

## Cities Fit For Cycling

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### Overview

The launch of The Times Cities Fit for Cycling Campaign has put the conditions for safe cycling onto the political agenda, and put the role of local authorities under the spotlight.

This briefing provides an update on the debate and an overview of the ways in which local authorities can contribute to safer cycling conditions in cities.

Because of the high level of interest the campaign has attracted this briefing will be of interest to all elected members, transport and road safety officers, and health improvement specialists.

### Briefing in full

On 2 February The Times newspaper launched a major campaign called Cities Fit For Cycling <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/cyclesafety/>. The campaign includes an 8-point manifesto:

- fit sensors, audible turning alarms, extra mirrors and safety bars to stop cyclists being thrown under the wheels to lorries entering a city centre
- identify the 500 most dangerous road junctions and redesign or fit them with priority traffic lights for cyclists and Trixi mirrors that allow lorry drivers to see cyclists on their near-side
- conduct a national audit of cycling to find out how many people cycle in Britain and how cyclists are killed or injured
- allocate 2 per cent of the Highways Agency budget for high standard cycle routes (£100 million annually)
- improve cyclist and driver training and make cycle safety a core part of the driving test

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- introduce 20mph as the default speed limit in residential areas where there are no cycle lanes
- invite businesses to sponsor cycleways
- appoint a cycling commissioner in every city to make sure these reforms happen.

The newspaper is continuing with the campaign and has taken the unusual step of making all the relevant articles public by placing them outside of its paywall.

The momentum generated by the campaign has pushed cycle safety up the political agenda and forced the government to respond. Parliament held a debate on cycle safety on 23 February. While the focus of the campaign may be on cities, the heartache to others caused by the death or serious injury of someone cycling is not reserved to urban areas, and conditions can clearly be improved everywhere. Some of the most articulate contributions to the debate were from MPs representing rural constituencies.

The Transport Select Committee has also announced that it is to hold an inquiry into cycle safety shortly.

The national debate has inevitably drawn in local authorities: the Transport Minister, Norman Baker, and the Road Safety Minister, Mike Penning, wrote to all local authorities in February urging them to promote cycling and improve safety for cyclists.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/cyclesafety/article3334735.ece>

Responding to these demands, Councillor Peter Box, Chairman of the Local Government Association's Economy and Transport Board, said that local authorities have been maintaining a "chronically underfunded road system for many years which, coupled with the recent severe funding cuts from central government, means resources for a vast overhaul of junction layouts and speed limit alterations are extremely stretched."

Nonetheless, councils can take action on the following.

### **Support Bikeability**

The nationally accredited scheme for cycle training for children and adults is called Bikeability. The government makes grants available to local authorities outside of London to deliver the scheme to children; in London training for children and adults is funded by Transport for London.

[insert image]

Caption: Local authorities take the lead on delivering the government's Bikeability cycle training scheme – the government has made £11 million available to 2014/15

Bikeability is very popular. A 2011 Ipsos MORI survey found that 93 per cent of parents surveyed felt that the training had a positive impact on their child's safety when they cycle on the road.

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110119211124/http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/cycling/bikeabilitytraining/>

The government has confirmed that Bikeability funding will continue to the end of this Parliament (2014/15). Local authorities should already have applied for funding for 2012/13.

### **Reduce speed**

Evidence shows that reducing vehicle speed is a key factor in cutting the number of road deaths and injuries. For example, research conducted by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine found that introducing 20 mph zones led to a reduction in road casualties of 41.9 per cent (16.9 per cent for cyclist casualties). The biggest decrease was recorded for younger children.

<http://www.bmj.com/content/339/bmj.b4469.full>

Some local authorities – including Portsmouth, Darlington and Liverpool (visit the 20's Plenty for us website for a full list - <http://www.20splentyforuk.org.uk/>) – are responding to this evidence by implementing 20 mph zones in residential areas. The London Borough of Islington is the first council in the country to agree to a 20 mph speed limit on all streets under its control.

### **Prepare and implement cycling strategies**

Local authorities can choose to prepare a cycling strategy. The political attention that safe cycling has attracted recently has put some of these strategies under scrutiny. For example, the London Borough of Southwark was forced to revisit its revised cycling strategy after campaigners criticised it for lacking ambition. The council has now agreed to work with the local cycling group, Southwark Cyclists, to identify and develop as many routes as possible that are 'free from intimidatory traffic'.

<http://southwarkcyclists.org.uk/news/cyclists-and-southwark-council-join-together-create-safer-borough-bikes-over-next-5-years>

Regarding implementation, the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) was set up as a single funding source for local authority transport schemes. In the Parliamentary debate on cycle safety, the Transport Minister, Norman Baker, stated that 38 of the 39 schemes funded so far by the LSTF include an element of cycling. Bids for the second tranche of LSTF funded closed recently.

### **Train lorry drivers**

The Times' manifesto stipulates that special mirrors and other devices should be fitted to lorries to reduce the number of crashes with cyclists, and that driver training should include an element of cycle safety. Five London boroughs now fund cycle awareness training for lorry drivers in the city (<http://www.no-more-lethal->

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[lorries.org.uk/](http://lorries.org.uk/)), which includes lorry drivers riding bikes to help them understand the perspective of a cyclist and how they can drive better to avoid them.

## Comment

LGiU members may recall that thinking about how to increase cycling and improve cycling conditions is not new for the LGiU. In 2009 LGiU and Cycling England held an inquiry into how best local authorities could promote cycling. The findings and recommendations were published in the document Active Communities: Cycling to a Better Quality of Life.

<https://member.lgiu.org.uk/whatwedo/Publications/Pages/activecommunities.aspx>

However, there is nothing like sustained coverage from an influential national newspaper to get an issue onto the political agenda, and to keep it there. From the Prime Minister down, the government has been keen to agree with the campaign while also pointing out all that it is doing to support cycling. Norman Baker argued recently that cycling is core government policy. And he had a message for council leaders and chief executives: they have to realise that cycling is “not a bolt on”.

If cycling is central to government policy, then the coalition needs to rethink how it is delivering. Because it is clear that provision for cycling in the UK is failing when compared with our continental neighbours. In Denmark, 19 per cent of all trips are by bike, and 55 per cent of schoolchildren cycle to school. Even closer to home, in Holland, more than a quarter (27 per cent) of all trips are made by bike. In England, the figure is 2 per cent.

The London Cycling Campaign has picked up on the chasm and is using the slogan Love London, Go Dutch (<http://lcc.org.uk/pages/key-principles-full>) as the centrepiece of its 2012 London Mayoral election campaign. Key to the campaign is the view that the fundamental difference between Holland and England is the cycling infrastructure: for example, high quality segregated cycleways that are separate from vehicles are far more common in the former.

[insert image]

Caption: Cycle campaigning groups are increasingly looking to countries such as Holland to see how they have achieved high levels of cycling in the last 40 years when rates in the UK have declined dramatically

The popularity of Bikeability is an interesting insight into how success in one area can pose challenges in another. The logical outcome of providing good quality training is that more people will want to start cycling more often. However, people’s general experience of cycling is that the road conditions need to be safer. Might it be

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that by training more people to cycle on the road the government now finds itself in a position where it has to do much more to improve the poor road conditions for cyclists, partly because of the demand its own training scheme has helped to create?

Although local authorities are the main providers of Bikeability, in other ways they may feel that their scope to act on cycle safety concerns is limited. But as the Southwark example shows above, cycling is an issue where elected members can influence decisions about how to cater for cyclists locally, and perhaps tweak existing budgets to make small changes that could have a big impact on how safe it is to cycle.

So, where to from here? The Times has achieved political traction with its campaign, but no actual increase in funding has yet been promised. While there are things that local authorities can do now, there is a danger that cycle safety will become mired in a wrangle between the government, which says that it already supports this, and local authorities, which believe there is little they can do without receiving more money to fund improvements.

Perhaps the final word should be left to a city mayor. Enrique Peñalosa was Mayor of Bogota in Columbia from 1998–2001, and is credited with transforming conditions for cyclists in the city by creating a system that works for everyone:

“We cannot continue to deceive ourselves thinking that to paint a little line on a road is a bike way. A bicycle way that is not safe for an 8-year old is not a bicycle way.”

### Related briefings

Transport and Health Resource: delivering healthy local transport plans  
<https://member.lgiu.org.uk/briefings/2011/Pages/201100853.aspx>

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