

October 19, 2010

Our ref: C 10 007

Councillor Mac McGuire (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Access), Councillor Roy Pegram (Cabinet Member for Growth, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning) and Cllr Tuck (Leader of the Council),

Cc: Contacts for each political group, The Chief Executive, and senior officers

Cambridgeshire County Council



Cambridge Cycling Campaign

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Dear Councillors,

Cycling: the need to maintain Cycling Officers and cycling funding following cutbacks

With the impending cuts to Local Authorities, we write to stress the importance of maintaining a cycling presence within the transport officer team when you consider changes to your budget. Although we have no knowledge of any planned changes, we write pre-emptively to express our support for the work of the County's cycling officers and for funding of cycling-related initiatives within the Council.

Key points:

- Cycling contributes 10% of county and around 20-25% of Cambridge city journeys;
- Cycling deserves representation within the officer team in line with these levels;
- Maintaining an officer presence is essential for obtaining new government funding;
- Cycling schemes have a high rate of return and cost less – both important at a time of restricted funding;
- Bikeability cycle training is essential to continue funding even if budget cutbacks are severe.

Ensuring that cycling retains a fair share of officer resources

As you will be aware, Cambridge – and Cambridgeshire more widely – have a high rate of cycling, with around a quarter of journeys to work by bicycle within the city, and a tenth of all journeys across the county as a whole. Without this level of cycling, it is fair to say that many places would grind to a halt with far worse traffic conditions. With housing growth still taking place, and the need to maintain an efficient network as the prosperity of this resilient region grows, the need to ensure continued investment in cycling remains.

In equity terms, in the event of a slimming down of the transport division, it would be unacceptable for the county to employ transport officers covering areas such as highways, public transport, rights of way, guided bus, etc., whilst failing to represent the presence of the form of transport that contributes such a high proportion of journeys.

Attracting new government funding

Cambridgeshire's record on promoting cycling and improving cycling conditions puts it in a good position to attract future funding from the recently-announced Sustainable Transport Fund which will effectively replace Cycling England and other initiatives (which we are sad to see being axed). Indeed, as you will be aware, Cambridge's status as a Cycling Demonstration Town, and the millions of pounds of funding that came with this, would not have been possible without this record. However, it would clearly not be feasible for the County to claim future leadership or commitment to cycling without at least one member of staff dedicated full-time to cycling initiatives.

The key benefits we feel that a Cycling Officer brings is as an internal auditor over transport schemes run by other colleagues, monitoring of planning-related matters to ensure that cycling provision is taken into account, and developing new cycling provision to deal with problems on the road/street network.

For all these reasons, we feel it is important that at least one dedicated Cycling Officer is maintained within any smaller officer team you may be considering.

High rates of return for cycling schemes generally

In general terms, we would like to remind you of the high rate of return that cycling schemes bring, despite their low cost. Indeed, in a climate of low capital and revenue availability, cycling improvements should be high-priority because they can be achieved within a highly squeezed budget, unlike schemes involving heavier engineering.

The Department for Transport's own model (WebTAG) for economic appraisal of cycling schemes gives a very high rate of return in transport terms: a benefit:cost ratio of 3:1. Work by Sustrans gives even higher benefit ratios, up to 33:1 in some cases. In other words, you can achieve a lot more by putting small amounts of money into cycling, than spending much larger amounts on other transportation projects.

Bikeability

In the event of severe cutbacks, our number one priority for cycling would be the safeguarding of continued funding of the Bikeability cycle training scheme. High quality cycle training for children (but also adults) is essential if we are to see continued levels of cycling in the area, particularly given the high residential turnover. Any cutbacks to this area would be disastrous in terms of road safety. Cycle training is proven to reduce cycle accidents and is the most important place to spend money to reduce traffic collisions.

The scheme's focus on using experienced cyclists to deliver training which deals with real-life road conditions is key to the success of cycle training.

For all these reasons, we would therefore welcome any assurances you can give over the retention of cycling posts within the transport officer team and over ensuring continued funding for high-quality cycle training and cycling infrastructure in proportion to their demonstrated value in this area.

Yours sincerely,
on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign,

Martin Lucas-Smith
Co-ordinator