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Your ref:

Councillors of the Environment &
Transport Area Joint Committee



Cambridge Cycling Campaign

P.O. Box 204, Cambridge CB4 3FN
01223 690718 (phone & fax)
contact@camcycle.org.uk
www.camcycle.org.uk

Dear Councillor,

Introduction and Cycling issues

We write to introduce ourselves and to summarise our views on a range of cycling-related issues.

By way of reminder, Cambridge Cycling Campaign is a local organisation with over 700 members. We are entirely volunteer-run. We work closely with local government and others to improve conditions for cyclists in Cambridge. As you will be aware, more people (25%) cycle to work in Cambridge than anywhere else in the UK.

We have an extensive website at www.camcycle.org.uk, where information on our activities and about cycling in Cambridge can be found. We also publish a bi-monthly Newsletter for our members and for decision-makers, and we have taken the liberty of ensuring that you are on our mailing list for this.

Why provide for cyclists?

Promoting and catering for increased levels of cycling is in the interests of all, including motorists. For instance, every new cyclist is potentially one fewer car in a traffic queue.

Together with the associated benefits of a less-polluted city, a more efficient transport network, and benefits to the individual of cycling, it makes sense to give greater priority to providing a high-quality cycling environment. Although levels of cycling in Cambridge are high by comparison with other cities, we believe that it is important to promote cycling to increase levels further.

Provision for cyclists doesn't just mean cycle facilities

People will only cycle if they see a direct benefit to doing so. Cyclists need a cycle-friendly road environment, rather than merely 'special' facilities which in practice are often less direct, which force people to give way at side roads, and which are often encumbered by obstructions.

It cannot be assumed that off-road facilities are inherently safer than on-road facilities. The correct approach is to reduce road danger rather than forcing cyclists onto the pavement. Indeed, we believe the latter is a key reason for increased levels of illegal cycling on other pavements, and is quite rightly much to the irritation of many pedestrians, whose environment in the city is arguably poor and getting worse. Government policy is clear that 'shared-use' (i.e. pavement) facilities should be a provision of last resort. Yet, this is usually the form of provision considered first by officers.

For instance, the southern entrance to the Milton Bridge is a pavement facility. It is less direct than using the road would be, and involves hazards such as crossing driveways rather than being in clear view of other vehicles as would be the case on the road. Indeed, shortly after its inception, an accident occurred due to a vehicle emerging from a side-road.

While many recent infrastructure developments are to be welcomed, such as the bridge at Milton itself, we are very concerned at the lack of basic standards being followed by the Councils in a wide range of changes. For instance, cycle lanes are often below the absolute minimum recommended by government, even in cases where there is plenty of road-space available.

Enclosed is a copy of our Manifesto for Cycling Provision. Although published almost ten years ago at the inception of the Campaign, it remains as relevant today as it was then. In the document, we describe some of the ways in which the ordinary road network can be made more cycle-friendly without providing specific cycle facilities. The most important way is to reduce the speed and volume of motor traffic. Another is to design the road layout to minimize conflict between cyclists and other road users.

What about cyclists who break the law?

We believe that responsible, legal cycling is in the best interests of cyclists themselves and of the wider community. We strongly support higher levels of enforcement of all traffic regulations, for all categories of road user, to reduce conflict and road danger.

We recognise that some cyclists do break the law, and that enforcement and education are needed. However, we would also note that levels of law-breaking by motorists are also high. Government statistics published in 2001 state that 65% of motorists do not obey the speed limit in urban roads with a 30mph speed limit. The consequences of this are manifestly much more serious: 823 pedestrians were killed by motor vehicles in 2001, of which speed clearly plays a significant part. There are also high levels of breaking of parking regulations across the city, with associated delays and inconvenience to all road users.

We are therefore strongly against the singling-out of cyclists as law-breakers, and believe that such a view should not be used as a smokescreen for not improving the cycling environment. We enclose a copy of our position paper on Responsible, Legal Cycling for your information, setting out our views in more detail, should this be of interest.

Our views on the City Centre cycling ban

We were extremely pleased at the decision taken by the Committee (and later supported by the full City Council) to run an experiment to suspend the city centre ban. We have since been liaising with Officers on some of the details.

Very many cyclists continue to find the existing ban a considerable inconvenience, one on which we have campaigned for very many years. We are glad that the long-standing lack of an adequate south to north cycling route through the city centre is finally being addressed, and indeed hope that the experiment will prove successful. We believe that pedestrians and cyclists can co-exist in the city centre, as demonstrated by the lack of current major problems on Sundays, when cycling has always been permitted.

The need to increase cycle parking considerably

Whilst cycle parking is a requirement of new developments (although the standards seem rarely followed in practice), there is currently no means to get new cycle parking spaces in public areas. New provision is piecemeal and rare.

There are many locations across the city where there is space for cycle parking. Cycle parking is particularly needed outside local shops, pubs, parks and other public buildings. Residential cycle parking is also desperately needed and is common on the continent. Yet, in the case of Petersfield, for instance, there are a merely a handful of cycle parking spaces (with the consequent result of cycles littering the pavement) compared to the hundreds of car parking spaces.

The cycle parking outside St. Catherine's College in the city centre shows what can be achieved. The removal of a mere two car parking spaces has enabled a large number of cycle parking spaces to be provided and the pavement to be passable by pedestrians again.

We believe a significant omission from the Council's work is any sort of structural initiative to increase cycle parking across the city, and we would ask the Committee to push for such an initiative. While car parking seems to be sacrosanct, cycle parking remains the exception rather than the rule. Cycle parking needs to become widespread, and should be cheap to provide, with the main requirement being officer time to negotiate changes to land use.

Bus lane schemes

The issue of bus lanes on Hills Road and Milton Road arose a few years ago and seems likely to return to the Committee in due course. The Council's proposals were to force cyclists onto the pavement by introducing bus lanes on the other side of the road, despite any clear evidence of widespread delays due to the lack of such lanes.

Adding a bus lane in a road of two general traffic lanes plus a cycle lane each side results in a road of three, relatively tight-fitting, traffic lanes. Cyclists who ride on the road thus appear to 'hold up' vehicles, as the latter cannot then overtake. The resulting effect is known as the 'Milton Road' effect, where cyclists on the road often experience abuse from motorists.

We carried out a series of census measurements which entirely discredited the claims of delays and the need for new bus lanes. One Councillor even took part in the measurements we did and saw for himself what the situation was really like.

We want to see solutions such as on-street ticketing applied first (long-promised by the bus companies but still not yet delivered) to reduce delays, before proposing to force cyclists onto the pavement and destroy some of the best cycle lanes in the city.

Corn Exchange Street contraflow

We have argued for the need for a contraflow to ensure that the Grand Arcade's new cycle parking facility (which is arguably in the wrong place) will actually get used. We believe officers have been over-cautious on this scheme and that it is important that demand is catered for here. We hope that Cabinet will eventually approve the scheme.

Yours sincerely,
on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign,

Martin Lucas-Smith
Co-ordinator