HQ building (for 5000+ staff).



» Different stakeholders will have different concerns. For anyone completing a journey, immediate first impressions must be confusing and a let-down. For workers getting on a bus or walking is difficult, and compares poorly with the situation in say Berlin, Rotterdam or parts of Paris. For researchers, the local environment may well put off retaining the best. And the levels of pollution, noise and danger are bad for residents, who have life spans that are ten years less than in the north of the borough, and have to navigate across a continual stream of traffic to get to shops and schools.



Rotterdam Central Station

» Three people have lost their lives while cycling to and through the area in the past decade and many others have suffered very serious injury. The numbers cycling to the area will inevitably grow substantially as new employment centres such as the Crick Institute and the planned Google building are occupied.



Berlin Station

» Yet there are no obvious signs of anything being done to make it easier to cross the roads outside the stations, or to help you find your way to wherever you want to go.



Paris Rive Gauche, development designed by SEMPERA



**Sue Vincent** lives south of the Euston Road in Russell Square, and is Planning Chair for Camden Council, as well as working for Urban Design London. Camden are concerned to change the experience along the Euston Road, as Kings Cross is an international hub, crossing two London boroughs – Camden and Islington. She would like King's Cross to be an easy place to navigate, describe and give directions to and around. She recognises the need for the area to work for residents, tourists and businesses.

Sue complained there was no time to linger, as it was always so busy. You need to be able to see your way through, with refuges where you can gather your thoughts. We should be bold, with, for example, larger and diagonal crossings - and without lots of yellow lines.

**Tim Thomas** is Programme Manager for Transport for London, and employed to make sure the different elements are joined up. Tim explained that King's Cross was one of a series of places that had been given priority to be upgraded during the Mayor's term of office. This will include new junctions in Islington, improved crossings, rationalising design while maintaining the A40/Euston/Marylebone roads role for through traffic, and expanding the Central London Grid of 'Quietways' for cyclists. In the longer term, the gyratory, which blankets the area, will also need to be sorted out.



Sue Vincent addresses delegates



Tim Thomas at event



Tight squeeze on Euston Road



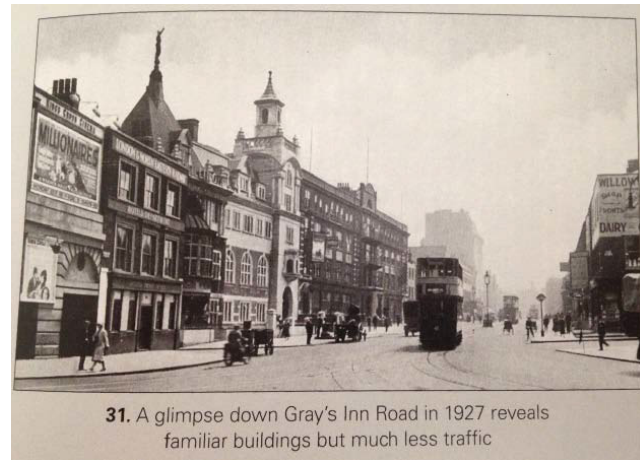
Cycle racks situated away from station entrance

## Walkabouts

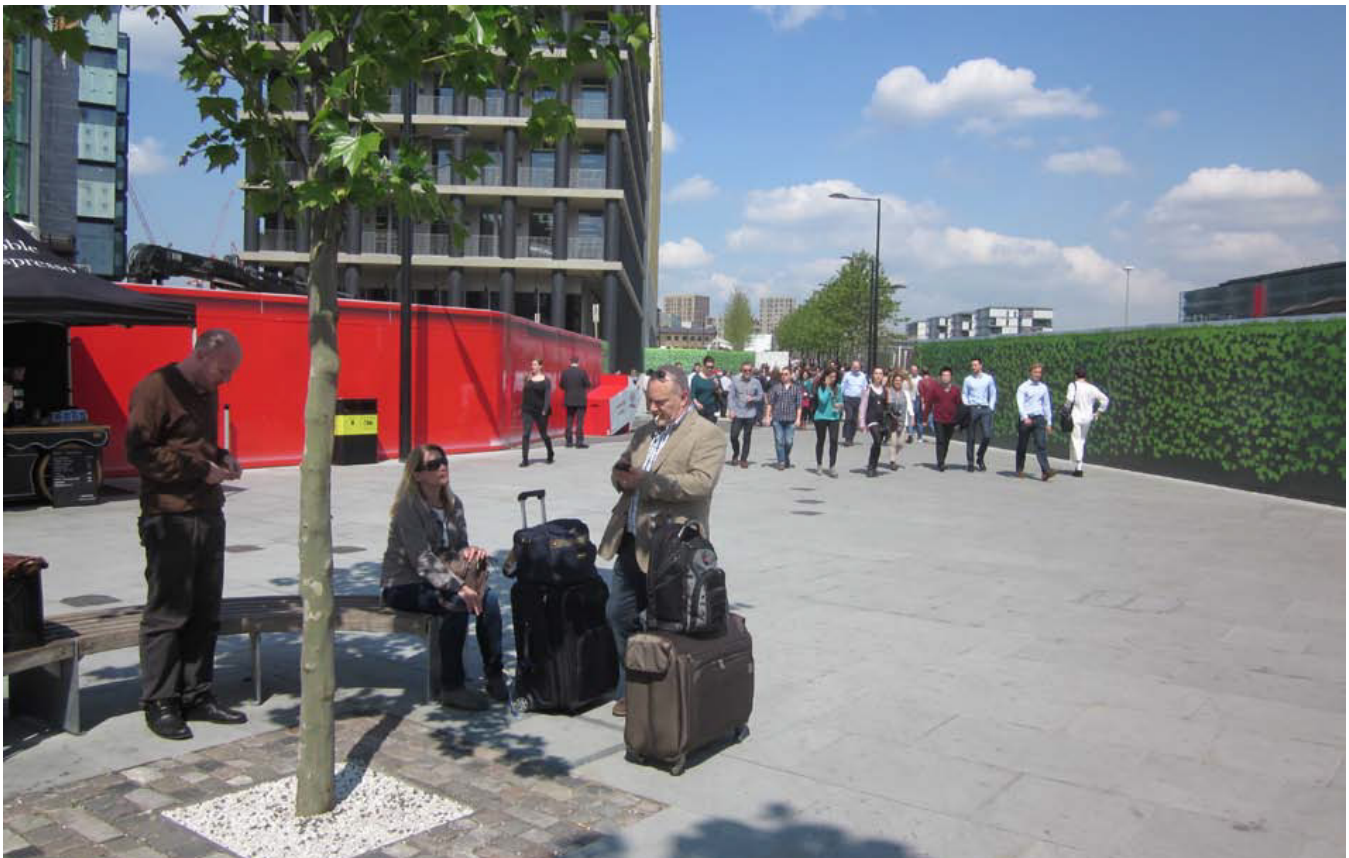
Participants were divided into four groups and asked to look at the area from different perspectives, and to get to and from different points so that we could discuss what might be done to improve the experience for everyone.



Tourists sitting outside station



Photograph of Gray's Inn Road in 1927



Walkabout near Granary Square



## Better crossings

Everyone agreed that the relationship between people on foot and traffic needs to change radically in front of the two termini to make the area as a whole work much better:

- » At the moment cars take priority over pedestrians and cyclists, and Euston Road forms a boundary between what have historically been very different functions, but which are now changing.
- » University accommodation is being built on the opposite side to where the other main university buildings are located further aggravating the problems.
- » TfL's main priority has been to keep traffic flowing along the main East West route through London (which is why there is an extensive gyratory). Passenger flow is expected to double in the next ten years, and conflicts will be further aggravated if and when High Speed Two opens up at Euston.
- » The traffic signals do not provide time for people to cross the whole of the road, and in some places, such as outside the British Library, the situation is quite dangerous.
- » 46,000 people pass through King's Cross Square every day and most cross over or under the Euston Road. Therefore pedestrians' needs should have a higher priority.
- » The crossings are very dangerous for people on bikes, especially at the Euston Road/York Way junction and the Euston Road/Midland Road junction. A large number of passengers with luggage cross this road daily, and a simplified crossing is required at the Midland Road/Euston Road junction. Improvements should allow pedestrians to cross with one signal, and increased pavement capacity is a great way to improve crossing capacity.
- » While the north and south sides of Euston Road have very different functions, residents find it difficult to cross and access the facilities and businesses on either side of the road.

**Appendix 1: Map showing all-day average pedestrian movements**  
Taken from TfL space syntax pedestrian analysis for Euston Area Plan (July 2013)





Pedestrian crossing on York Way



Tube entrance

Some solutions should be tested out before traffic is rerouted:

- » Good urban design requires there to be crossings where there are desire lines so that people's natural routes are not disrupted.
- » There needs to be a mixture of crossings, which should be wider where there are the greatest number of pedestrians.
- » 'Count down' signals should be installed, and most of the barriers should be removed.
- » The main crossing should be wide enough to avoid bunching up, with a surface that puts people first, e.g. properly laid pavements.
- » Many more trees and greenery could help soften noise and absorb some of the pollution.
- » A huge increase in the number of people cycling into the area is certain as large new buildings are planned on the Railway Lands site for businesses including Google, Camden Council, Waitrose and many others. The projected occupancy is 30,000 workers, students and residents by 2016. Fully protected road space on the Dutch model will be needed to ensure that the 10% of those who are likely to choose to travel by bicycle are able to do so safely. Cycles are sometimes seen as in conflict with pedestrians, but this is largely a product of the extremely poor provision for both modes of travel on London's roads. No such conflict exists in other European cities where proper space has been allocated to both modes.
- » An increase in cycling, while desirable, will not reduce the number of cars. It should be promoted in the side streets to avoid cyclists having to weave across lanes of traffic. Advance stop lights and space for cyclists ahead of traffic need to be properly policed.
- » Action should also be taken to stop taxis idling while waiting to pick up fares (and therefore adding to noise and pollution), for example rethinking the dispatching process.



- » The British Library receives about 1 million visits a year. That equates to 2,700 visits/day. The Crick institute will have 2,000 employees and let us say they will receive an equal number of visitors. That equates to about 4,000 visits/day. So we have a total of about 7,000 visits, or 14,000 crossings of Midland Road per day to access the buildings on Midland Road.
- » By 2016 the Railway lands site will have approximately 30,000 residents, workers and students, all of whom must enter and leave via the entrances on Goods Way and York Way. That number does not include visitors, for which we'll conservatively add a further 10,000. So we have approximately 40,000 visits necessitating 80,000 crossings/day of Goods Way or York Way. Motor traffic diverted from Midland Road would necessarily have to use both of those roads.

Longer term solutions should aim to improve flows while reducing intimidation for pedestrians:

- » Reintroducing two way traffic in Caledonian Road and York Way.
- » Addressing the 'pinch point' at the top of Gray's Inn Road, possibly as part of the redesign of the gyratory system for the whole area.
- » Getting rid of cars down Midland Road to make it easier for visitors to reach the British Library and the Crick Institute could produce worse problems elsewhere. What is needed is slower traffic and more safe crossing points on Midland Road and possibly a restriction to buses and taxis only on both Midland Road and Goods way.
- » An alternative option is to implement a traffic diversion further north of St Pancras Way, so in close proximity to Camden Town area, this would protect Goods Way /York Way, roads in close proximity to a lot of future development and student buildings.
- » Creating an attractive underground crossing with shops alongside, as in Vienna, perhaps with a ramp or escalators up to King's Square, which may also involve slightly raising the road.

## Spaces



Workers, students and visitors share the space in front of the piazza in Granary Square



Polite sign reminding cyclists



Living wall on route to Granary Square

## Signals



Making York Way a two way traffic system may improve transport, as it could divert traffic away from the heavily congested Euston Road.

## Taxis



The existing taxi rank on Midland Road is dreadful and rows of taxis sit with their engines running until they have a passenger, which contributes to poor air quality in the vicinity.



## Clearer signing

- » There is a lack of easy way-finding to and from the stations, including getting from Euston to King's Cross on foot via Somers Town.
- » Signage needs to be planned comprehensively as there is an assortment of systems at present.
- » Bus stops are hard to find and poorly laid out with inadequate shelters on York Way, unlike, say, Stockholm.
- » A good solution is for attractions such as King's Place or the hotels in Bloomsbury (11,000 bed spaces) to tell their visitors how to get there before they start their journey.
- » Temporary signage, such as banners, could help to make the area look special.



Stockholm Central Bus terminal



Variety of signage in and around Kings Cross station

## Conclusions

It is important not only to consult with all the stakeholders, but also to generate imaginative options, and communicate their benefits, steps could include:

1. Circulating this report, then adding the participants to TfL's Stakeholder mailing list, and invite to future events.
2. Understanding proper 'place check' to audit all the problems and opportunities.
3. Investigate setting up a Business Improvement District for King's Cross, like the one in Bankside, composed of councils, TfL, local residents and businesses to bridge the many gaps. This could be an informal group initially.
4. Commissioning designs for one of the new crossing (King's Crossing?) which would demonstrate London's commitment to 'Green' principles, involving the University of the Arts, so that something remarkable emerges in the redesign, between the British Library and York Way, but not a 'shared surface' as per Exhibition Road in South Kensington.

TfL website dedicated to improvements:

[tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/improvements-and-projects/kings-cross-and-euston-road](https://tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/improvements-and-projects/kings-cross-and-euston-road)

