

**MAKE SPACE FOR BIKES NOW, DON'T TRY TO SQUEEZE THEM IN LATER!**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fifty years ago in the UK, the bicycle was an important form of transport and recreation. Typically over 25% of all trips were made by bike. However, the bicycle was largely ignored by architects, town planners and traffic engineers until the 1980s, and even when it is considered, it is often as an add-on or squeezed into space that is not required for any other use.

Recent policy and design guidance recognises that catering solely for a highly mobile car-friendly society is a mistake, leading to problems with health, pollution, social unrest and traffic congestion. Trying to reverse this situation to create people-friendly towns and cities in which the bike can fulfil its true potential is desirable. The only trouble is, the space is already taken and each mode must compete physically and politically for a share of the land.

Can African towns and cities avoid some of the problems currently facing Europe by retaining space for local communities and encouraging development at the human scale? This paper looks at the key messages in current UK policy and how they might apply to other nations.

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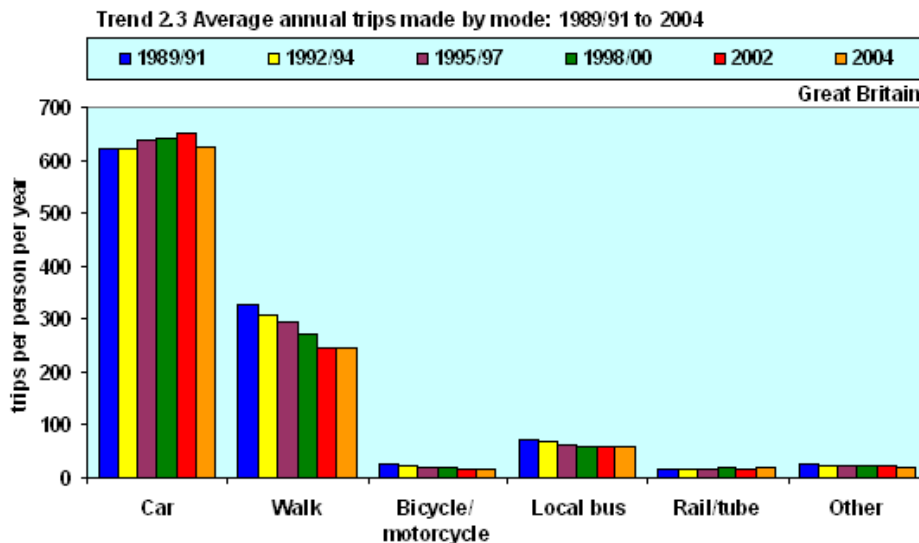
### DECLINE OF CYCLING IN THE UK

In the 1950s, cycles accounted for up to 25% of trips in many of Britain's towns and cities, with even higher proportions than this in the flat areas in the east of England. This level of cycling is not dissimilar to the levels that we see today in the 'cycle friendly' countries of Holland and Denmark. Cycling was a very popular leisure activity, and a valuable means of access to work and education.

In the 1990s cycling typically accounted for around 2% of all trips. Only the bravest and hardest people cycle in most major cities, and in some areas it is very unusual for women and children to cycle on public roads.

### WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

Are we travelling further, too far to cycle? It is certainly true that the distances travelled for work and leisure trips have increased over the years, but it is still also the case that 70% of all car trips are under two miles<sup>1</sup>. The average time spent travelling has remained stable for the last ten years, at around 360 hours per year, but the average distance has increased by about 5% as a result of transfer of trips to car travel<sup>2</sup>. In the last twenty years, car travel increased by 75% but during the same period, the distances travelled by other surface modes remained fairly static or in the case of buses and cycling, suffered from a decline. However, most people still make a lot of short journeys that could potentially be made on foot or by bike. It seems clear that these short journeys have transferred to car.



Source: Department for Transport

<sup>1</sup> Transport White Paper, 1998

<sup>2</sup> Transport Trends 2005, Department for Transport, 2006

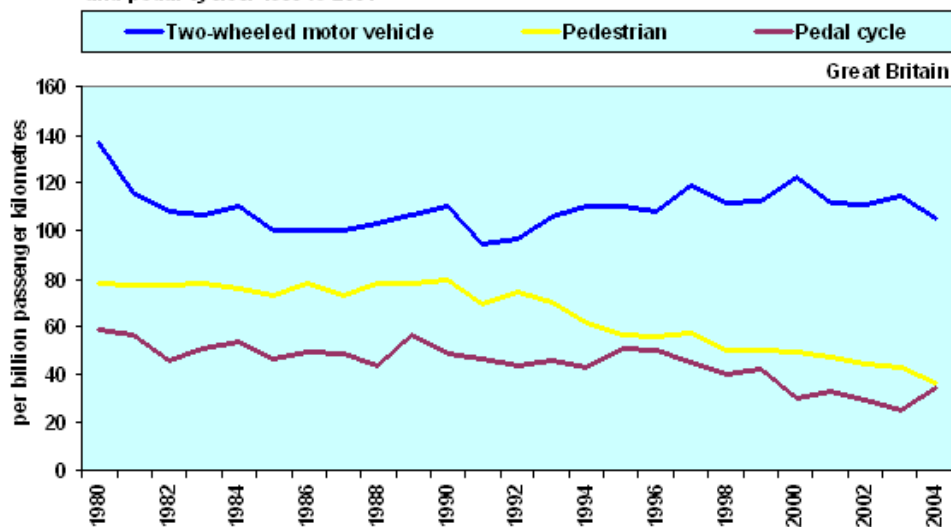
Is the weather so much worse? No, with global warming we mostly have milder winters now and summer is pleasantly warm, but sadly not often very hot!



(Adrian Lord)

Is it more dangerous? In terms of overall casualties, Britain has the safest roads in Europe although some countries have a better record in terms of injuries to cyclists. But compared to the 1950s the roads are certainly safer for all users.

**Trend 7.1b Passenger fatality rates for pedestrians, two wheeled motor vehicles and pedal cycles: 1980 to 2004**



Source: Department for Transport

In my opinion the main reason for the decline in cycling is simply that it was overlooked. It was considered to be old-fashioned and associated with the poverty and austerity of the immediate post-war period. Parts of Africa and the rest of the world are now facing an increase in wealth and consequent spread of car ownership, while in the most urbanised countries, the trend is for increasing numbers of cars per household. In such circumstances the role of the bicycle as a mode of transport can easily become marginalised, and in the face of serious issues such as sanitation, healthcare, housing, education and poverty, the role of the bicycle as accessible transport is forgotten by planners. This was certainly the case in parts of Britain where inner city 'slum' dwellings were

systematically cleared and the inhabitants relocated to the suburbs, far from their place of work and the main 'hub' of urban life. Many of these estates are now 'no-go' areas with serious problems of unemployment and crime, and poor links to the transport network helping to contribute to poverty.



Street Scene, Coventry UK, around 1910  
(Coventry City Council Archive)



Bikes for school travel, South Africa  
Source: Afribike Project (Re-cycle.org)

From the 1950s through to the 1980s the private car was transformed in Britain from something that only wealthy people could afford to a means of transport for the masses. During the same period, the relative cost of a bicycle and of other forms of transport remained stable, for example a good quality bicycle has always cost the equivalent of a months wages for an average worker.

There was some planning for pedestrians during this time – mainly to get them between car parks and shopping areas, but there was virtually no consideration of cyclists. The bicycle slowly faded away as a form of transport, and with less and less direct experience of cycling among the general public, the perception developed that it is much more dangerous and hard work than it really is.

## THE REVIVAL

The bicycle began to bounce back in the 1970s, partly driven by the oil crisis of 1973, but later in the decade as a form of exercise. In the 1980s it became a symbol and the mode of choice for environmental campaigners, and in the Netherlands and other parts of continental Europe, this was the decade in which pro-cycling policies really started to develop. It was the decade in which the Velo-City and Velo-Mondiale conferences started. For Britain, the 1980s was a decade in which the

Government was most proactive in encouraging car ownership as a symbol of economic achievement to the point where Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared that 'A man who, beyond the age of 26, finds himself on a bus can count himself as a failure.' (1986)<sup>3</sup>. The Employment Minister, Norman Tebbit (1981) also famously reinforced the image of cycles as a poor man's form of transport by saying of his unemployed father "He didn't riot. He got on his bike to find work". This was widely misquoted afterwards as a derogatory phrase to the unemployed "On yer Bike"<sup>4</sup>.

Despite this, there was increasing concern over the effects of rapid growth in car use within urban areas, and increasing recognition that local government simply could not afford to purchase more and more land for roads and car parks. The environmental movement was gathering pace, with opposition to new road schemes and also a strong lobby to preserve the countryside and historic buildings within towns. By the end of the decade a few authorities had started to formally plan 'cycle routes' and facilities. In the 1990s the trend continued, with a number of government reports questioning the economic benefit of new roads and raising concerns about health and environmental disbenefits. By 1996 the cycling revival reached sufficient momentum that the government published a National Cycling Strategy<sup>5</sup>. The decade of the National Cycling Strategy was also accompanied by various technical guides on cycle planning and design, many derived from experience in the Netherlands.

Will Africa and other areas with rising levels of car ownership follow the same trend? Will it take fifty years to get back to the bicycle? What problems will that bring?

## **TOP TEN MEASURES TO RE-INTRODUCE MORE CYCLING, MORE SAFELY, MORE OFTEN**

Cycling has lost not only the physical space on the roads but also its place in the culture and consciousness of the nation. The measures to reintroduce the country to cycling are therefore required to cover engineering, encouragement and promotional initiatives. People need to re-learn the possibilities and opportunities that the bicycle brings to them, and to feel confident that they can cycle in safety.

In 2005, Cycling England appointed a team of advisors to help local authorities and other organisations to help to achieve the ambition of 'More Cycling, More safely, More Often.

The emphasis within engineering and planning is to ensure that cycling is included in new developments and at the same time try to get the optimum 'deal' for cyclists on existing roads. There is fierce competition for road space between cars, buses, cycles and pedestrians, both in practical terms and politically, the cyclist has to fight to be seen and heard!

### **1. BETTER PLANNING**

In the UK, new buildings need to be given planning permission. This is being used as a vital tool to create better conditions for cyclists. Many planning authorities now insist that secure places to store bicycles are provided in all new buildings, including houses in some cases. This is vitally important because having a bike stolen is a reason that up to 25% of people stop cycling. Some premises also have showers and changing rooms available so that a cyclist can change into clean clothes at the workplace. There are also mechanisms in place to make the developer provide special cycle routes within the development, or to provide money for public highway improvements for cyclists. Up to 40% of all money spent on cycling infrastructure comes from private sector developers.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Commons debates, 2003-07-02, column 407 and Commons debates, 2004-06-15 column 697, HMSO.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Tebbit, *Unfinished Business*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> National Cycling Strategy, Department of Transport, 1996





Cycle parking, Boots Chemical Factory, Nottingham UK (Adrian Lord)

Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 (PPG13)<sup>6</sup> gives guidance to developers and local planning authorities on what the government expects from transport. One of the important considerations now is that developments should be 'mixed use', helping to bring retail, education, industry, healthcare and residential areas closer together to help to reduce the need to travel. This policy has the long term potential to help cycling by reversing the trend for different land uses to become increasingly separated.

Another important trend in planning is the reclaiming of urban public open space to create high quality squares and streets that are safe and attractive for people rather than vehicles. Many city centres have large pedestrian areas filled with shops, cafes and bars and it is now recognised that these are more profitable than when the spaces were filled with cars. The city of Birmingham recently demolished part the city ring road to enable the city centre to expand.



This street in Birmingham was full of buses and parked cars in the 1980s. (Adrian Lord)

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<sup>6</sup> PPG13 Transport, ODPM, 2002

## **2. PEOPLE FRIENDLY ENGINEERING**

Because of the competition for road space and the typically narrow streets (based on ancient settlements), there is not much opportunity for separate cycle tracks in towns and cities, so the emphasis is on making the roads safer where possible. A hierarchy of measures<sup>7</sup> is proposed:

Traffic Reduction  
Speed Reduction  
Junction Treatment and hazard site treatment  
Redistribution of the carriageway  
Cycle lanes on the carriageway or cycle tracks off the carriageway  
Conversion of footways/sidewalks (pedestrian space) to shared use by cyclists

## **3. TRAFFIC REDUCTION**

Traffic reduction may be achieved through road closures and removal of on-street parking areas in town centres, and by diverting traffic around a 'ring road' away from a town or village, but the reduction in the amount of traffic will only be maintained if physical measures ensure that the roads don't fill up with additional traffic. 'Congestion Charging' was introduced to central London in 2004, after which the levels of cycling have increased by about 16% during the first six months.

Measures that remove motor traffic help to keep the centre of our towns and cities civilised, vibrant and safe. The bicycle is not a 'retrograde' form of transport but an essential component of street life.

## **4. SPEED REDUCTION**

'Traffic calming' is a term referring to various ways to slow down traffic, using specially constructed humps or chicanes for example, but increasingly also using interactive signs and speed cameras to manage speed. Traffic calming measures typically reduce cyclist casualties by up to 50%.



Interactive sign, Coventry (Adrian Lord)

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<sup>7</sup> Policy, Planning and Design for Walking and Cycling – Consultation Draft, Department for Transport, 2004



## 5. JUNCTION TREATMENTS

Junction treatments are particularly important to cyclists because that is where most accidents occur. Signalised junctions (robot junctions) help to reduce casualties, but where these are not possible there are other measures available.

Where money is tight or space is restricted, junction treatments can deal with some of the most hazardous sites for cyclists in a cost efficient way.



## 6. REDISTRIBUTION OF THE CARRIAGEWAY

Sometimes it only takes a little change to the roadway to make it more bicycle-friendly. It may be that removal of on-street parking releases road space for cyclists. On dual carriageway roads the nearside lane can be made wider by narrowing the offside lane. In other locations it may be possible to move the centre line of the road to 'create' additional space at points where cyclists are hemmed in by other traffic.

## **7. CYCLE LANES AND TRACKS**

Special lanes and tracks for bikes are important as a visual reminder to drivers and others that cyclists need the space. Off-road traffic free tracks in the UK have been particularly successful, with about 10% growth in cycling each year, but only in areas where they offer a continuous unbroken route. Cycle tracks alongside the carriageway which yield priority at each side road crossing are much less popular, cause problems with pedestrians and sometimes have a poor safety record. There is a particular problem with child cyclists riding out into traffic on such facilities, and some believe that the provision of roadside cycle tracks also contributes to the tendency for cyclists to ride on footways/sidewalks that are meant for pedestrians only.

Cycle lanes and tracks have their place in cycling provision, but too often they are seen as the 'only' options, when sometimes there are other solutions that are better for cyclists.



Cycle lanes in York (Tony Russell)

## **8. CYCLE TRAINING**

Cycle training can have real benefits in helping children to recognise hazards and develop the skills and confidence to ride safely. Unfortunately there has been a tendency to ignore this aspect of cycling or to provide poor quality training in fields and playgrounds away from traffic. A new national standard for training has been developed and is being rolled out by the CTC – the National Cyclists Organisation with funding from the government.

Good quality cycle training saves childrens' lives and can help give inexperienced adults the confidence to cycle in traffic. It must be an essential element of pro-bike policies.



Cycle training (York City Council)



## 9. ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT

In the 1950s it was possible to transport bicycles, motorcycles and cars by train for longer journeys and on many commuter lines. This made it easy to combine the train and bike for work journeys and also for holidays. The new generation of trains introduced in the 1980s and 1990s no longer included a 'guard's van', and this has led to a steady decline in cycle access to trains. Traffic regulations to protect pedestrians prevent the use of front-mounted racks on buses in the UK, although they are popular in north America. The government and train companies have recently spent money installing and improving cycle parking at stations but this does not satisfy the demand for bike carriage on rail services.

Truly cycle-friendly countries must make provision for bike carriage by public transport for long and medium distance journeys, especially in areas where the roads are dangerous or inadequate.



Going on holiday by train (Adrian Lord)



Put your bike on the bus  
(Sportworks, USA)



Secure bike park (Adrian Lord)



(Adrian Lord)

## **10. INFORMATION, PUBLICITY AND ENCOURAGEMENT**

It is not enough to make planning laws and policies, or to simply provide infrastructure. For people that drive each day they may be too busy looking at the traffic to even notice the cycle route that they pass on their journey. They may be too afraid to try cycling, scared to be the first person at their school or workplace. There are now an increasing number of maps available to help cyclists to choose a route, and in London an interactive journey planner (<http://www.londoncyclenetwork.org/>) is available to plot out your own individual route simply by entering the street names or post codes. Many authorities offer guided rides or leisure rides and each June there is a National Bike Week with events around the country to help people to get started. Within larger workplaces there is often a Bike Users Group to offer specialist assistance and self-help among fellow cyclists.

Without these essential 'back-up' services, entering the world of cycling can be a daunting and mysterious experience for the complete novice. Information and support is therefore a vital component of the top ten.

### **DOES IT ALL WORK?**

Unfortunately there are few places in the UK that have the entire 'top ten' in place, but certainly in central London, York and a few other pioneering authorities there has been a growth in cycling that suggests that the eradication of cyclists is not an inevitable result of 'progress'.

It is clear that some of the historic parts of cities in Africa, Asia and South America face similar challenges in re-introducing the bike into streets that have become dominated by car traffic, and where people are afraid to travel without the protection of a car. At the same time there are many rapidly urbanising areas throughout the world where there is an opportunity to integrate cycling into the vision of the future and make space for the bicycle as the transport of tomorrow.