RESPONSE TO TRANSPORT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO EFFECTIVENESS OF LEGISLATION RELATING TO TRANSPORT FOR DISABLED

The Cycling Embassy of Great Britain aims to act as a conduit for best practice for bicycle infrastructure design from around the world, and to achieve proper standards for the creation of cycle infrastructure suitable for all types of users - including, in particular, those with mobility problems.

‘Shared use’ pavements

One of our main concerns - of relevance to transport for the disabled - is with 'shared use' pavements for pedestrians and cyclists, which continue to be advocated in government guidance (see LTN 2/08, and LTN 1/12)[1].

Rather than providing, for instance, a clearly-defined cycle track alongside a pavement explicitly for pedestrians, the current practice of creating ‘shared use’ pavements places pedestrians and cyclists in conflict. This is not only inconvenient for those wishing to cycle; it is also unpleasant and unnerving for pedestrians, particularly those with mobility problems, or sensory impairment.

These 'shared use' pavements are often mere conversions of existing pavements; cycling has simply been allowed on the pavement, without any change to the existing street environment. Indeed, 'convert pedestrian routes to shared use' is actually suggested within LTN 1/12, rather than being explicitly forbidden.

All too often this occurs when there is adequate space to create a dedicated cycle track alongside a pavement, usually by reducing the width of the main carriageway. Cycle users and pedestrians are placed in conflict, when there is more than enough space to keep the two apart.

We feel that this misguided approach derives from a ‘two-tier’ approach to cycling provision, one that sees those cyclists who are unwilling to cycle in the main carriageway as ‘slow’, and therefore happy to cycle on infrastructure specifically designed for pedestrians. This is in complete contrast to continental practice, which seeks to accommodate the needs of *all* cyclists in one design solution, separated clearly from pedestrians.

The current British approach is problematic both because it places bicycle users in conflict with pedestrians (particularly those who are less mobile, and those who cannot hear or see an approaching bicycle) but also because it expects bicycle users to cycle on infrastructure specifically designed for pedestrians - especially able-bodied pedestrians.

Considerable benefits would accrue, therefore, from providing bicycle infrastructure suitable not just for all bicycle users, but for those with mobility problems. This is something we shall discuss in the next section.

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[1] Local Transport Note 2/08, *Cycle Infrastructure Design* and Local Transport Note 1/12, *Shared Use Routes for Pedestrians and Cyclists*

Infrastructure suitable for all

Consistent, well-designed off-carriageway bicycle infrastructure would be of considerable benefit not just to able-bodied cyclists, but also to people with disabilities. At present, those using mobility scooters, or specially adapted bicycles and tricycles[2] either have to travel on pavements that are poorly designed for their needs, with street furniture, inconvenient crossing points, and conflict with pedestrians, or attempt to travel in the carriageway itself, which can be an unnerving experience.

By contrast, bicycle-specific infrastructure is ideally suited to the mobility requirements of these groups. Properly designed cycle tracks and paths can, and should, accommodate mobility scooters, adapted bicycles and even powered wheelchairs. That should mean paths and tracks free from obstacles or barriers that are currently often placed across them in an attempt to limit access by motorcycles, or to slow bicycles down. These barriers frequently block access entirely for mobility scooters and adapted bicycles. Tracks and paths should be smooth, direct and continuous, and allow all types of user to travel wherever they wish with ease, free from interactions with motor traffic.[3]

It should be noted however, that we are not seeking to 'banish' all wheelchair and mobility aid users to a particular piece of infrastructure, whatever the high quality and good intention. Those that use wheelchairs constantly, for example, should of course be welcome on the pavement as well. We are seeking to create an inclusive network that increases the options and scope for disabled people should they choose to use it.

There should also be excellent continuity of clear signage, to be expected on any equitable transport network, so it may be used by all. We would also like to point out that electric bicycles represent an increasingly viable mode of transport for those with mobility problems and the elderly, particularly those who no longer feel comfortable driving. Properly designed bicycle infrastructure should accommodate the needs of these users.

We believe that it is the perfect time to build on the wonderful paralympic legacy resulting from London 2012 to give disabled people greater options to access step-free public transport networks and to get around their local communities without fear or hindrance. We believe that quality bicycle infrastructure is a key to unlocking that potential with a scope that extends beyond the humble bicycle.

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[2] See this video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2C1VOKiF14 for an illustration of how adapted bicycles can be an excellent mode of transport for disabled people

[3] To see how this works in practice, please read this description of how bicycle-specific infrastructure works for those with mobility problems in the Netherlands http://bicycledutch.wordpress.com/2012/12/06/who-else-benefits-from-the-dutch-cycling-infrastructure/, and watch the accompanying video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSGx3HSjKDo

Shared space

Shared space schemes - which are typically defined by a removal of demarcation between pavement and carriageway, and the creation of a uniform surface - are proving to be increasingly popular in towns and cities across the United Kingdom. The intention is to create a calmer street environment by encouraging more cautious driving and negotiation between motorists, pedestrians and other users.

While this may work to an extent in practice, streets without demarcation which continue to have significant flows of motor vehicles (for instance, Exhibition Road in west London) can be unsettling places for blind people, who will find it difficult to know when they have strayed into an area where they might encounter motor vehicles, and deaf people, who cannot hear approaching motor vehicles. They also do little to achieve subjective safety for cyclists; shared space schemes on thoroughfares in the Netherlands are unpopular with Dutch cyclists, who prefer the comfort and security of cycle tracks alongside the carriageway.[4]

To that extent we would like to see careful consideration of how and where shared space schemes are employed. The more successful schemes in the UK are employed alongside measures to significantly reduce motor traffic; for instance, New Road in Brighton, or East Street in Horsham, where motor vehicles are banned during shopping hours, while still allowing bicycle access. We do not feel that shared space is an appropriate treatment on roads that act as major thoroughfares; here we would prefer to see continued demarcation along pavements, and the provision of cycle tracks between pavement and carriageway.

Access to other transport networks

We acknowledge that much has been done and is currently being achieved to increase accessibility at transport interchanges, as well as the buses and railway carriages that run through them to increase ease of travel, comfort and dignity. We do believe that more should be done to increase step free access at railway and bus interchanges as well clearly marked signed quality routes connecting them.

We would like to see better uses of space on railway carriages (or indeed more space provided) accommodating wheelchair users as well as bicycles, especially those used as mobility aids such as tricycles, handcycles, tandems et cetera.

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[4] See Moody, S. and Melia, S. (2011) *Shared space: Implications of recent research for transport policy.* Working Paper. University of the West of England, Bristol http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/16039/