

Two Years In: Dynamo's assessment of the CDT project

1. As a Cycling Demonstration Town (CDT) we're clearly not doing very well - considering what could've changed, very little actually has changed. We're meant to be achieving a major impact on cycling levels; but we think that, at best, the current impact of the CDT project is minor.
2. Accepting point 1 does not mean the CDT team is doing a bad job. To the contrary, Dynamo recognises the hard work of many people, and applauds the efforts that have so far been made. We include council officers, council members, everyone on the steering group, and the many people who have been volunteering in many different ways.

People are doing the best they can, and some progress has been made. To give some specific examples, the improved signage along the Lancaster/Morecambe Greenway is great; the canal's obvious potential as a wonderful cycling corridor is gradually being realised; we've got a couple of new cycling contraflows; Morecambe Prom is now open to cycling; the Go Ride club is pulling lots of young people into cycling. Then there is the undoubted success of cycle training in schools by Bike-it and Pedal Power, who have both received support from the CDT. Moreover, we've still got one year to go, a year in which further improvements can, and we think will, be made.

That said, some of what is happening in the name of cycling promotion is counter productive (such as encouraging shared use of pavements rather than reallocation of road space to cycling; and inserting 'cutting edge' features, such as the new 'magic roundabout' outside The Platform, which exposes cyclists to danger from left turning motorists. The squandering of resources on expensive consultants who have produced city centre plans that do nothing to improve conditions for cyclists and are way over budget. Most importantly, all the changes which have so far taken place under the CDT project, are both piecemeal and inadequate.

3. Dynamo believes we need to put point 1 into a wider context: all the CDTs are failing. None of the 6 towns is doing well. That, Dynamo believes, is because we all face similar obstacles.
4. Our point, put prosaically, is that we have been sold a lie. Perhaps we were a little naive 2 years ago - to believe that we could really boost cycling with a little bit more money and a little bit more status. We all wanted to believe that, it was in our interests to believe that; Cycling England wanted us to believe that; and it's very convenient for central government if people believe that. But it is simply not the case.

5. We are now all more aware of the very real barriers to boosting cycling at the local level. We have finally woken up to the impossibility of promoting cycling in an 'anti-cycling' policy environment. Central government, via a woefully under-funded Cycling England, has passed responsibility for promoting cycling onto local actors without the power and ability to deliver.
6. Dynamo believes we should now seek to pass that responsibility back to where it properly resides, to central government, including the Department for Transport. We therefore invite Lancaster City Council's CDT team, the 5 other CDT teams, and the cycle campaigning world to join us in lobbying Cycling England, the Department for Transport and central government to institute the changes which will enable genuine, effective cycling promotion at the local level.
7. To reiterate, Dynamo applauds the efforts of Lancaster City Council's CDT team, the other CDTs, Cycling England and hard working campaigners everywhere. It is not easy to remain motivated and keep working hard in an unforgiving political environment, yet people are continuing to give their best even when the odds are stacked against them.

But Dynamo calls the CDT project a sham. Dynamo believes we must recognise and advertise this sham in order to apply pressure for real change, changes in transport policy that will genuinely enable people at a local level to promote cycling and achieve substantial increases in levels of cycling.

8. Dynamo believes this is how the CDT project could be most effective. If all we CDTs join together and proclaim loudly that we've been set up, our hands are tied, and to boost cycling we need policy changes at a national level, then we can have an influence and - just maybe - we can effect genuine change for the better, and change which will have much broader effect, well beyond the 6 current demonstration towns. So we need to demand a policy environment which:
 - allocates vastly more money than hitherto to cycling. Cycling England is requesting a budget of £250 million from central government, and it is seeking to expand its CDT project. Last time it requested £70 million, and it was given £5 million. But we say that £250 million is still way too little;
 - positively encourages and facilitates mandatory speed restrictions;
 - makes cycle contraflows the norm rather than the exception;
 - always prioritises cycling over the movement of motorised vehicle (this entails specific interventions such as cycling always having right of way at junctions);
 - changes the cost structure of motoring, so that variable costs become an ever greater proportion of total costs;

- changes the law, to put the burden of responsibility for accidents onto drivers of motorised vehicles.

This, Dynamo believes, is the politically astute move which we 'first-wave' Cycling Demonstration Towns should now be making. We must use what media attention and collective muscle we might possess to apply pressure where it's really needed. This is not about giving up on the CDT project, but about using our role in this important project to effect change where it's really needed. Moreover, it's about pushing for similar things, in a similar direction, to other groups and organisations in the field of sustainable transport promotion. None of the above suggestions have come from nowhere; they are all in line with what other groups, and sometimes even government guidelines, are proposing. We are in a uniquely and strategically good position. With others, we should be pushing for central government leadership on promoting cycling in Britain.

However, to be listened to, we need to develop a collective voice, and act in solidarity, together with others in a similar position.

Dave Horton
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