

Comments on Reading Transport Strategy

We are responding on behalf of the Reading Cycle Campaign, which is a voluntary organisation that campaigns for better facilities for cyclists in Reading and the surrounding areas. We are a local cycle group, but we work closely with Sustrans and Cycling UK (previously known as Cyclists' Touring Club), which are both national organisations. Reading Cycle Campaign was established in 1982 and presently has over 500 paid-up members.

Reading Cycle Campaign would support the overall visions and objectives identified in the Transport Strategy, especially as an increase in cycling plays an important part in achieving these objectives. An increase in cycling would contribute towards measures to address the seven key transport challenges that have been identified:

- Cycling is adaptable for the future, especially with increased use of electric bikes, bikes to carry children and cargo bikes
- Increased levels of cycling will support improvements in air quality
- Increased levels of cycling will support reductions in traffic congestion
- Cycling provides affordable and accessible travel for all
- Cycling supports healthier lifestyles
- Cycling supports good accessibility to local facilities and employment
- Cycling supports new development, especially for those locations that are poorly served by other travel modes

Whilst we support the wider policy objectives, we nevertheless remain concerned about the delivery of the schemes and initiatives identified in the Strategy due to reducing Government support for local transport. Alternative sources of funding, such as increased levels of contributions from developers should therefore be considered.

We would emphasise that cyclists are a diverse group, from novice cyclists, parents with young children, school children, occasional cyclists, commuters, through to sports cyclists. Whilst on-road cycle lanes are to be welcomed, these are more likely to appeal to existing cyclists who have the confidence and experience to ride in with traffic. For many people including families, children, and those who don't presently cycle, riding in traffic using on-road cycle lanes is unlikely to be attractive. Since one of the objectives of the Strategy is to increase the number of people cycling at least three times a week from 6% to 15% by 2040, future facilities should be made sufficiently attractive to encourage those who don't presently cycle to take up cycling. This is more likely if the future cycle network also includes off-road cycle facilities, reduced through traffic on local residential streets, cycle and bus friendly traffic calming on local roads, routes through parks as well as school streets in order to achieve this growth.

Also, whilst much of the emphasis has been on cycling for commuting or utility purposes, leisure and recreational cycling are also important. This is because they are a gateway to more people taking up cycling, with consequent wider health benefits.

Reading is a relatively compact urban area, where cycling is a realistic option due to the relatively modest distances involved. Some parts of Reading are though poorly served with cycle routes whilst other areas have isolated sections of routes. We would therefore support initiatives to link up existing schemes to form a coherent network of routes. Also, consideration needs to be given to upgrading existing sections of cycle routes where problems have been identified.

Whilst signage on existing cycle routes is generally good, there are still many instances especially in the town centre where signs are missing or confusing. Consideration should also be given to signing important destinations in the town.

Future development schemes have an important part to play in developing the network. In particular, it is suggested that future development schemes should make provision to encourage walking and cycling, not just for residents or users of a new facility, but for others walking and cycling through the area, thereby promoting the development of a coherent network.

Some of the cycle route maps included as part of the Strategy need to be updated as there are missing sections of route. Also we would question the practicality of some suggestions due to terrain or current density of traffic on other routes - eg. the inclusion of the IDR on a cycle map calls into question the map's usefulness.

We welcome the inclusion of the Reading Cycle Campaign's list of schemes and improvements as Appendix H of the Transport Strategy. This provides a list of improvements that have been identified by our members to improve their journeys. The list is reviewed and updated on a regular basis to reflect changing circumstances and new ideas. We would therefore welcome working with the Council to update and agree the list on a regular basis through an official meeting such as the Cycle Liaison Group meeting. This would be the way to add new schemes or identify opportunities that arise as a result of other transport schemes or development-related opportunities.

Secure cycle parking at both ends of a journey is important to encourage cycling as the fear of having your bike stolen is a considerable disincentive to cycling for many people. Secure under-cover cycle parking should be provided for long-term cycle parking at both ends of the journey. Also, a proportion of parking should be provided for bikes with child seats, cargo bikes, electric bikes etc.

Finally, whilst we note that DfT statistics have been used to provide overall monitoring data for cycle usage, we would strongly support the use of direct cycle surveys to inform the design of new cycle schemes.

At a more general level we suggest that in order for cycling to be given more 'clout' in council policy, that a role of 'cycling champion' be created with a brief to ensure that cyclists are given proper consideration in all new policies and developments.

We would also suggest that the council adopt a RICE strategy

- Research to find where to do the most good
- Investigate the best most practicable solutions
- Consult with all stakeholders
- Evaluate the outcomes against the objectives

It is all very well having the best thought out and presented strategies, if the implementation is not well planned and managed. As a campaign, we are particularly concerned about the use of external consultancies who may not have the required local knowledge and are certainly not answerable to the local population. This may of course be a consequence of the way Whitehall funds local government, but the campaign is always willing to talk to councillors and officers about how strategy should be implemented and in the future collate evidence of good practice from other places in Britain and beyond.

Reading Cycle Campaign
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