

Background

Rod King has been a cycle campaigner for the last 6 years and is currently Publicity Officer for Warrington Cycle Campaign. In 2004 he cycled to Warrington's twin town, Hilden, in Germany and from this investigation realised that high levels of cycling (24% of Hilden in-town trips are by cycle) can be achieved without expensive cycle facilities or programmes as long as the roads are shared equitably with vehicle speeds reduced.

Since then he has presented at Velo-City and last year was awarded CTC Volunteer of the Year in the North West 2005 for his campaigning activities. Rod is aged 57, rides a recumbent tricycle and other bikes, and lives in Lymm, near Warrington. He commutes to work by bicycle about 40% of the time. Rod is also a Trustee of Cycling Projects.

Cycling Advocacy – Time to Change Gear

All of us are advocates of cycling. What are our objectives :-

- Better cycling for those who cycle
- Cheaper travelling for those who can't afford a car
- Faster travel for those who wish to beat congestion
- Healthier travel
- Greener travel

All of us are involved with a wide range of tactics which will help to achieve these. We create Cycle Maps, We train youngsters. We create cycle lanes and facilities!!! We create Safe Routes to Schools, We Organise Rides.

Yet we know that statistically we are not breaking through. Cycling is reducing as a modal percentage of travel. And even if we get a small increase in cycle usage it is swamped by the ongoing rise of the motor car for its convenience, cheapness and speed. And of course any increase in cycling that is for leisure purposes does not have any green or decongestion effect, but merely adds journeys on our roads.

We need to recognise some very real issues in our current campaigning:-

- 1) Cycle Lanes and facilities currently only comprise about 1-2% of our roads in towns. It is simply not possible to increase this so that journeys become practical on off-road routes.
- 2) All our efforts to make cycling safer through training courses, or safety equipment merely reinforces the dangers and transfers the responsibility for that danger onto the cyclist.
- 3) Once we take out cycling for leisure then cycling for transport is probably reducing.

Yet equally we also recognise that there is a large aspiration to be able to cycle. The cycle industry is showing unprecedented levels of growth.

The fact is that there is a very large elephant in the room which we fail to acknowledge. And that is the disregard throughout local and central government for an equitable sharing of our roads. Whilst many of us are involved in LTPs that purport to favour cyclists and pedestrians, the constant pressure to maximise throughput, vehicular capacity and maintain high vehicle speeds in our town belies that boldly stated precedence of pedestrians and cyclists first, and motor vehicles last. How often have you been involved with cycle facilities at junctions which introduce inconvenience and danger to cyclists rather than simply slowing the motor vehicles down to a safe speed where they can share that junction equitably.

We must accept that the British public is frightened to cycle on our streets, which we call roads lest anyone should imagine that they are to be used by mere people. That is borne out by the fact that we have the highest percentage pedestrian deaths on our roads in Europe. There is no way that we can radically increase cycling without addressing that fear and making a substantial shift in the way that roads are shared. In fact I will boldly predict that this will be demonstrated by our Cycling Demonstration Towns which will not show any real increase in cycling unless they incorporate such a shift. This is also shown in the increased cycling in London which has taken Congestion Charging to promote cycling and also unfortunately Bombs on Buses to add to the incentive for modal shift.

So what can we do as cycling advocates to make such a change:-

Firstly we must start talking about the morality of placing motorist needs above our young, who are not allowed to drive, our poor who cannot afford to drive, and those who simply do not wish to drive. We have gone too far in preserving the rights of motorists to convenient and high speed travel and must now reduce those rights in favour of pedestrians and cyclists.

We must implement 20mph in all residential and urban areas as the default maximum speed limit where people live. This is the norm in Northern Europe and is the foundation of their cycle friendly towns, cities and villages. How can we expect to increase cycling levels when we are asked to co-exist with vehicles travelling 60% faster than in Northern Europe? Some towns such as Portsmouth have taken the initiative to make such a change and the recent requirement for all LA's to re-assess road maximum speeds and implement 20mph without physical calming is an excellent opportunity to do this.

Once in place then 20 mph set the new standard for speeds where people live and 30 mph is seen for what it is, 50% faster and with 3 times the differential speed between motor vehicles and cyclists. But this must be accompanied by community level debate to ensure that such policies are driven by community needs for independent travel for our children and a better environment. Our research at Warrington Cycle Campaign shows that over 80% of the public questioned wanted 20 mph as a maximum on the road where they live.

Twenty's Plenty must become the central policy for cycle campaigning in all our towns and cities.

We must also remember that simply to increase cycling we need to do this. If we are to reduce the dependency on cars then it is necessary to go even further. There is no point in using modal shift to reduce the number of cars on the roads if this merely reduces congestion and attracts more motorists to fill the congestion gap so created. If we wish to reduce pollution, greenhouse gases and car dependency then we must make radical changes to the cost and convenience of using personal motor transport.

For too long cycling advocates have not wanted to "rock" the motoring boat. We have stood at the sidelines hoping that a few facilities here, a better junction there, and a few thousand pounds for cycle training or promotion will help our cause and entice a few more people to take up cycling.

Frankly, we are wasting our time, our efforts and our taxpayer's money. It is time to confront those who think the answer lies in paying lip service to encouraging cycling yet also prolong the dependency of our communities on motor vehicles.

We are living in a post Stern world with increasing concerns about both the result of using fossil fuels on our environment and also the not insignificant problem of who to buy them from and the cost associated. We must ask ourselves whether as cycle advocates we wish to continue the soft involvement with facilities, training and encouragement with some satisfaction and little real results, or whether we take the harder route of confronting the demons and vested interests which exist and making a real difference in the ability of our children and adults to enjoy the freedom to cycle.

I believe that the time is right to start to challenge the morality of continuing with transport policies which disenfranchise pedestrians and cyclists of the right to safe and equitable use of our roads. We must confront prejudice against cyclists wherever it exists. To put the needs of motorists above those who cycle or walk is unjust and unsustainable. The modal hierarchy that puts pedestrians and cyclists first in transport must be rigidly adhered to.

We must demand the implementation of 20mph as the default maximum speed on all urban and residential roads. Where higher maximum speeds are proposed then this should only be allowed where safe facilities exist for cyclists and pedestrians.

And for those who say that this will be simply too hard and the fight is against too many vested and commercial interests I would simply remind you that we are today in a city which built its entire commercial existence on an industry which was in time seen to be morally unjustifiable. 200 years ago William Wilberforce was undaunted by such challenges and as a result a considerable wrong was put right.

Putting the convenience of motorists before the right of our children to use the roads safely and without fear is a considerable wrong that also needs putting right. And if I can modify a quote by J. F. Kennedy :-

"we should ask ourselves not what the cyclist can do to avoid the car, but what the car can do to avoid the cyclist"

And most of all remember that cyclists are not a transport problem, they are the transport solution.

Thank you

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