

NICI Newsletter

WORD FROM THE CHAIR



NICI Steering Group: Jonnie Palmer, web master, Kathryn Carson, membership secretary, Sally Liya, policy and research, John Wright, liaison with Green Action and environmental campaigner, Tom McClelland, Chair. Pat McKeivitt the Treasurer unfortunately missed the photograph.

The Steering Group has been meeting regularly and working hard. We are concentrating on a number of manageable objectives, including, contributing to the Belfast Routes Group, participating in the Cycling Forum, responding to various consultation documents and issues papers.

We are an open and transparent group who warmly welcome new faces and enthusiastic contributors who will help boost our efforts.

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Cycling With Children

David Simpson & Fionnuala O'Callaghan

Never is the conflict between motor traffic and bicycles more acute than when children are involved. We are fortunate to



live in a rural location, but as a consequence we both have to commute to Belfast. Paradoxically the high volume of fast moving traffic, to which I am afraid we contribute, makes small country roads more dangerous than many city streets.

When our children were very young we ventured out with them strapped into baby seats on the back of our bikes. By riding very carefully we felt reasonably comfortable with this arrangement. However, as soon as the children became self-propelled it was impossible to bring them on the roads. The only, less than ideal, solution is for me to run alongside our six year-old. Whilst this contributes to my fitness training it is hardly suitable for everyone!

Last summer we had a holiday in Brittany. A bike rack was duly fitted to the car and big and small bikes attached. Perhaps the most enjoyable part of the holiday was cycling together on the quiet village roads and in particular on a car-free pathway to the local lighthouse. One of the few places we are aware of in Northern Ireland with such a track is around the balancing lakes at Craigavon, which is certainly to be recommended for a nerve-free outing.

Any measures to reduce the impact of traffic are important, but to enjoy cycling with young children a car-free environment is essential. Although the development of such facilities is very difficult it should be promoted at every opportunity.

Editors note –

Parts of the national cycle network are traffic free and ideal for cycling with young children.

**NICI acknowledges the kind support of
John Reavey Solicitors,
West Street,
Carrickfergus
(Tel 9335 5535) and
625-627 Shore Road,
Whiteabbey
(Tel 9085 3361)**

See www.nationalcyclenetwork.org.uk for more information.

David and Fionnuala's experience on rural roads highlights the problem of speed and growing volumes of traffic. Research recently published by the Transport Research Laboratory, TRL310, examines why rural roads that once provided a tranquil setting for cycling and walking are now so dangerous. In Great Britain roads in non-built up areas account for only 9% of all cycle casualties but almost half of road deaths. The links between severity of accidents and speed limits are considered. Recommendations are made for traffic management initiatives to be considered to improve conditions for all non-motorised modes and suggest promoting a rural road hierarchy. When will the research findings be implemented in Northern Ireland?



Get round this! A 10 wheel heavy lorry on a C-class road!

Belfast Metropolitan Plan

A consultative conference was held in February and the Draft Preferred Strategy was examined both in workshops and later in a question and answer session. Four themes were presented:

- Public transport
- Strategic highway network
- Local road network, incorporating walking and cycling
- The need for demand management – constraining car use

Walking and cycling were referred to in the report of the conference, by Community Technical Aid, as one of the important underpinning themes of the Draft Preferred Strategy. The report also noted that many delegates suggested that the budget for walking and cycling should be increased.

Planning Cross City Cycle Routes

Atkins, the consultants who are leading the development of the BMTP, recently presented draft proposals to the Belfast Routes Group, supported by on the ground research, for a scheme to improve access for commuter cyclists to the city centre following north-south, west-east axis. The presentation dealt with improvements to difficult road junctions and highlighted the need to follow desire lines.

The presentation is part of a very complicated jigsaw envisaged by the Regional Development Strategy “to have a modern sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone’s quality of life”.

Comber Greenway Campaign

It's not everyday that a mile of new traffic-free cycle and walking route is built in the heart of Belfast, but with your help this is what will be achieved within the next 6 months. Following the laying of a water pipe along the Comber Railway line at Bloomfield, Roads Service is considering reinstatement details of this linear park, along future National Cycle Network route 9. Our particular concern is the need for wide (3metres) bitmaced paths so that cyclists, walkers, joggers, wheelchair users etc can comfortably share the space. If you support the reinstatement of the path and planting for wildlife please write soon to: Mr Joe Drew, Roads Service Manager, Eastern Division, Hydebank, Belfast BT8 8JL or email roads.eastern@drdni.gov.uk.

Cycling Forum

The Northern Ireland Cycling Forum has been restructured to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. There are four sub-directorates:

- Strategic review
- Monitoring and research
- Marketing
- Routes and technical

The NICI steering group's view is that everyday cycling's contribution to public health is as important as the environmental and sustainable issues and significant work is being carried out by the Health Promotion Agency in making this link.

The representatives from the local Councils highlighted the importance of having Councillors and Chief Executives promoting cycling and cycling provision within Council areas. This work has begun and will take time to bear fruit.

Cycling Policemen

Policemen in Belfast and Ballymena have recently been equipped with high performance bikes with 27 gears. Jim Rodgers, the Chair of the Belfast District Policing Board, has said “the bikes are more flexible than patrol cars getting to incidents quickly through heavy traffic and video cameras attached to the helmets gather evidence efficiently and clearly. The scheme has only been in operation for a few weeks and has already won the approval of the public.”

Pedalling Picnic

In support of our friends in Sustrans and with a view to showing children that cycling is fun and healthy, we are organising a traffic free, pedalling picnic during Bike Week on Sunday 22nd June. Cyclists of all ages and abilities are welcome, but under-16's should be accompanied by an adult.

This is a new area for us, becoming involved in raising cycling awareness.

We hope we will see many of you with friends, family, grannies, grandpas and grandchildren on the day!

We meet at 1.45pm for a 2pm start from Belfast at Stranmillis car park between Cutters Wharf and the Boat Club or from the Island Centre car park in Lisburn. We are cycling to Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park for the picnic (bring your own!) and then cycling back to the start. It's about 5 miles each way on a level, traffic free path and we are sure it will be a fun filled adventure for everyone. It is not necessary to register in advance, but if you are thinking of coming it would be useful if you could let us know so we have a rough idea of numbers. The pedalling picnic is listed on the Sustrans web-site (www.sustrans.org.uk). If you would like more information about the pedalling picnic contact Kathryn Carson (Tel: 02890643994; Mobile 07905553293; e-mail membership@nici.org.uk). More details of other **Bike Week** events at www.bikeweek.org.uk