

January 2005

NICI Newsletter

WORD FROM THE STEERING GROUP

Patron: Brian Hanna

NICI is affiliated to the Irish Cycling Campaign Network and the Cycling Campaign Network of Great Britain

BMTP launch

The big news event since NICI's last Newsletter that affects local cycling has been the launch of the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP).

Geraint Ellis, an expert on Environmental Planning and NICI member, has very kindly written an article on his impressions of the plan.

BMTP allows for £16.3 million to be spent on cycling and an additional £19.4 million to be spent on quality walking routes. The Plan document reiterates the importance of the five key design features in cycle networks, namely coherence, directness, attractiveness, safety and comfort. The Plan also recognises that marketing and promotional strategy is as important as infrastructure provision.



Cycle Conference on cycling and transport integration

Sally Liya attended the Cycle Campaign Network/ CTC autumn conference in Wolverhampton on behalf of NICI. Her comprehensive report highlights best GB practice.

News from Coleraine

Ian Murray, NICI member and CTC Right-to-Ride rep, has contributed his thoughts on cycling progress in Coleraine.

Leading transport practitioner to speak at NICI AGM

Mr. Joe Drew, Manager Eastern Division Roads Service and keen cyclist, has kindly accepted our invitation to be the guest speaker at **NICI's AGM on Saturday 19th February. The venue is Belfast Exposed Art Gallery, The Exchange Place, 23 Donegal Place, Belfast, and the meeting will start at 11.15am.** We aim to have the formal business of the NICI

Injured cycling or driving on our roads?

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completed within 30minutes. Mr. Drew will talk from a personal perspective on cycling and the art of the possible in transport.

Please support the Steering Group by attending the AGM and gain enlightenment listening to and questioning Joe Drew.

Obesogenic infrastructure

This new addition to the language was reported in a recent New Scientist.

Obesogenic Infrastructure means that the prevailing culture and infrastructure is promoting obesity and making an unhealthy lifestyle the default option. All journeys are by car whether short or long - no provision for walking, cycling and integrated daily physical activity - super sized portions of calorific dense and highly processed food.

The steering group can be contacted at www.nici.org.uk

or by calling the Chairman, Tom McClelland, on 028 9082 5279 or the membership secretary, Kathryn Carson, on 028 9068 3582.

Belfast's Mediocre Transport Plan

by Geraint Ellis
School of Environmental Planning
Queen's University, Belfast.

We should, I suppose, be grateful – at last a comprehensive transport plan for Belfast, setting out all the transport proposals to be undertaken in the city up to 2015. The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) was published in December 2004 to accompany the new land use plan (BMAP) for an area covering Belfast, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and North Down. This also offers some promise of co-ordinating development with transport proposals, which can be a key way to reducing the need to travel and ensuring any infrastructure is built in the most appropriate place.

Grateful we may be for such an approach eventually being adopted – but should we also be satisfied? I believe that anyone that recognises the seriousness of Belfast's transport situation - and cyclists are predominant amongst this group - should see this as a rather mediocre and timid attempt at grappling with what is one of the greatest threats to quality of life in the city.

Before getting too pessimistic, it is only fair to highlight some progressive elements of the plan. Most importantly for cyclists is that the plan at last offers official recognition that the current provision is very poor and proposes an "extensive cycling network" across the city, at a cost of £16.3 million. This includes the identification of the routes to be developed as segregated or non-segregated cycle routes, mostly on the radial routes in the city and a commitment to supporting measures, such as cycle parking and a "comprehensive marketing strategy".

The plan also proposes other people-friendly measures, such as initiatives to support walking in the city, such as pedestrian priority in traffic management (which would also help cyclists) and the development of a number of "Quality Walking Routes". The plan proposes expenditure of £19.4 million on walking measures up to 2015. For public transport, the plan recognises that current provision is woeful and proposes the development of a number of "quality" bus corridors, the development of a "rapid transit" network such as the E-Way to Comber, improvements to rail services and more park and ride facilities. There is also provision for managing transport in a more effective way, such as parking controls, although these are actually quite weak.

All this is framed within some aspirational rhetoric of trying to

establish a "sustainable" and "balanced" transport system and to support an "appropriate level of movement of cars and goods vehicles" – what is not voiced in the document is that Belfast has one of the highest rates of car dependency of all European cities, the fastest growing traffic in the UK and some of the worst public transport. In this context, the measures outlined in the plan appear extremely timid, even futile, in addressing the transport problems of the city. I regard that the plan has major shortcomings around three main themes; process, philosophy and aspiration. I could offer a lengthy critique of these, but briefly:

Process – The starting point for the plan is the direction already set by the Regional Transport Strategy (2002) and other adopted policies, such as the NI Cycling Strategy (2000), so that the room for manoeuvre is hampered by any failings in these documents, and there are quite a few. Although there was a process of consultation leading to the publication of the BMTP, there is no opportunity for the public to comment on the published version, unlike there is on the land use plan it accompanies – this surely is a failing of procedural justice? Finally the plan is full of qualifications, in particular that all the proposals will still be subject to "detail economic assessment" – I am always cynical about such a process, as magically this always seems to prioritise investment in the road network on the flawed basis that this

aids the economy. This may mean that many of the progressive measures may never be implemented.

Philosophy- The whole plan is underlain by an implicit assumption that Belfast will continue to be heavily dominated by the car and that there is not much the plan can do to change this, so it might as well support the liberal use of the car. Thus 48% of all spending will be on highways (compared to 35% recommended in Richard Rogers influential report, "Towards an Urban Renaissance") – with major road schemes, which will provide only temporary relief to congestion, such as motorway widening getting the biggest single share of the budget. It also has some questionable assumptions about cycling, suggesting that congestion, land-use and topography offer a variety of challenges throughout the city to which cycling measures have to adopt – there is not a mention that congestion and land use should be adopted to ensure cycling (and other sustainable transport) becomes more attractive. Furthermore while the plan rhetorically promotes the use of public transport, the Government is debating on whether it should close half the rail network that serves the city.

Aspiration. Above all it is the plan's low aspirations that really frustrates me. Here we have the best ever opportunity to create a fundamental shift in transport culture of the city, but the plan shirks from this

challenge. Thus while many comparable cities in GB and the Irish Republic are adopting tram systems with great success, the BMTP can only suggest a segregated bus routes (E-Way and SuperRoute) and here these are timidly put forward as "pilot schemes" as if the benefits of enhanced public transport were unknown. There is also an embarrassingly weak comment that there will be no introduction of congestion charging that has been so successful in London, but a commitment to "review such a scheme during the Plan period" – in other words, don't expect anything as radical like that for the next 15 years.

So, should we show gratitude that a more robust approach to transport planning has finally been adopted for Belfast, or disrespect in saying that it just isn't good enough? The answer to this question largely on depends on our own aspirations and confidence in government, but for me a key test is to ask whether, at the end of the Plan period when oil wells begin to run dry, how well will the city be served?

Cycling & Transport Integration

CTC / Cycle Campaign Network Autumn Cycle Campaigns Conference, Wolverhampton Sat 13th November 2004

A report by Sally Liya

The conference was organised very competently by Wolves

on Wheels, the Cycling Campaign of Wolverhampton. The conference started with an overview of how cycling fits into transport planning by Dr Malcolm Read, Chief Officer for Regeneration and Transportation on Wolverhampton City Council. The main problem for traffic planners is anticipating the future. He quoted the alarming statistic that in England the number of people without cars fell from 51 to 35% between 1971 and 2001. Moreover by 2001, 22% of people had 2 cars. This means a rapidly growing car lobby - and politicians need votes!

Simon Talbot-Ponsonby then spoke on the **SUSTRANS campaign for Safe Routes to Stations**. In Holland 32% of journeys to stations are cycled. In UK only 1%. In northern European countries cycling to stations is greatly facilitated by having 20 mph speed limits in urban areas. This reassures people who perceive cycling as dangerous. To increase cycling to stations in UK, traffic planning measures needed include clear routes, good road crossings, clear signage, multiple entrances to the station, wheeling ramps on bridges and steps, city centre facilities for finding out train times and buying tickets; more facilities for carrying bikes on trains and better, more secure cycle parking at stations, with CCTV.

Tandems, and their role in facilitating cycling by disabled and partially sighted people was presented by Peter and David

Simpson. The two brothers, one of whom is partially sighted are enthusiastic members of the tandem club. Speaking of their adventures trying to get their tandem on to trains, they reported that if they were pleasant, persevering and very, very patient they generally succeeded in the end.

Kristopher McGowan described a cycle pool for staff and students at a college in Hereford.

Fifteen bikes were bought from a bicycle recycling enterprise, costing £30 each. Bike recycling enterprises up and down the country put 30-50% of discarded bikes back on the road, and the others can be cannibalised for spare parts, people with disabilities often work in them. Funding was obtained from Community First, a charity that provides grants for sustainable options for those in rural areas. A contract was made with the recipients not to use cars on the campus. One person was appointed the bicycle rep and made responsible for cycle maintenance. The project was a great success: a win-win situation for all concerned - funding obtained from a charitable organisation was given to a charitable organisation and recycling was promoted. Such a project is easy to do. Insurance is available:

www.cycleinsurance.info

Good News: Bike trailers behind buses

Bus trailers are designed to get 'bike-in-shed' people on their bike - you cycle to the bus

stop, off bus you cycle to work. Designed by Steve Jacobs, they are already used in Cardiff, Durham, Sussex, Yorkshire, and Ipswich among other places. One of the successes of the scheme has been the New Forest Tour, where a double-decker open-topped bus with a bike trailer meets every second train, and goes round beauty spots and campsites. To be successful such schemes need: a visually exciting experience, publicity and promotion, a suitable bus company, a carefully chosen route, consideration of facilities for cyclists along the route. It is intended to promote the system along leisure routes, so that it will then take off along commuter routes. The chief cost is driver training for a special licence (D+E). Another option is to have bike racks on the front of buses, as is done in US, but such buses are more dangerous in the case of a collision. For more information see:

www.bus-cycle.com

Tel 023 8066 7076

Graham Bowskill of the Highways Agency spoke on **Cycling Provision on the National Road Network**. To the Highways Agency the cyclist is an NMU (Non Motorised Road User) The good news is that from February 2005 the Highways Agency will carry out a mandatory NMU audit on all new roads schemes. The Highways Agency also has an initiative to influence Travel Behaviour through workplace travel plans and liaison with Local Authorities. The cyclists present were very vocal about

their wish to have cycle right of way on cycle tracks going alongside A roads.

An Innovative Cycle Map Technique

was described by John Franklin of Cheltenham cycling campaign. Instead of highlighting only cycle routes, the entire road network is coloured in terms of the degree of cycling competence needed on each stretch of road. Roads coloured yellow are residential streets with slow, light traffic suitable for a level 1 cyclist. Green shows through routes with low traffic. Blue shows roads with busy traffic, traditional road design with safe overtaking, fit for level 2 and 3 cyclists. Red shows busy roads, some HGV, high-speed traffic, complex junctions. Purple shows busy fast roads, with many lorries and large roundabouts. A blue edging marks cycle lanes. Cycle shops are shown, but not car parks or green spaces not open to public. In Cheltenham GCHQ employees are all given the map, and the possibility of cycle training.

Dene Stevens who is a Walking and Cycling for Health worker with a Primary Care Trust gave a talk on **Cycle Training in the NHS**. The NHS has a number of programmes which may involve cycling: a physical activity strategy (to cut coronary heart disease), NHS bodies are supposed to have travel plans, the Commission for Health improvements has provided targets for Primary Care Trusts; the new GP contracts have funding to buy services and could have funds

for physical activity referral; there has been a Health Development Authority report on physical activity and obesity, a Commons Select Committee report on Obesity.

Physical inactivity costs the country £10 billion. With regard to exercise referral, exercise on prescription tends to be gym focused. However an evidence-based review found that things that work are: (1) based in the community, (2) teach behavioural skills and (3) tailored to individual needs. (Like cycling!).

National standards for **cycle training** were drawn up last year, and are administered by the CTC. It has been found that trained cyclists cycle more and further. Training gives cyclists the confidence to cycle on the road for the first time. Training is based on assertive cycling (i.e. keeping in lane, not cycling too close to the kerb, negotiating traffic using body language and eye contact etc.). Parents learn with their children. There are 3 levels to complete. Training gives people confidence to cycle on the road for the first time. To find out more, consult *Cyclecraft*, a book on skilled cycling technique for adults, by John Franklin, published by The Stationary Office, the recommended course book for the National Cycle Training Project. It is endorsed by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Department of Transport, widely acclaimed and considered on a par with Police Roadcraft manuals. (Some cycle campaign groups in England have bought copies

and put them in the Public Library).

Training is organised at times to suit trainees. Cycling Instructors were recruited from experienced cyclists who were good communicators, receptive to the needs of trainees. They are trained for 4 days: In some places there is a secondary school road safety team, which is funded through the neighbourhood road safety initiative, a staff travel plan funded by the National lottery, a physical activity referral scheme (funded by the lottery), there are Health Assessment Centres which provide a choice of health walks, gym, gardening, green gym, gentle exercise as well as cycling. such schemes give people confidence to cycle on the road for the first time. Cycle campaigners are encouraged to approach the Director of Public Health in their local Primary Care Trust and look at their targets and the plans that have been made and bring them physical activity promotional material and tie it in with Road Safety schemes.

Roger Geffin of CTC presented a review of **CTC Campaign Issues Early Day Motion: Walking & cycling Action Plan**. This came out in July. It was supported by 154 MPs. The Plan aimed to put walking and cycling at the heart of the wider transport policy by providing:

- 1) Better walking and cycling conditions,
- 2) Integration with public transport and other

sectors of the economy,

- 3) Information and encouragement,
- 4) Adequate funding and other resources.

The plan can be downloaded from:

www.dft.gov.uk

Sustainable Travel (Tel 0870 1226 236).

In spite of this, the **Transport White Paper** which came out in August, seemed to be entirely focused on reducing the use of private cars by improving public transport, particularly flooding the streets with buses, and developing congestion charging within the next 15 years. To the consternation of cyclists, the former national target (to treble cycle trips between 2000 and 2010 has been dropped in favour of what was called '*sharper, more focused local targets*' - with no explanation of what this meant. It is also flawed by failing to deal with the link between transport and planning, and not having sections on either health or climate change. The Future of Transport White Paper can be found at:

www.dft.gov.uk - about DfT - DfT Strategy (Tel 0870 6005522).

There was a lot of discussion of **Local Transport Plans (LTPs)**. These only apply in England, but may concern us, if the same principles are used here - the four objectives: Accessibility, Congestion, Safety and Environment. *Accessibility* is defined as '*the ability of the local community,*

and in particular disadvantaged and vulnerable groups to access work and important services including education, healthcare, leisure and shopping'. It is about the social exclusion of disadvantaged communities with infrequent, expensive public transport and bad air pollution from surrounding roads and motorways. The scary thing is that the new software that is to be used defines accessibility only in terms of bus routes to key destinations. No consideration is given to ways of walking and cycling to bus stops, train stations, crossings of dangerous roads and roundabouts, etc.

(Editor's note – Northern Ireland's small size means the Regional Transport Strategy and the 3 Transport Plans that sit within the RTS are effectively equivalent to an LTP.)

John Franklin and Roger Geffin conducted a panel session on **the BMA and the helmet compulsion**. They reported that recently the BMA have executed a U turn in relation to the helmet and now want it compulsory. This appears to be due to pressure from a Dr Mark New, based on selective evidence in favour of helmet use. (See paper on BMA website). This is despite the recorded drop in cycling in Australia once helmets were made compulsory. Now is therefore the time for cycle campaigners to put pressure on doctors and ask them to phone the BMA to protest about the lack of consultation about cycle helmets. Bike Biz

has an on-line petition against cycle helmets, and good coverage of the arguments involves. This is an opportunity to take this debate to doctors and health professionals. A well researched and referenced commentary on the Cycle Helmet paper on the BMA website can be found on the website www.cyclehelmets.org

A kind member of Wolves-on-Wheels gave me a bed for the night. She also lent me a bicycle, so that the next day I could join in a post-conference cycle ride round Wolverhampton, to see the best and the worst of cycle facilities in the area.

I'm on my bike!

by Ian Murray



On my bike, in the fresh air, is a great way to oxygenate my brain cells. It makes me think as well, as I did on that hot day last summer. There was this long queue of traffic grumbling with their farting exhausts as they stop/started slowly past me. Those snorting speedy monsters reduced to this! 'This is too much', I thought.

'Have we to put up with this for years to come?' Then, I became more excited. What if oil became short, rationed, highly expensive, would this prise the motorist from their cars? Would this be the only way? Would 'oil shortage' do the trick? Would they take to the bike, horse, or walk? Maybe. Or, horror, horrors. The Government may give the 'Oil Benefit!'

Putting aside my fantasy I reflected on what was being done for us ON BIKES. What practical plans are they up to for us, in Ireland? Speaking for Coleraine, my home town, there has been reasonable progress in providing cycle paths both in and out of town. Many cycle friendly minor roads have been signposted. Also a well designed cycle/pedestrian bridge has been provided across the river. Work is on-going. There are regular meetings of the 'North Coast Cycling Consortium' where members of the Council, Roads Service, Sustrans & C.T.C discuss further development of cycle provision which 'they think' we need.

We could do with many 'Cycle Pressure Groups' in many of our towns to be a public voice for cycle users. Unless we cyclists put forward our needs, how can our local authorities provide for us! Sustrans have been foremost in providing safe cycling and walking routes to schools. Called 'Safe Routes to Schools' they have proved popular on the mainland. Sustrans are talking to schools in the Province

about this healthy way of children getting to school. If taken up it will help reduce the congestion of cars at morning and afternoon school times.

Using the car to get to work can also pose problems with rush hour gridlock. Cycle use by staff can benefit employers as well. For further details see www.nationalcyclingstrategy.org.uk.

Parking too is a problem in the Coleraine district since the University of Ulster introduced paying for parking on the Campus.

Finally trying to get folk onto a bike, changing their lifestyle is not easy. Some negative excuses I get are: "I haven't got the time. Too old, fat, thin, weak, etc. etc. I'd never keep it up. Its dangerous. I love my car." Well we can't win them all! But changing your lifestyle to 'less car more cycling' can be beneficial in so many ways healthwise. It has been proved that regular gentle exercise on a bike, about five miles daily, produces good muscle tone, aids circulation, is good for the lungs, reduces stress and improves sleep. Weight watchers can benefit too. Cycling helps remove flab from ankles, legs, thighs, buttocks, waist and arms and improves skin and complexion. So.....what's the excuse? Be like me "I'M ON MY BIKE!"

December cycling for the shopping

by Katie's Granny



Living in rural Northern Ireland we are dependent on the car for most of our journeys but one of the treats on the weekend/day-off is to cycle to the village for the shopping.

B-roads in Northern Ireland are notorious for their speeding cars but the seasonally changing scenery is worth the risk.

So, taking a few days off when our city-slicker granddaughter visited, we did not change the habits of our rural lifestyle. We wrapped her up well and with her mother hesitant but supportive we set off, 4 bikes, one with a little red seat, two panniers, a list and the cash.

Katie's first real shopping experience.



Grandpa rode menacingly at the back in his reflective big,

bright yellow jacket just in case anyone thought they might pass the convoy without slowing down.

Look – sheep, look - cows, look - a woof-woof dog, hens, ducks and a cat! More sheep, more cows! Mummy had to duck under the tree branches. The special treat only available to children on the back of bicycles – to lean out and touch the hedges and feel the prickly branches. What an exciting journey.

Car up, car down we shout in the cyclists' modern jargon. Single file when there is traffic on the road, then two abreast when the road is clear. Singing 'Old Macdonald had a farm' to the real animals in the fields.

Some cars slowed and some stopped – well you do tend to meet and talk with more of the neighbours when out on the bike than when you in your car and most of them slow down when they see such a colourful convoy on the road.

In to the shops, much attention for the little person all wrapped up against the December cold on a bright red seat on the back of a bike. Fill the baskets, then to the checkout and no plastic carrier bags but into the panniers and back onto the bike.

Then it's back on the road again past all the familiar sights, telling all the animals how we've bought tea and are going back to cook it.

What better way to spend the hour or so between playing with plastic toys and tea at granny and grandpa's house?

(Editor's note:- Grandpa is looking forward to the day when traffic calming on rural minor roads is a fact instead of a pipe dream. Sustrans funded by the Scottish Executive have just published an excellent guide to traffic calming on Rural Roads. "Often narrow roads are urbanised through insensitive engineering techniques". How true that is in NI)

Belfast Councillor leads by example



Tom McClelland (ED) recently pedaled along to the City Hall, in Belfast where, in grand surroundings, he had a chat with Belfast City Councillor **Tom Hartley**, who has been a regular cyclist in Belfast for 5 years now. He cycles from his constituency in the Lower Falls to the City Hall, most days and is a great advocate of the cycling in Belfast.

ED: I believe that you have recently received good news on the mileage allowance for bicycle use.

TH: Yes, after years of campaigning, I have helped ensure that the mileage allowance for bicycle use for Councillors and certain employees has risen from just 6.7p to 20p per mile. When I found that the British Government was raising the bike allowance in the rest of the UK I talked to Roads Service, the Chief Executive of the Council, Sustrans and the DOE Local Government Section to see if we could have a reasonable rate for cycling here. I hope the new rate will encourage more Councilors and Council employees to cycle. After all, Belfast Council covers a small area and much of the city is quite flat.

ED: Why do you cycle?

TH: I started cycling when I was much younger and cycled the length and breadth of Ireland staying in Youth Hostels. I stopped cycling in my early 20's, and I do have a driving license. However about 5 years ago I started cycling again and cycle most days now. I cycle for a number of reasons – firstly it makes me feel healthier, and now that I do not run a car I am saving money. Also driving makes me hyper, stuck in traffic and putting up with other drivers, so I am happier on the bike.

ED: What do you think of conditions for cycling in Belfast?

TH: Well, the roads of Belfast are dominated by cars. There are few cycle lanes in my part of town. I cycle down the Falls Road past the Royal

Hospital, and into the city centre. We need a good cycle lane on the Falls Road. We also need cycle lanes on the Andytown Road, Glen Road, Whiterock Road with links to the City Centre.

ED: As a Councillor what can you do to promote cycling?

TH: I can lead by example by being seen traveling on Council business by bike. Some of my friends have started cycling and another Councillor David Kennedy now cycles. However the planners need to listen to society and involve Local Councillors in planning for transport, as we are connected to the local people. People are getting lazier and society is getting unhealthy so it is important that conditions on the roads are improved to encourage more people to cycle.

ED: Can you assist people from other areas of Belfast who are campaigning for better cycle facilities.

TH: Yes, if any one wants me to help they can ring me at the City Hall on 9032 0202.

REMINDER

NICI AGM

11.15am
Saturday 19th February 2005
 @
Belfast Exposed Art Gallery
The Exchange Place
23 Donegal Place
Belfast