

NICKEY LINE REDBOURN ROAD CROSSINGS SURVEY REPORT 27/8/15

The Nickey Line crosses major roads twice at Redbourn (one is a double crossing):

- Redbourn / Hemel Hempstead - B487 (by the junction with Hemel Hempstead Road), and
- Redbourn / Harpenden - A5183 Redbourn By-Pass *and* B487 Redbourn Lane (both by the roundabout).

Redbourn / Hemel Hempstead - B487 Crossing



Redbourn / Harpenden - A5183 Redbourn By-Pass & B487 Redbourn Lane Roundabout Crossings



This report covers the user opinion and usage survey of these crossings undertaken by the Friends of the Nickey Line over June and July 2015. Please send any questions or comments to Friends Chairman Dave Abernethy, friends@nickeyline.org, tel. 07788 198283.

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Report Summary & Call For Action

1. The Redbourn section of the Nickey Line (NL) is part of National Cycle Route 57. It is used by local residents to go to & from work and school in Harpenden and Hemel Hempstead and recreationally by walkers, runners and cyclists. It leads to Maylands Industrial estate, the biggest in the Eastern region, and a major employment site. The NL provides a traffic free link from Harpenden and via the Upper Lea Valley Way from Luton to Maylands.
2. The Nickey Line crosses major roads twice at Redbourn (one is a double crossing):
 - Redbourn / Hemel Hempstead - B487 (by the junction with Hemel Hempstead Road), and
 - Redbourn / Harpenden - A5183 Redbourn By-Pass *and* B487 Redbourn Lane (both by the roundabout). The Roundabout has twin lane entry on two arms (B487 & A5183) which are particularly dangerous for Non-Motorised Users (NMUs). There are a further four public Right of Way footpaths crossing the by-pass between the two NL crossing points: Redbourn 24, 31, 34 & 38. All crossings are uncontrolled and with fast traffic.
3. Following extensive feedback from users, Friends of the Nickey Line ran a survey of users' opinions on the safety of the Nickey Line crossings. Whilst concerns were expressed on both crossings, the Roundabout double crossing quickly appeared to generate the most anxiety and so was taken as the initial main survey priority, with a usage count, observations and informal interviews of users being added to the formal opinion survey.
4. The Redbourn roundabout crossings see heavy weekly crossing traffic. Over the late June/early July period, Friends of the Nickey Line measured **over 1600 crossings per week with over 1 crossing per minute at peak times**. Cyclists form 60% of users; runners and walkers about 20% each.
5. Users are very concerned with crossing safety on **both** Redbourn crossings:
 - b. 84% of users expressing an opinion of the roundabout crossings felt they were unsafe**
 - c. 77% of the users expressing an opinion of the Hemel Hempstead B487 crossing felt it was unsafe**

The main issues include:

 - Traffic speed at both sets of crossings especially at busy periods
 - Poor sightlines made worse by totally inadequate foliage control (mainly the Roundabout crossings)
 - Unpredictability of traffic on roundabout made worse by crossings being too close to roundabout
 - Family groups in particular can really struggle to cross safely. "This is a death trap - nearly been run over twice with a buggy - impossible to cross. The Harpenden crossing really puts us off using the Nickey Line when with children. Literally nearly been killed there"
6. The by-pass and unsafe crossings clearly creates a large 'severance' for Non-Motorised Users from accessing the traffic free route between Hemel Hempstead & Harpenden and the countryside to the south:
 - **One in three respondents said they would use the Roundabout Crossings more if they were safer**
 - **Over one in six respondents said they would use the Hemel Hempstead Crossing more if it were safer**
 - **User feedback reported potential NL users who refused to use it because of the perceived crossing risks**
7. **CALL FOR ACTION** - Friends of the Nickey Line call for actions to improve the safety of both crossings:
 - **Highways to regularly manage verge vegetation to improve sightlines (See Appendix photographs)**
 - **Speed limits be implemented on all approaching roads and the roundabout**
 - **Both sets of crossings be upgraded to formal Zebra / Toucan crossings**
 - **The Roundabout crossings to be repositioned to be further away from the roundabout to allow drivers to have more time to see them and space to stop.**

1 SURVEY AND COUNT BACKGROUND

1.1 The Nickey Line crosses major roads twice at Redbourn (one is a double crossing):

- Redbourn / Hemel Hempstead - B487 (by the junction with Hemel Hempstead Road), and
- Redbourn / Harpenden - A5183 Redbourn By-Pass *and* B487 Redbourn Lane (both by the roundabout)

(See the Appendix photographs)

1.2 Following repeated feedback from users, Friends of the Nickey Line ran a survey of users'

- opinions on the safety of these crossings
- personal use.

Whilst concerns were expressed on both crossings, the Roundabout double crossing quickly appeared to generate the most anxiety and so was taken as the initial main survey priority, with a usage count, observations and informal interviews of users being added to the formal opinion survey.

1.3 Users were approached in a range of ways:

- Members of Friends of the Nickey Line were emailed the survey form
- The survey form was placed on the Friends' website and advertised for visitors to use
- The survey form was offered to attendees of several local events, online to users of a Harpenden social site and on the Line itself with a membership table
- 2500 printed copies were delivered with the Redbourn Parish Newsletter to all Redbourn households (Our thanks go to Redbourn Parish Council for funding the delivery).

Formal responses were received at the time in events, by email, and by hard copies left at Redbourn Parish Office or sent to the Chairman's Harpenden home.

Additionally,

- Users were approached on the Nickey Line for informal discussions on their experience and views in the course of the usage count that was undertaken on the Redbourn roundabout crossings
- Users were also observed making the Roundabout crossings and difficulties noted

2 SURVEY RESPONSES

- 135 formal survey responses were received. Of these over 60% had used the Hemel Hempstead crossing occasionally or more often; over 90% had used the Roundabout crossings similarly
- A third did not express an opinion on the Hemel Hempstead crossing, but only 6% had no opinion on the Roundabout crossings.

We believe this probably reflects the lower usage amongst respondents of the Hemel crossing but there does also seem to be even higher concern over the Roundabout ones. Of those expressing an opinion on the crossing concerned:

- **only 23% felt the Hemel crossing was 'safe' or mainly 'safe'; 77% felt it was unsafe**
- **only 16% felt the Roundabout crossing was 'safe' or mainly 'safe'; 84% felt it was unsafe**
(NB Sometimes crossing safety was qualified in the comments, i.e. on the whole felt to be safe but with reservations voiced)
- Numerous (20+) 1-1 personal soundings mainly about the Redbourn roundabout crossings – these and the observations basically revealed the same concerns as highlighted by the opinion forms but also revealed that *groups* of users suffered particular difficulties in crossing.

3 MAIN OPINION RESULTS (Counts)

		% of total respondents
Hemel Hempstead Crossing		
No Opinion	44	32.8%
Safe	21	15.7%
Not safe	70	51.9%
Would use more	24	17.9%
Used occasionally /more often	84	62.2%
Want crossing	27	20.1%
Want speed control	22	16.3%
Want better signage	11	8.2%
Roundabout Crossings		
No Opinion	8	5.9%
Safe	20	14.9%
Not safe	107	79.9%
Would use more	43	32.1%
Used occasionally /more often	122	91.0%
Want crossing	54	40.3%
Want speed control	20	14.9%
Want foliage control	14	10.4%
Want better signage	21	15.7%

So:

- **Over 50% of the overall respondents felt the Hemel Hempstead Crossing was unsafe to use (rising to 77% amongst users with an opinion)**
- **80% of overall respondents felt the Roundabout crossings were unsafe to use (rising to 84% amongst users with an opinion)**
- **One in three respondents said they would use the Roundabout Crossings more** if they were safer to use.
- **Over one in six respondents said they would use the Hemel Hempstead Crossing more** if it were safer to use.

4 CROSSING PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

Verbatim statements (anonymised) are available of the problems identified by respondents. There is a striking consistency in them. The main problems cited are:

4.1 Hemel Hempstead Crossing

1. Excessive Traffic Speed. The speed limit is 60 mph- It is a mainly straight road and vehicles travel very fast
2. Traffic volume at peak times
3. Lack of apparent driver awareness of the crossing.

- “Cars go very fast & don’t expect to stop”
- “Heavy traffic and drivers unfamiliar with the access to the Nickey Line have no regard for pedestrians.”
- “Busy roads - have to wait for a long 'break' in the traffic then rush across as quickly as possible”
- “Traffic too fast and sight lines not good. The crossing with Hemel Hempstead Road is used a lot and is very dangerous. Both my husband and I have nearly been run over several times”

4.2 Roundabout Crossings

1. Very poor sightlines - blind corners, high vegetation not cut back
 2. Excessive Traffic Speed - The speed limit is 60 mph and vehicles travel very fast out of the roundabout or corners
 3. Traffic volume at peak times
 4. 2 lanes of fast traffic need to stop / be clear at the same time
 5. Turning cars not being aware of cyclists & pedestrians until very close to them. Signs are often covered in vegetation or just not seen by motorists. The crossings are not obvious to many approaching drivers and come with little real warning (despite the warning signs nominally present)
 6. The crossings are too close to the roundabout - drivers have too much to observe/think about . They are basically looking right and then are practically on top of the crossings which are to their left and so often not 'seen' till late.
- "Traffic coming down hill cannot be seen from path edge - you have to be in road to see vehicles. Similarly there is poor visibility of traffic from right when crossing A5153 from Harpenden Lane "
 - "This is a death trap - nearly been run over twice with a buggy - impossible to cross. The Harpenden crossing really puts us off using the Nickey Line when with children. Literally nearly been killed there"
 - "Very fast vehicles leaving the roundabout, have to take life in hands when running across, very hard with bikes, children and dogs"
 - "Cars too fast. NO proper crossing, cannot get good view"
 - "They are not crossings, just refuge bollards. Hence there is no advance notice for drivers, particularly those who are stupid."
 - "Because there are 2 lanes on each approach this is dangerous for pedestrians to cross. Verges should be cut back for better visibility. I did not allow my children to cross until much older even though this is their route to and from school when they can't get the bus."
 - "When I'm driving down the hill from Hatching Green to Redbourn I often have cars following very closely at speed so if I had to break suddenly to slow down for someone crossing the road it might cause an accident. I used to cross here every day with two dogs but no longer feel safe. A Police car actually stopped to let us across!"

4.3 Groups

Groups were observed to encounter significant problems, especially with children:

- They take longer to cross and present a bigger 'target' for traffic
- One family with 2 parents and 3 children crossed each of the Roundabout crossings by the father making 3 return trips each time to ferry bikes across with the mother waiting with the children. At a busy time, this was a major undertaking with much traffic disruption resulting.

5 SURVEY CALLS FOR ACTION

While most Nickey Line users felt these crossing had severe problems, some clearly felt they were not expert enough to say what should be done. However, many requested specific actions:

5.1 Hemel Hempstead Crossing

	Count	% of Respondents
Formal crossing (Pelican(Toucan)/zebra/bridge)	27	20.1%
Speed control (speed limits, roundabout /other calming)	22	16.3%
Better signage (general signage or specifically at the crossing)	11	8.2%

5.2 Roundabout Crossings

Formal crossing (Pelican(Toucan)/zebra/bridge/underpass)	54	40.3%
Speed control (speed limits/other calming)	20	14.9%
Foliage control	14	10.4%
Better signage (general signage or specifically at the crossing)	21	15.7%

5.3 Other

The small B487 Redbourn Lane roundabout car park gets very full, mainly with dog walkers, and it facilitates usage of the Nickey Line and other local footpaths.

The entrance is very tight and now potholed. Entry and exit is slow and affects traffic approaching the roundabout from Harpenden. We had requests for a slightly larger car park with safer and repaired entry/exit.

6 ROUNDABOUT CROSSINGS USAGE COUNT

A count of crossing users in either direction was made in late June and early July. Counting covered:

- from 7am to 8pm in 1 to 2 hour weekday sessions spread over the days of the week to allow for different day volumes , weather variation etc
- from 7am to 7pm in 1 to 2 hour sessions on *both* Saturday and Sunday separately, spread over several weekends again to allow for different day volumes , weather variation etc
- separate counts for different user types (walkers, runners and cyclists)

6.1 Count Results

	Count	% of Overall Count
CYCLISTS	957	60%
RUNNERS	311	19%
WALKERS	339	21%
TOTAL	1607	
WEEKDAYS AVERAGE	176	
SATURDAY	309	
SUNDAY	418	

Notes

- Counts on Saturday and Sunday separately both show heavier usage, especially Sunday at over 400 crossings counted
- No counts were made after 19.00 on Saturday and Sunday - we know some use occurs so overall week count of over 1600 is probably conservative
- Peak average usage is over 1 crossing every minute, e.g. Sunday late mornings
- The small car park is heavily used at times by dog walkers.

6.2 Count Summary Results

1. Roundabout Crossings usage is over 1600 per week, at least in the late June/early July period
2. Peak average usage is over 1 crossing every minute, e.g. Sunday late mornings
3. Cyclists form 60% of users, runners and walkers form about 20% each

7 DISCUSSION AND CALLS FOR ACTION

7.1 Hemel Hempstead Crossing

- There is strong feedback here that there is an issue with speed and traffic volumes at peak times.
- The B487 is speed unlimited here and traffic travels up to at least the allowed 60 mph if not more
- The crossing is not necessarily obvious to many drivers and crossers do not have right of way.
- The B487 on this length has four further RoW footpath crossing points: Redbourn 24, 31, 34 & 38 Rights of Way, plus the Redbourn High Street roundabout which has a 30 mph limit already, and the A5183 Redbourn By-Pass / B487 Redbourn Lane roundabout.
- We propose that Highways be asked to consider a formal limit of (we suggest) 40mph from Aubrey Park Hotel to Harpenden Lane – this will:
 - benefit all the crossings along this length
 - facilitate the traffic exiting Hemel Hempstead Road, and
 - be inexpensive to implement.
- We propose that Highways be asked to upgrade this crossing to a formal Zebra / Toucan crossing which would be far more visible to drivers and give direct protection / priority to crossers.

7.2 A5183 Redbourn By-Pass / B487 Redbourn Lane Roundabout Crossings

- These are perceived by users to be highly dangerous crossings with multiple problems
- They see heavy usage but are significantly deterring growth in Nickey Line use by children, families and adults
- We strongly recommend:
 1. Immediate action by Highways to cut back then regularly manage verge vegetation to improve sightlines – especially the Redbourn Lane car park and the Harpenden Lane corners (see Appendix photos)
 2. Speed limits on all approaching roads and the roundabout
 3. Both crossings be upgraded to formal Zebra / Toucan crossings and repositioned to be further away from the roundabout to allow drivers to have more time to see them and space to stop.

7.3 B487 Redbourn Lane Car Park

- This is a useful and well used facility for Nickey Line and other footpath dog walkers
- It is cramped and has a very poor entrance/exit which slows down entry in particular causing unnecessary traffic disruption
- We recommend immediate maintenance and improvement of the entrance and consideration to slightly increasing its size / usability for single cars.

APPENDIX PHOTOGRAPHS OF ROADS AND CROSSINGS

Redbourn / Hemel Hempstead - B487 Crossing (by the junction with Hemel Hempstead Road)



Hemel Hempstead Crossing Looking towards Harpenden



Hemel Hempstead Crossing from Island Looking towards Hemel Hempstead Road and M1

Redbourn / Harpenden - A5183 Redbourn By-Pass & B487 Redbourn Lane Roundabout Crossings



Redbourn Roundabout From Harpenden Crossing Edge

View of Car Park Corner Towards Hemel Hempstead



View towards Harpenden from Redbourn Lane Island



View towards M1 from Redbourn Lane Island



Restricted view towards Harpenden from Car Park Corner – Users have 2 Lanes to Cross to Reach Safety



First Clear View towards Harpenden from Car Park Corner – from Middle of First Lane



Harpenden Lane Corner - Limited View towards Hemel Hempstead. Users have 2 Lanes to Cross to Reach Safety



Harpenden Lane Corner - First Clear View towards Hemel Hempstead – from Middle of Lane

REDBOURN SHOWING FOOTPATHS (THICK RED LINES) CROSSING BY-PASS



Report produced by David Abernethy, Chairman of Friends of the Nickey Line 27/8/15

Queries to Dave Abernethy, friends@nickeyline.org, 07788 198283

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