

LANCASTER AND DISTRICT: CYCLING DEMONSTRATION TOWN

Comments and ideas following on from the CDT meeting

In concentrating their very small budget (in national terms) on the six demonstration towns, Cycle England are looking to us to demonstrate how a moderate investment in cycling can produce a high value for money result in terms of a level of increased cycling which has a significant effect on health, wellbeing and congestion. We need to be careful not to spend the money in ways that will please many existing cyclists but will not deliver more regular riders in the city. In particular major new or extended cycle tracks out from the urban core are very desirable, and I have a shopping list myself, but they are unlikely to deliver the number of new commuters we need. To achieve an order of magnitude increase in cycling we need to campaign on two main fronts.

- First to improve conditions for cycling within the urban core.
- To change the public attitude to cycling.

Improving conditions within the urban core.

This may involve some short linking cycle tracks and improved access to existing tracks but dedicated cycle tracks can never serve more than a small proportion of the places that people need to visit. The streets do serve all these places so what we need is to make the streets safe, friendly places to cycle as our first priority. To do this we need to concentrate on the following:

- Reduce peak speeds and high speed dashes by 20 mph limits.
- Increased bus and cycle lanes on main roads.
- Allow responsible cycling on pedestrian streets.
- Educate drivers into the advantages of bicycles to them.
- Keep the streets well maintained and clear of glass.

20 mph limits. The speed of traffic is one of the main deterrents to potential cyclists taking up cycling yet in Lancaster the average speed of traffic is very low. The problem is the short high speed dashes from one hold up to the next or from junction to junction in residential streets. In Hull extensive 20 mph zones have had a dramatic effect on the number of crashes and an even greater effect on casualties. As a consequence cycling has risen. What is needed is 20 mph limit for all residential streets, shopping streets, near schools. In fact it would make sense to have a default 20 mph limit throughout the urban core.

Before you dismiss this as cloud cuckoo land and decide I've been smoking something illegal think about it again. Lancaster is a Demonstration Town. We are supposed to be looking for innovative approaches to cycling promotion at moderate cost. Well, traffic calmed 20mph zones are known to improve conditions for cycling and walking, but we can't possibly traffic calm the whole city with the funding

available. However we could use a sign only 20 mph default limit over the whole urban core with reminder signs on all main roads. This would probably require special permission from the DfT. However they are supposed to be looking for us to come up with innovative approaches to cycle promotion so, with the correct approach, they should be prepared to allow a special trial of an area wide 20 mph limit with signs and publicity but without humps or other calming hardware. This is the sort of innovative scheme that could deliver that improved feeling of safety needed to get more people out on their bikes. Some time since the Scottish Executive allowed tests of sign only 20 mph zones and, while not as good as calmed zones, they proved sufficiently effective to allow the trial schemes to be extended. We should take the opportunity to prove it works on a city wide scale.

But won't it slow journeys across the city even more and make congestion worse? No! The effect on most journey times will be minimal. In any journey across the city very little of the distance is travelled at significantly above 20 mph. During the working day it is very unusual to be able to travel significantly above 20 mph for even one mile between the southern and northern 30 mph limits. One mile at 30 mph takes 2 minutes, one mile at 20 mph takes 3 minutes so the most it would add to the normal journey would be one minute. In practice it would be less still as the short bursts of faster travel only result in longer waits at the next hold up.

Increased bus and cycle lanes on main roads.

The road system in the centre of Lancaster has been driven by the need to manage the motor traffic but there appears to have been little consistent design effort for cycle traffic.

There are some useful features like the cycle lane down King Street but then it ends at Meeting House Lane. The Toucan Crossing at Chapel Street and the contra flow cycle lane are useful but they don't link up to the town centre or with access from the east.

On the up side of the one way system where cyclists have most difficulty there is no help except for a peculiar cycle lane up the right hand side of Thurnham Street which is little used and has a dangerous kink where it is overrun by HGVs and Busses.

I feel a bus lane round the whole of the one way system would be appropriate but failing this a thorough and consistent look at cycle lanes is required. Looking at just one section:

From Stonewell up Gt. John St there is plenty of room for a cycle lane until the top where a build out has deliberately narrowed the road so that cycles cannot get through and have difficulty getting back into the traffic stream. This build out should be removed allowing a cycle lane through into Dalton Square.

Crossing Dalton Square is difficult as cars are liable to squeeze past on either side. A wide red cycle lane is required here to the traffic lights which should have an ASL.

Up Thurnham Street vehicles tend to hug the left kerb making it impossible for cyclists to get past however they will always find enough room to pull out to pass a cyclist then pull in again. There should be a cycle lane right up to the lights which should again have an ASL.

The Approaches:

I know best the Southern approach to Lancaster so I will consider that. It is absurd that the A6, the main artery into the City from the south, has one third of its capacity dedicated to free parking resulting in routine congestion for public transport and dangerous squeezing for cycles. A bus lane down Scotforth and Greaves Roads would be a tremendous improvement for public transport and cycling and would also improve access for ambulances.

The A6 is the best road out of the City to the South. To try to send Cyclists a long way round over the steep hill of Bowerham is totally counter productive for increasing cycling. It requires a level of climbing ability that most casual cyclists don't aspire to. What is needed is a cycle lane up the A6. This will give confidence to many more cyclists to ride up the A6 which is gently graded and easily rideable by even inexperienced cyclists.

Allow responsible cycling on pedestrian streets.

The pedestrian area is a major block to cycling. There is no easy way round it. Also the large number of shoppers is a great pool of potential cyclists. Permitting cycling within the pedestrian area together with the provision of more cycle stands in the area could deliver many more cycle trips. Cycling in pedestrian areas works well on the continent and is permitted in Cambridge. It is accepted that cyclists and pedestrians can share the Lune Millennium Park so why not the pedestrian streets in the city centre? It may be said that some young cyclists would ride dangerously and cause a nuisance. This may be so, but those cyclists already ride through the pedestrian area with apparent impunity. The ban only deters responsible cyclists. A trial scheme should permit cycling subject to conditions that cyclists ride slowly and give way to pedestrians at all times.

Educate drivers into the advantages of bicycles to them.

This is of major importance in improving the conditions for cycling in the city. Being made a cycling demonstration town is a great opportunity to educate drivers on all aspects of cycling. We will need to direct publicity into every house and business in the city with many

messages about the demonstration town. It is important that one of the messages is that increased cycling is also good for car drivers. Each bike is one less car looking for a parking space; one less car adding to the congestion. Even children riding to school means less cars driving them to school. We also need to get over the message to watch out for cyclists at all times and to give them plenty of room when passing. Don't overtake and turn left, the cyclist may be travelling faster than you think. Particular messages should be directed to bus drivers about not passing too closely or moving in before they are completely clear. Also messages about giving more clearance in windy weather when the turbulence round their vehicle has such a powerful effect on a bicycle.

Keep the streets well maintained and clear of glass.

This is self evident but the highway maintenance in Lancaster is quite poor particularly with respect to damaged, sunken or raised ironwork. Also where cyclists are likely to be riding close to the edge of the road they should not use great thick yellow lines as these deflect tyres and can hold puddles which then freeze.

To change the public attitude to cycling.

Moving to the second front, changing the public attitude to cycling is more a matter of soft measures which I see under the following headings:

- Publicity.
- Events.
- Training.
- Support and Encouragement.

Publicity.

Publicity is obviously involved in many aspects of the campaign but under this heading I want to focus on specific messages we need to get across to the non-cycling public not the publicity for specific events. However all the advertising for events or facilities needs to be consistent with the overall message. For example publicity for off road cycle tracks should not imply that cycling on the road is dangerous or to be avoided. That is "OFF MESSAGE", and counter to our overall aims.

The Messages we need to get across include those already mentioned above in Educating Drivers. Here is my list. I'm sure there are many more to add to it.

- Increased Cycling is good for everyone including drivers.
- Be aware of Cyclists and give them room.
- That cyclist isn't going to grab your parking spot.
- Cyclists do pay for the roads through taxes & many have a car they have left at home.

- Cyclists have a right to be on the road.
- Cycling on the roads is safe and healthy.
- Cycling is quick from point to point for journeys of a few miles.
- You don't have to wear Lycra if you don't want to.
- Cycling makes you feel good.

Events.

There were plenty of suggestions at the meeting. I would only add that Company of Cyclists can offer good try out events to which they can bring a wide selection of bikes including many fancy ones that will attract attention and bring in the crowds. Contact info@compofcyclists.demon.co.uk or see www.companyofcyclists.com .

If you had it as say a May Bank Holiday weekend event you could also get a mountain bike or BMX stunt rider in to put on a show. There was a very good one at the CTC York Rally last year.

A May Bank Holiday weekend would also be a good event to Officially launch Lancaster's Summer of Cycling or some such catch phrase to co-ordinate lots of different aspects of the demonstration town.

Training.

Again this was mentioned at the meeting. I would see it as involving a major boost to cycle training at both primary and secondary schools and also adult training. The CTC Nationally has been developing a standard for cycle training. It would be sensible to follow this up before looking at any other source of cycle training. The following is an extract from a recent newsletter.

"A grant of £950,000 has been awarded by Cycling England to the CTC Charitable Trust to accelerate the take-up of new national standards for cycle training, a scheme that will consign the Cycling Proficiency test to the history books. Having developed the original Cycling Proficiency test in the 1930s, CTC has over the last few years been instrumental in the development of a new up-to-date national standard for cycle training, which reflects the needs of today's cyclist. The new training uses three levels of training to give cyclists the practical skills and confidence to make more cycling trips, safely. To find out more call the national cycle training helpline on 0870 607 0415 or visit www.ctc.org.uk/cycletraining

Support and Encouragement.

I would expect this to involve such things as bike buddying and lead rides.

Off Road Schemes.

Although I believe that the main emphasis should be directed towards On Road cycling in order to deliver a major increase in cycling to work,

school and to the shops, I recognise that there is a demand for more off road facilities. While these may result in some increase in leisure cycling they will also increase motor traffic as users bring their bikes to the cycle track on the back of the car.

Where off road cycle tracks are created they should not be segregated facilities with a central white line. The segregation doesn't work as it is ignored by almost half the pedestrians and quite a lot of the cyclists who can't decide which side to pass other cyclists. Worse though is that it is confusing for children who learn to ride on segregated paths. It is difficult enough to get some children to ride on the left without having them ride first on the right when going one way on a segregated path. Far better is to treat cycle paths as a narrow lane and ride on the left except when you have to move over to pass someone. This is good training for later riding on the road.

Among the off road options I am aware of I would put them in the following order of value for increasing cycling.

- Officially Permitted Cycling on the Morecambe Promenade.
- Improve Canal towpath surface and access between Hammerton Hall and the Water Witch including access to the Lune Millennium Path.
- Lune Valley Path between Hornby, Wray and Wennington.
- Improve the links to the Millennium Bridge behind Sainsbury's and under the Greyhound Bridge Road to the Millennium Path.
- Improve the links to the Millennium Bridge from Damside Street, it is risky crossing to access the bridge due to poor sight lines and the high speed of some traffic under the former railway bridge.
- Improve access to the Skerton Bridge underpass from Derby St and Lune Street.
- Extend the surfaced towpath from Carnforth to Kellet Lane Bridge.
- Surface towpath from Water Witch to The Borough Boundary at Bay Horse and Down the branch to Glasson.
- Complete the Lune Valley Path from Bull Beck to Hornby (to link up with the Hornby Wennington section above).

I hope this rather long list of ideas is useful

Regards

Matt Hodges,

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