

Cycle and Road Safety Campaigning in North Herts

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Welcome

You are possibly wondering why on earth you have been sent a newsletter on cycling. You may not have been on a bike yourself since you were a child, and may have little interest in ever doing so. You might even harbor some rather hostile attitudes towards people who do ride bikes.

Well, unless you have been stranded on a desert island without access to newspapers, radio and TV for the last decade, it cannot have escaped your attention that we are, as a society, facing a whole spectrum of problems inextricably linked to our dependence on motor traffic.

If you are on the distribution list for this newsletter then you are in a position, however small, to change that.

We are damaging the earth's atmosphere, condemning future generations to drown or fry. Rural tranquility is a thing of the past as country lanes become commuter rat runs. Our towns are choked with traffic and parked cars. Our children have lost their independence as we no longer feel they are safe in our streets. We grow fat, unhealthy and unhappy, burdening a



perpetually overstretched health service with the avoidable consequences of our inactive lifestyles.

So are we all doomed ?

No, of course we are not. We can make all of these problems diminish by the extraordinarily simple act of choosing to drive a little less, and to walk or cycle a little more.

However much people might want to blame the government, motor manufacturers, or any other scapegoat, the inexorable rise in motor traffic is the result of millions of individual decisions made by ordinary people over the past half century. The hostile, threatening, unpleasant environment experienced by people using the roads without a motor car is also due to the behavior and attitudes of individuals.

We can reverse these trends in exactly the same way, little by little, person by person, but only if we try.

So that is why you have been sent this newsletter. We hope that you will take the time to read it and ponder on its implications, then take whatever action you can to make our roads, safer, more pleasant, more equitable places, for all to use.

Feel free to contact the editor with any questions that you might have.

Connect2 and the Royston Cycle Network

In a televised vote just before Christmas, Sustrans won the £50 million Big Lottery grant. It was the culmination of months of witting down worthy environmental projects to a final shortlist of four. Sustrans went head to head with The Black Country Park, Sherwood Forest and the Eden Center, and came away with a staggering 40% of all votes cast. Who says people in Britain aren't interested in cycling ?

Sustrans plans to spend the money building bridges between 79 communities - those that have been separated by busy roads, railway lines or rivers. Royston is one of the towns to benefit, with a new underpass under the railway line proposed and a network of cycle routes leading into it.

We have now received some preliminary route proposals from the County Council. Sadly, these have not inspired confidence. Royston already has a cycle route plan, part of the 1999 masterplan adopted by NHDC, but the current proposals do not seem to match that.

More worryingly there seems to be an unhealthy emphasis on pavement conversions. These are the "solution" of last resort, unpopular with cyclists and pedestrians alike, and with a questionable safety record. Pavement conversions are rightly at the bottom of the hierarchy of provision, only to be considered after all options for making the roads safer have been explored.

If you would like to know more about the proposals visit our website (www.stevenagectc.org.uk and click on the campaigning tab) for updates.

Hitchin Station

Hitchin rail station has never been a particularly nice place to get to on foot or by bike. Recently Hitchin suffered the ignominy of being shamed in a report by Friends of the Earth on Britain's least approachable stations.

The roads converging on the station have an unnecessarily hostile feel to them, and the A505 rail bridge makes for a nasty pinch point.

Could there be a solution ?

It is unquestionably a huge engineering challenge to modify a road under one of the busiest rail lines in the country, but if ever there was a time to do it, it is now. The Government recently announced £1 million for route design work for the Oxford / Cambridge rail line, which passes through Hitchin and will require major engineering works in itself.

This is the time to make improvements to the A505 rail bridge, to make it less hostile to pedestrians and cyclists. If this opportunity is not taken it is unlikely that we will see another.

There are of course other, simpler measures that could be taken for example the long standing suggestion to create a second entrance on the London bound side of the lines, thereby removing the need for people to go through the A505 bridge.

Cycling Champions

Could you be a cycling champion ?

No, you don't have to put on a skin suit and belt round the boards of the Olympic Velodrome. Cycling England, the organization tasked with promoting cycling by the Department for Transport, are keen to identify local councilors at all levels who would be willing to push forward cycling initiatives in their local authorities. There is an online support group and you can, of course, rely on help from CTC local campaigners.

Could that champion be you ? Do you have a cycling interest, even a casual one, and would like to learn more about it ? Contact the editor or tony.russell@cyclengland.co.uk

How to Cater for Cycling on British Roads



Everybody knows how you make conditions better for cycling. You build cycle paths, right ?

Er, wrong.

If you have to build segregated facilities for cycling then it is an admission of failure. It is an admission that road conditions are so hostile that cyclists cannot reasonably be expected to share them. That is good for no-one.

Cyclists are the litmus paper of the road environment. If ordinary, non-lycra-wearing folk are happy to get on a bike outside their house then it is a safe street. Safe for all of those activities that streets were used for before people were driven from them - like chatting, playing hopscotch, walking to the shops, meeting your neighbours and their children, or just passing the time of day.

So, the aim of any program to promote cycling should be to make the roads safe for cycling, not



to provide segregated facilities for cyclists.

Of course there will always be roads that can't reasonably be made "cycle friendly" - inter urban links that carry heavy lorries for instance, where only the most hardened people will cycle, so there will remain a need for segregated facilities. BUT, segregated facilities are greatly overused as an easy "compromise" measure that demonstrates that we are "doing something", sadly without actually making any improvement.

So let us be clear. There are very few situations in an urban environment where roadside pavement conversion cycle tracks will bring benefits to cyclists, and very often they will make a bad situation worse.

This isn't just our opinion. It is the guidance of the Department for Transport and most Local Authorities, although few put that guidance into practice.

There is an established hierarchy of measures to improve conditions for cycling as follows. It tackles the causes of hostile conditions, not the

symptoms, and originates from the Dutch guidance.

Hierarchy of Provision TA 90/05			
b	<i>Traffic Reduction</i>	Particularly HGVs. Divert traffic, traffic calming, road closures.	Consider first
b	<i>Speed reduction</i>	20 mph zones, Homezones, shared surfaces, traffic calming	
b	<i>Junctions and Traffic Management</i>	ASLs, signalisation, re-engineering of roundabouts, freedom from banned turns, removal of dedicated vehicle left turn slip lanes.	
b	<i>Carriageway Redistribution</i>	Cycle lanes, bus lanes	Consider last
b	<i>Off road provision away from highways</i>	Railway paths, canal towpaths, paths across parks, new cycle paths, ROWIPs	
b	<i>Roadside pavement conversions</i>	Rarely satisfactory. Only appropriate for busy, fast rural roads with few side roads	

Getting Started

Not been on a bike since you were a teenager ? If you haven't led an active life then getting on a bike for the first time, like any unaccustomed exercise, is going to hurt a little. But that is not a reason for not doing it, in fact it is all the more reason for getting more active before you die of a heart attack. The beauty of it is of course that the more you do, the fitter you become and after a month you will be wondering what the fuss was about.

If you are new to cycling, start gently and gradually increase your mileage. Maybe go to the gym and use a static bike to improve your fitness. Use quiet roads to build your confidence, and then by summer you will be ready to start mixing in the hurly burly of commuter traffic.

Easy Riding – topical tips

Two factors affect how much effort is involved in cycling more than any others - tire pressure and a clean, well oiled chain.

If your tires are soft, cycling will feel really hard work. You should not be able to press your thumb into the tread, if you can it is too soft.

Most cheaper bikes use the same style of valve as on a car so just take your bike to the nearest garage and use the air hose. Don't worry, they won't explode, bike tires operate at 40 psi or more - higher than your average car.

If you are oiling your chain, use a proper chain oil. WD40 is too light and will evaporate off leaving your chain dry. Don't forget to clean the chain first otherwise the mix of oil and grit acts like grinding paste.



Considerate driving

What puts people off cycling and what kills cyclists are actually two very different subjects. Most cyclists are killed or injured at junctions, by drivers turning without checking properly. What puts people off cycling are the constant frights

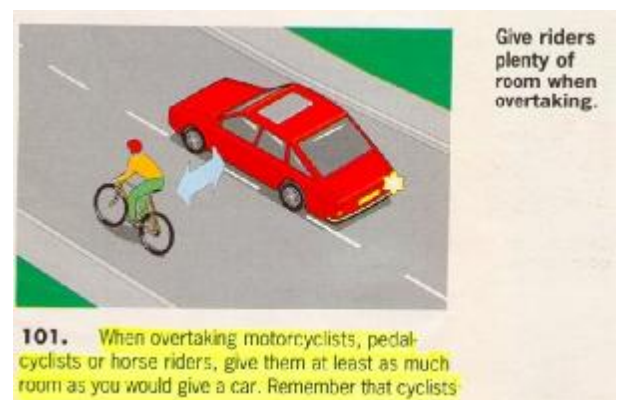


that wear away on your nerves from people passing too close to you, or overtaking in stupid situations.

The worst instances always occur when the driver has the least to gain by their actions - the idiot who insists on overtaking when you are signaling right, or the one who tries to overtake just before reaching a stationary queue or red traffic light, when he can't actually complete his maneuver.

Very often the same vehicle will force his way past two or three times in congested traffic, putting you, himself, and everybody else at risk, only for you to glide past again a few yards further on. Why ? What is he gaining ? In congested traffic cyclists are usually moving faster than the traffic.

Pretty well all adult cyclists also drive a car nowadays, so it makes people very angry to be treated with such callousness when they travel by bike.



So, when driving be considerate to cyclists and in particular give them plenty of room when passing, don't crowd them or follow too close, and if you have nothing to gain by overtaking, then don't. Just follow behind, nothing gained, nothing lost.

It isn't enough to just drive considerably yourself, don't tolerate aggressive or inconsiderate driving by others.

Coffee Room Myths

"You couldn't do it here, things are different on the continent."

Cambridge, only 20 miles away, has levels of cycling more commonly associated with the Netherlands. One in four Cambridge worker gets to work by bike.



We can do it here.

Reasons to Cycle – Health

Studies have shown that people who cycle regularly have the health of a sedentary person 10 years younger than themselves.



The Copenhagen Study (Anderson 2000) concluded that those who did not cycle to work experienced a 39 percent higher mortality rate than those who did.

"Obesity is costing the [UK] economy £2 billion. Cases of type 2 diabetes are increasing among our young people, and the projection is that if something is not done about obesity, the economy will have to bear £3.5 billion in related costs by 2010." (Richard Caborn, Minister of sport November 2003)

Heart disease, liver disease, diabetes, asthma and depression are all associated with an inactive lifestyle. Heart disease kills 70,000 people every year, compared with only 3,500 deaths on the road. The benefits to be gained from cycling far outweigh the risks imposed by road traffic.

Cycling regularly is reported to halve the danger of heart disease. (Source: British Heart Foundation, Morris). Whitehall civil servants who cycled for at least an hour a week (or 25 miles in a single week) had less than half the death rate of those who didn't, during a 9 year study period

Facility of the Month

If you do not cycle yourself then you are unlikely to appreciate how truly awful the quality of most British "cycling infrastructure" really is. It is no exaggeration to say that the majority of those red painted paths that you see beside the road are of absolutely no use whatever for cycling.

We would like to entertain you with a few examples that even people who never ever cycle can see are nonsense. Be warned, these are just the tip of the iceberg. There are far more insidious and less breathtakingly obvious hazards to be encountered in the strange world of the British "cycle path".



For the indecisive cyclist - a fence to sit on whilst pondering which way to jump !

With thanks to Warrington Cycling Campaign. For a disturbingly amusing look at the very worst in British design visit:

<http://warringtoncyclingcampaign.co.uk/facility-of-the-month>

Good Examples

Thankfully it is not all bad news and some British designers know precisely what to do to make urban cycling safer and more attractive.

This "cycle plug" allows cyclists to pass through an environmental road closure. The lane is wide, smooth and free of obstructions - just like it would be for motor traffic.



Even young, inexperienced or nervous cyclists will use this sort of street without needing segregated lanes.

In future Issues...

- b** Personal travel plans and rail commuters.
- b** Cycle training on the curriculum and School travel plans.
- b** 20s plenty - people friendly speed limits.
- b** Road building and traffic growth.

Contacting us

You can email the editor with any queries or comments, or help with any cycling related issues at alsdair_massie@LineOne.net

Visit the CTC local group website at:
www.stevenagectc.org.uk



About us

The CTC is Britain's largest cycling organisation with 70,000 members. Formed in 1878 we have actively campaigned for better, safer roads, locally and nationally since our inception. We have a large and active section for Stevenage and North Herts.

Hitchin Safer Cycling is a local campaign group, started last year, that developed out of Hitchin Vision.

I am the local "Right to Ride" Representative for North Herts, dealing with campaigning issues, and a civil engineer by profession. And yes, I drive a car.