



Policy Briefing: Public Art (September 2013)

Cambridge Cycling Campaign supports public art when it assists the development of a public awareness about transport issues, especially in relation to cycling and active modes generally. The bicycle is an important part of the history and culture of Cambridge. Our city is also the national leader in cycling mode share. This is why the bicycle is an obvious object or reflection or celebration through public art. So far, the bicycle has rarely featured in the public art installed locally. It is time for the city with the highest rate of cycling in the country to address this oversight.

Proposals for public art should clearly lay out how they engage the local community and local issues. We encourage art projects which offer the public an opportunity to reflect on the use of motorised transport, and which explore the fact that the space of community is primarily the road, the space of transport.

Bike-Awareness in Cambridge:



Cambridge, Guild Hall: Artwork (interior) with focus on transport modes, lacking bicycle. Right: Long Beach (California), displaying bicycle artwork proudly on the outside of city hall

Desired Outcomes:

- Express and assert the value of cycling and human powered transport
- Increase road safety through raised awareness of vulnerable road users
- Reflect the issues and conflicts experienced on Cambridge roads
- Celebration of a significant local mode-share achievement
- Addressing psychological and cultural barriers to cycling
- Enhancing the sense of community among cyclists
- Include cycling in a highly visible public agenda which recognizes the value human powered transport
- Give the local community a glimpse of what the city would feel like if it was no longer dominated by cars
- Developing civic pride and community based on overcoming car dependency

Background:

Preconceptions, cultural attitudes, personal habits and fears create major barriers to a wider uptake of cycling. To address these barriers, we encourage public agencies and developers in Cambridge to use public art to advance the individual and communal recognition that cycling is an easy and pleasant activity, which is beneficial for all. Public art focussing on cycling will help to celebrate the fact that Cambridge leads the nation with high rates of cycling.

Funding:

We encourage the local authorities and developers to recognize that public art can be a powerful encouragement tool in line with locally adopted transport policy goals. A local concentration of bicycle themed art would also benefit the development of Cambridge as a bicycle tourism destination

Evaluation Criteria:

When evaluating public art proposals, the following criteria should be applied

Address and dimension: Define the implied observer of public art. Which road users are addressed?

Equity and equality: When representing the body of a cyclist, the work should go beyond the stereotype of the male cyclist. The number of female (and young) cyclists is considered a good indicator for the status of cycling provision. The male cyclist tends to represent sporting achievement, which is not in itself a community value.

Road safety: Public Art which distracts drivers and road users from the traffic around them can become a road safety hazard. Public art which is designed and able to reduce car traffic speeds is welcome.

Some examples for public art related to the discourse of active transport:

Counting devices:

A project that reflects back to the public its own transport choices. A device which counts and updates modal share numbers and displays additional traffic related information (CO2 savings etc, compare car parking capacity displays)

City wide projects:

Public art can reach areas of awareness which traditional traffic signs often fail to reach. Where signs like “Yield to cyclists” “Reduce speed for cyclists” etc may not be sufficient, a large scale display of a bicycle themed art object at a major arterial road can help to focus the attention of drivers on vulnerable road users. A city-wide project could envision a series of artistic gates at the entrances into Cambridge.

Decorated bike path:

A local bike path is colour coded with the BRCA2 gene sequence. This work is innovative and laudable. It elevates the experience of cyclist, but remains invisible for car drivers. It does not raise the public awareness about transport issues.



Events:

Event based art projects explore and cultivate the friendly community among cyclists. Drivers sit in a steel box behind closed windows while among cyclists an easy communal atmosphere develops which can be emphasized by appropriate artistic or theatrical interventions. These could have an educational aspects or pursue the tradition of street theatre and would depend on secondary media coverage to reach a wider public. (e.g. kinetikaonline). Art events could include: Artistic cycling, unicycling; parades, street closures to provide a safe cycling environment; Annual Bicycle Celebration, working with large numbers of bicycle badges; Temporary addition of bicycle iconography to existing public art; Valentines Day bike messages, etc

Bridges:

Elevated locations or bridges crossing major motorways offer significant opportunities to express and further modal share policies.

Artistic elaboration for bicycle parking:

Bicycle parking stands have already attracted artistic attention by a team of local yarnbombers. The colours or the colour scheme for public bicycle parking offers artistic opportunities. Car shaped parking structures would have added value if shape or colour can be adapted to local circumstances.