

Making cycling in Bristol safer - democratically (United Kingdom)



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Bristol

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Topic:
Walking and cycling
Mobility management

In brief

Bristol is England's 'Cycling City'. But it is also a fast-growing and densely populated city with thousands of inner-city journeys still being made by car. To boost its environmental legacy and cut carbon emissions, Bristol is taking steps for this trend to be reversed.

It is improving its public transport and wants to make cycling even safer, more popular and accessible for citizens. To do this, the city formed a commission that, together with the public and other stakeholders, investigated how it could make cycling safer for citizens.

Context

Bristol is in the south west of England with a population of 432 000. It is an important centre of employment, retail, culture and higher education, has many historic areas, and has a history of maritime industry. Almost 57 000 Bristolians commute by foot or bike - the highest rate of any local authority in England and Wales.

In 2008 Bristol and South Gloucestershire won the Cycling City Award from Cycling England, a government body. Although the resulting government funding of £22.8m ended in March 2011, the West of England authorities successfully bid for a £24m sustainable transport fund - £2m of which is for cycling and walking.

The west of England now has a long-term transport plan, known as the Joint Local Transport Plan, for improving transport in the region. Bristol's Transport Strategy sits in this plan, and includes a target increase the number of cyclists - by 76 per cent between 2008 and 2016.

In action

To help achieve this ambitious target, Bristol council formed a commission in September 2012 to hold a public inquiry with 32 key participants. These included representatives from community organisations, council officers and other experts to discuss research and other evidence and develop some practical solutions that the Commission could consider and take forward as recommendations.

The main objectives of the inquiry were to:

- Assess the current evidence on cycling safety

- Identify the causes of cyclists' safety concerns
- Identify the causes of negative safety perceptions that deter potential cyclists (including the influence of social marketing)
- Draw on good practice from around the world
- Assess all transport interventions and policy in relation to cycling safety
- Make recommendations as necessary to be taken into account in the Council's development of a cycling strategy.

The inquiry was held in public to enable anyone to attend. Bristol chose an independent chair as it thought it was essential to keep a balance of the complex material discussed during the session.

During the session, the Commission received four public statements from individuals and organisations, including the Young People's Select Committee and the Disability Equality Forum. After each presentation, question and answer sessions were held to explore each issue further and round table discussions drew priority topics together.

In addition, the Commission produced a short film where a number of key groups in the city who were likely to be potential cyclists - such young people, women, people from black and ethnic minority groups and older people - were interviewed. The film was shown during the inquiry session.

Results

After taking into account all the evidence presented to the inquiry, the Commission identified four key themes. They are presented below, with selected elements from each.

Vision and leadership

- The Mayor must lead the cycling campaign to ensure that it meets council objectives and help promote cycling to the public as a 'cool' mode of transport
- Safety fears mean few brave a hostile traffic environment. Imposing speed restrictions and reallocating road space would reduce anxiety for would-be cyclists
- Clear priorities for officers and other agencies and partners must be agreed to enable multi-disciplinary working.

Image and identity

- Cycling must be seen to cater for people of all ages
- Some people dislike being labelled as 'cyclists' - rather they are 'multi-mode' users. Social marketing can tackle a 'them and us' image
- Cycling policy must focus on deprived communities as it can improve access to jobs
- Media's role in the positive promotion of cycling is essential.

Transport Department vision

- There is a need for a comprehensive cycling network on quieter streets
- The Council should try different approaches and experiment more, e.g. the use of Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders
- Segregated paths which in some cases will require road space reallocation away from motorised traffic will be required to attract potential cyclists and reduce actual road dangers.

Engineering (and organisational development)

- The Council should implement a well-constructed inter-disciplinary learning process
- When roads or junctions are re-engineered, they should be made accessible to pedestrians and cyclists
- The wheel does not need to be re-invented; Bristol can learn a great deal from other European cities where similar problems have already been tackled.

The Commission's Scrutiny Report, with full descriptions of the themes, is [available to view online](#) (opens pdf).

Challenges, opportunities and transferability

The council thought it crucial that these key themes were taken into consideration in Bristol's Cycling Strategy, which is expected to be completed by the end of 2014. A Safe Systems Road Safety Plan, further supporting policies and measures to improve safety for cyclists by reducing road danger, would run parallel to the strategy. This is also yet to be finalised.

The fact that central government funding is still stop-start is a challenge for cycling in Bristol. Continued investment in

cycling infrastructure and behaviour change work needs to be maintained over a generation to help change engrained habits and help the next generation choose the healthy travel mode choices because they are easy choices.

In a city where car-use has dominated for several generations it is difficult to change established behaviours. To an extent this is also true for the ways and practices of the City Council and car-centric views which had made work to promote cycling more difficult.

With Bristol's award of Cycling City (2008-11) and, more recently, the European Green Capital for 2015, there is increased emphasis on increasing cycling which has helped to overcome such barriers. There is throughout the need for strong leadership from political leaders and senior officers. The election by public vote of a Mayor in 2012 who is supportive of cycling in particular has helped to promote cycling in Bristol.

In Depth

- [Scrutiny Report](#) (opens pdf)
 - [Bristol: State of the City 2013](#) (opens pdf)
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