

Weak link in the Westlink plan

Westlink widens: Great for motorists but cyclists are demanding dedicated cycle routes

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WE, of Northern Ireland Cycling Initiative, are very concerned that the Public-Private Partnership engaged in widening the Westlink does not, to our knowledge, have any plans for dedicated cycle routes across the M1, in spite of the fact that these are marked as strategic cycle routes on the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan.

The Westlink is already a formidable barrier between west Belfast and the city centre - especially so for cyclists and pedestrians. Crossing points at Grosvenor Road, Broadway and Stockman's Lane are already noisy, frightening, insecure, even dangerous places.

Widening the Westlink removes barriers to the movement of cars and lorries at the cost of increasing barriers to the movement of pedestrians and cyclists.

Once the Westlink is widened the distances to be traversed will be greater and accompanied by the greater movement of impatient vehicles on and off the slip roads to the motorway.

To motorists, cyclists are slow-moving obstructions, so cyclists on busy roads have to take a giant leap of faith that motorists will behave with courtesy and obey traffic regulations.

It is for this reason that we call upon Belfast City Council and Roads Service to insist on the building of dedicated cycle routes at each crossing point.

The City Council is anxious to halt Belfast's declining population and to increase its competitiveness with similar cities in Europe.

International research shows that a city's competitiveness depends on attracting a young, well-educated workforce to live and interact within the city. Young people are increasingly environmentally conscious and want to cycle.

A common factor in most successful cities in the USA and the EU is the provision of opportunities for walking and cycling.

It is, therefore, in Belfast's interest to provide high quality cycle linkages across the Westlink.

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