

NICI NEWSLETTER



NICI AGM

Thursday 12 May at 6:30pm in the Donegall Pass Community Centre located at 25 Apsley Street, Belfast BT7 1BL

NICI Responses

Since the last AGM & Newsletter, NICI have provided responses to the following consultations:

Donegall Place Traffic Order	10/05/2010
Road Safety Strategy	15/06/2010
Queen Street Traffic Order	08/09/2010
Belfast On The Move	30/11/2010
DRDNI Budget Helmets	16/02/2011 14/03/2011

The responses will be placed on the NICI web-site.

Annual Newry Canal Ride Sunday 15th May

Meet at Portadown Train Station at 10:30am. Ride starts at 10:45am.

Cycle all the way to Newry and back (40 miles), to a midpoint location and back, e.g. Scarva (14 miles) or Jerrettspass (30 miles), or get the train back from Newry (20 miles).

Contact us

web@nici.org.uk

Website

www.nici.org.uk

A Facebook page is in development

Keep up support for the Comber Greenway

The Comber Greenway is a wonderful 7 mile traffic-free green corridor through the heart of East Belfast, developed by Sustrans. Walkers, cyclists and nature lovers were horrified in 2008 when the Department for Regional Development announced that the Comber Greenway was to be developed into the site for the EWAY rapid bus route. Members of NICI helped establish the Greenway to Stay Campaign which has sought to galvanise public opinion and lobby politicians about the importance of the Greenway (see www.combergreenway.co.uk for more information).

A number of meetings were held with civil servants and local politicians, and it would appear that all six local MLAs now support the retention of the Greenway, although this was not initially the case. Caroline McDowell, Secretary of the NICI Steering Group, was part of a delegation which met DRD Minister, Connor Murphy, to present him with almost 1500 signatures supporting the retention of the Greenway. Although he could give no guarantees, the feedback was much more positive than had previously been the case, and it would appear that the tide is now turning in favour of running EWAY along the Upper Newtownards Road. However, the Greenway to Stay Campaign group is not complacent and is encouraging people to write to candidates for the forthcoming Assembly elections to make their views heard.



The Comber Greenway has also won two prestigious awards. In September 2009, the Sunday Times announced it as one of the top 12 cycling routes in the UK and Ireland, and the following month it won first prize in the European Greenway Awards. Let us hope that with ever increasing popularity and international recognition, the spectre of a 'greyway' alongside a rapid bus route is now consigned to the past.

Connswater Community Greenway

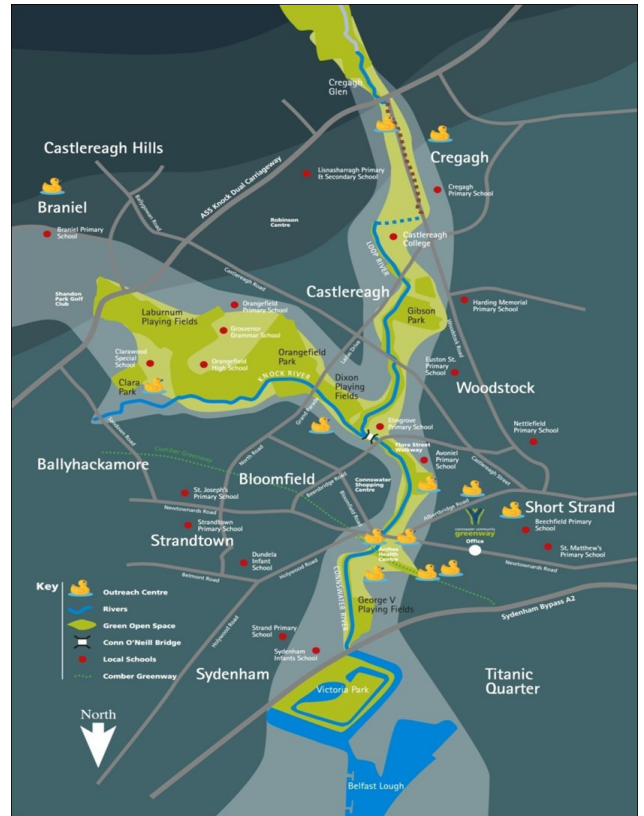
The Connswater Community Greenway is an exciting new development in East Belfast, with building work getting underway in the next few months. The CCG has been developed by East Belfast Partnership and is funded by the Big Lottery Fund, Belfast City Council and the Department for Social Development. It is a major environmental improvement project, connecting 379 acres of public open space, building 40 new and improved bridges and 16kms of cycle and walkways.

The vision is to develop a safe, accessible, sustainable greenway which is an inspirational living landmark that improves the quality of life for the people of East Belfast. It will also link with the Comber Greenway, creating a network of safe cycle routes in East Belfast.

The physical changes to the living environment will include:

- 9 km linear park
- Wildlife corridor
- Connecting open space
- New bridges
- 5km of clean rivers
- 6 tourism and heritage trails
- A civic square

The Centre of Excellence for Public Health (NI) has won a prestigious Medical Research Council award to evaluate the Connswater Community Greenway and its impacts on physical activity and the health of the local population in East Belfast. Hopefully this will once again highlight the many benefits of cycling!



Cycle Helmets

NICI has written to the DOE committee to express its opposition to the proposed cycle helmet legislation. Although we are not opposed to helmets – most of the steering group wear them most of the time while cycling – we are opposed to them becoming compulsory. We have two main objections:

1. The proposed law is disproportionate
2. The proposed law would discourage people from cycling

We do not accept that the risks associated with cycling require such legislation. Data from the N.I Travel Survey and PSNI indicate that the risks of serious injury or death on the road are similar for cyclists and pedestrians, and much lower than that of motorcyclists. Secondly, we believe that the proposed law would discourage people from cycling. There is strong evidence from around the world that such legislation does indeed reduce cycling levels. One of the most common reasons as to why people don't cycle here is that it is too dangerous. This law would re-enforce this belief. Whether it would actually make cycling safer is debatable. Melbourne, reckoned to be one of the better places to cycle in Australia, and where helmets are compulsory for cyclists of all ages, has a much higher rate of death and serious injuries per distance cycled than N.I. We believe there are better ways of improving safety, such as reducing speeds and cycle training.

Update: With the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly, this particular bill will not be progressed. Any parties wishing to implement such legislation will need to start the whole process again from scratch.

Holidays with the Tandem Club

By Charlie White, aged 12
(helped by Ramona White, aged 9, and Dad)

Since 2004 my family has usually gone to Tandem Club Rallies as part of our summer holiday. My little sister Ramona was just 3 so she went in the trailer pulled by Dad and Kate on a tandem. I was only 5 so I can't remember much.

Dad says there are 3 types of rally:

1. Family weekend
2. National – one week long in the UK
3. International – one week long in Europe

This was a family weekend in England.



In 2005 we went to Denmark for the International Rally.

Like every year, we went by car and ferry. It takes a long time! We have a tandem on the car roof and a trailer with the other bikes.

Some people cycled the whole way from England!

Ramona is now on the Trailer bike, behind Kate and Dad.

In 2006 we went to Edinburgh for the National Rally. It was a very hot year.

This is Dad, Kate and Ramona at the Scottish Parliament with Arthurs seat in the background.

In the same holiday we also went on the Family weekend which was in Shropshire.



After a break of 2 years we went to the Netherlands in 2009. This is me with Ramona on the back, showing off. It was so safe on the roads, and quite hot, so we didn't wear helmets. Last year, the Tandem Club was in Luxembourg. Unfortunately we could not get a place in the official campsite so we stayed in a nearby campsite just across the river. It was actually in Germany!

This year we will be going to the UK National rally in Herefordshire.



Dad says:

We have all enjoyed going to Tandem Club rallies as part of our summer holidays.

Most people camp at the rally site, and this makes it a relatively inexpensive week. There are typically 3 suggested rides each day, say of 30, 40 and 50 miles. We will usually take the shortest or just make up our own route. There are no official ride leaders or schedules, people just set off and stop when they wish. It is good for families, but a lot of young couples and retired couples go as well. You have to be a member of the Tandem Club, but this only costs £10 a family.

More details can be found at <http://www.tandem-club.org.uk>. The CTC organise similar holidays, but their pricing structure makes them relatively expensive for a family of 6, so we have never been. For couples though, the pricing is comparable – see <http://www.cyclingholidays.org/brides/index.php>.

Northern Ireland Tandem Cycling Festival

Continuing with the tandem theme, Lisburn in Focus are holding Northern Ireland's first tandem only cycling festival on Saturday 4th June 2011 at Down Royal Park Golf Course. The purpose of the event is to allow blind and partially sighted tandem cyclists to have a good day. Everyone can cycle at their own rate and level of fitness, with staggered starts for each length of course (2, 10 or 45 miles), with the aim of finishing together for a BBQ lunch.

They are looking for volunteer tandem pilots (who cycle on the front of the bike), blind and partially sighted stokers - both experienced and people who want to have a first try! If you would like to take part contact Lisburn in Focus on 028 9260 0388 or email lisburninfocus@rnib.org.uk.

Sad News of deaths of local cyclists

On a much sadder note, NICI would like to offer their condolences to the family and friends of the 2 cyclists from Northern Ireland who were recently killed in Belfast and North Wales.

Gareth Crockett died after being hit by a car on the A55 dual carriageway in Anglesey. He had been part of a group raising money for charity in a 100-mile run and 450-mile cycle ride from Belfast to London. He was just 27.

Michael Caulfield died following a collision with a lorry at the junction of the Ormeau Road and the Annadale Embankment on Friday 15th April, at about 6:30 am. He was the first cyclist to be killed on the roads in Northern Ireland since 2008, when 2 cyclists died in separate incidents, one of which also involved a lorry. Lorries are a particular danger to cyclists, and we will be writing to the PSNI to relay our concerns on this issue.

New Venue and Time for AGM

The NICI Steering group meets every 6 weeks or so at the Donegall Pass Community Centre, at 25 Apsley Street, Belfast. This has proved convenient and in-expensive, and will be the venue for our AGM, on **Thursday 12 May at 6:30pm**

Party Manifestos and Cycling

NICI is non-party political and will work with any elected representatives to further cycling in Northern Ireland. We decided to look at the manifestoes of the 5 main parties, searching for “cycl” and “bik” as a rough indicator of party positions. Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionists did not mention cycling or bikes at all. Excerpts from the Alliance, SDLP and DUP manifestoes are re-produced below:

Alliance

Environments which promote a physically active lifestyle and healthy diet should be created across the education, employment and transport sectors. For example, safe environments for cyclists and pedestrians should be promoted.

It is vital that the budget considers the balance of costs versus benefits of a reduction in public transport funding, pedestrian walkways and cycle lanes versus road building.

Alliance will support a rapid transit system in Belfast. However, it would have to be part of an integrated transport strategy and its development should not be at the cost of current public transport funding. Alliance favours a road based system and believes there are a number of key factors that should underpin the investment decision: economic payback must be maximised (including opportunities for job creation, reduced cost for commuters); the development should connect with wider transport routes e.g., the West Way and Titanic Quarter; it should protect access to walking and cycling routes (retaining or enhancing current provision such as the Comber Greenway); and it must act as a viable alternative to the private car.

Walking and Cycling

In Northern Ireland, 28% of all journeys less than one mile and 67% of journeys between one and two miles are made by car. The Regional Transportation Strategy recognises the importance of walking and contains measures to make it easier for all to walk by providing good and accessible infrastructure.

Alliance supports the continued provision and maintenance of cycle lanes on our roads. We recognise the importance of safe road use. In particular, we believe there is a need to educate children in the safe use of roads. We therefore propose primary schools include cycling proficiency as part of the physical education curriculum.

SDLP

... it is widely accepted that reducing the speed from 30 mph to 20 mph on urban residential streets through creative urban planning has been proven to increase the number of cyclists on the roads.

The SDLP therefore brought draft legislation to the Assembly which would reduce speed limits in urban areas. By making our streets a safer place for all, we will increase uptake of active transport, namely cycling and walking.

We initiated the draft legislation and also demanded a reversal on cuts to the active transport budget following the startling 98% cut in the Budget. In the next mandate, we will build on our work to date by expanding and promoting the ‘bike to work’ scheme to encourage employees to cycle to work if and where possible, incentivising the scheme by enabling employees to purchase bikes tax-free.

In addition, we will establish a bike scheme in Belfast, whereby bikes are available for short-term public hire across the city, given the success of a similar scheme in Dublin, as well as evidenced in many cities across Europe. Looking beyond our main cities, we support the expansion of the cycle network across the North and an increase in the number of dedicated cycle routes.

Party Manifestos and Cycling (continued)

DUP

OBESITY

increase the number of regular cyclists

INFRASTRUCTURE

- continue to minimise road casualties through road safety engineering, collision remedial schemes, traffic calming, school safety zones and improved pedestrian and cycle networks

View from the Green Mountain

There's a film called "Greenberg" in which the principal character devotes a substantial amount of his time to writing letters of complaint to the directors of various undertakings with which he has come into contact. This is surely not the best way to enact change, so in an attempt to improve the lot of cyclists, I decided to join the steering group of NICI.

Northern Ireland has a long and proud tradition of exploiting the use of the internal combustion engine: on land, sea and in the air. One view is that the majority, or at any rate a significant number of vehicle drivers, care about cyclists. The second possible narrative is that most, if not virtually all, motorists have never given a second thought to the needs of cyclists. Where they have considered the issue, such motorists may be actively hostile to the existence of cyclists in almost every forum.

I'm inclined to accept the second scenario. It seems to me there are few motorists in NI who would be happy to accept any compromise to their rights to drive at speed on large, unrestricted roads. Government policy merely reflects this view. Testament to this are the hundreds of millions of pounds lavished on roads compared with the few hundred thousand parsimoniously (but with considerable trumpeting) dispensed on the odd cycle lane.

It may be said that it took campaigning Dutch groups years to achieve their cycling infrastructure in Holland. However, the policy decisions implemented in Holland weren't the result of impossible campaigns by a few dedicated cyclists bringing little known statistics to the attention of a disinterested government and general public. Rather, those decisions were the result of what the majority of people in Holland wanted. And so it is in NI; except that the vast majority of our people want to drive cars and don't want the trouble of cyclists on roads. Where campaigns *were* necessary in Holland, they would have been pushing at an open door in policy terms.

The fact is that, for most motorists in NI, cyclists aren't a vulnerable minority to whom special protection should be afforded; rather, they're just a damn nuisance. This much is clearly and democratically reflected in our government's policy.

Campaigning may risk generating feelings of frustration and hopelessness; but the alternative is even more awful i.e. to allow the decision makers to proceed with no voice at all being raised, other than by the odd, lone Greenberg. It is imperative that the interests of cyclists be considered and NICI offers a valuable platform for local cyclists to deliberate and decide on matters of concern to them, and for those views to be heard by local government.

Julian Black

Cycling Questionnaire

Caroline McDowell and Conall McDevitt are keen cyclists who manage to fit cycling into their busy work schedules. Caroline is a Health and Wellbeing Improvement Manager with the Public Health Agency and is also the current secretary of NICI. Conall is an SDLP MLA for South Belfast. The two cyclists kindly agreed to complete the questionnaire below for the NICI Newsletter.

Question 1: *When did you first start cycling?*

Answer: Caroline

I first started cycling when I was at university and haven't looked back since!

Answer: Conall

First started seriously cycling in and around 2007 when I got a bike through the "bike to work" scheme.

Question 2: *How often do you cycle and what do you like most about cycling?*

Answer: Caroline

I cycle most days, and always cycle to work unless I have meetings outside Belfast. I'm lucky in that I've always lived close enough to my work to cycle, except for a three year period spent in Manila when it was just too hot! I love the feeling of freedom that cycling gives – not being cooped up in the car and stuck in traffic – and I also enjoy not having to go to a gym to get my exercise. It's also a very good way of de-stressing (except of course when you get cut up by motorists!) My husband Boyd and I also go on cycling holidays each year.

Answer: Conall

Everyday. I cover about 100 miles a week, cycling to and from Stormont as well as in and around the constituency on other days for various meetings and appointments. I love the freedom of it and the opportunity to exercise and commute at the same time. Also gives me an opportunity to clear my head!

Question 3: *How would you encourage more people to take up cycling?*

Answer: Caroline

By telling them how much fun it is, what good exercise it is and showing that you can turn up at work and meetings by bike with no hassle at all.

Answer: Conall

By example and talking lots about it!

Question 4: *How would you improve the existing cycling infrastructure so as to promote cycling?*

Answer: Caroline

I'd like to see more on-road cycle paths that don't end just when you need them! Safe routes across Belfast City Centre would also be very welcome.

Answer: Conall

I'd make all residential streets 20mph. I'd also reverse Conor Murphy's 98% cut in the cycling budget.

Question 5: *Do you think that cycling helmets should be made compulsory?*

Answer: Caroline

I wear a helmet myself but would not like to see them being made mandatory as evidence from other countries has shown that helmet legislation has resulted in fewer people cycling. I'd like to see greater emphasis on driver education.

Answer: Conall

No I don't, though I do wear one and do encourage other people to wear them.

NICI would like to thank Caroline and Conall for taking the time to response to the questionnaire.

Future direction of NICI

The number of people on the steering group has declined, with some new faces, for which we are very grateful, but sadly with more people departing. Consequently, we have been less active this year than previously. We helped finance a Cycle Chic event during Bike Week last year, but plans for other bike rides fell through.

With this in mind we began to question whether we should continue as a separate group, merge into a CTC campaign group, or create a new, Belfast focused cycling group by joining up with Belfast Friends of the Earth. Ultimately we decided to remain an independent group, affiliated with the CTC, and working in tandem with CTC, Sustrans, and Belfast Friends of the Earth.

Being a CTC affiliated organisation means that NICI members can become affiliated CTC members if they so wish. The main advantage of this is third party insurance, but there is also a membership card with certain discounts and benefits, such as a 15% reduction at Cotswolds. These and other benefits, such as an excellent printed magazine, come with full CTC membership, which for an adult costs £37 a year. Affiliated membership costs just £12 (plus £5 NICI Membership).

We hope that being able to offer benefits such as third party insurance will make it easier to recruit more members, but if we cannot achieve this we will have to revisit the idea of merging with other organisations.

Right now, we urgently need to get more people active on the steering group, particularly since our treasurer, Niall Waterman, is stepping down at the AGM. If you are able to assist in this, or in any other capacity, we would be delighted to have you on board, so please get in touch, and help shape the future of cycling in Northern Ireland.

Bike Week 2011

Bike Week 2011 will take place from 18th – 26th June throughout Britain and Ireland. The aim is to get more people cycling, more often, and the associated events should offer something for everyone – from families, schools and companies, to seasoned cyclists and those who have never cycled before. See <http://www.bikeweek.org.uk/> and <http://www.bikeweek.ie> for details.

NICI are organising 2 events under the Bike Week banner, but in the weeks before Bike Week itself:

Sun 15th May: Portadown Newry Canal Ride. Meet at Portadown Train Station from 10:30

Sun 12th June: Ride to Belfast Castle. Meet at the Big Fish, Donegall Quay, Time TBC

More details will be placed on the NICI Web Site closer to the time

To save money, and the environment, we wish to distribute Newsletters electronically as far as possible. If this has been posted to you, and you would be happy to receive it via e-mail, please email membership@nici.org.uk