

Response to draft Surrey Cycling Strategy **by David Moxon, Chair of Waverley Cycle Forum**

Overview

General points

The aims of the strategy are welcome. The paper rightly views cycling as part of the solution to a range of the problems we face in Surrey – health, congestion, air quality, limited public transport and high cost of running a car or using public transport.

This response has been discussed at a meeting of the Cycle Forum and with a range of other cyclists. The Forum's assumption is that, if cycle forums are to survive, they would have a key role in "...the development of local plans for each of the Surrey boroughs". If they don't, it's hard to see what they're for. But if they are to survive they need to have a lot more clout. There is real frustration that a great deal of effort, mainly by volunteers, has achieved so little: volunteer fatigue is a serious issue, and one which will not go away unless the enormous amount of effort that people contribute is reflected in changes on the ground. It is rare for SCC staff or councillors to attend meetings so key decision-makers are not fully engaged.

For the most part cycling is not high on the agenda of Borough, Town and Parish Councils. Having a councillor with specific responsibility for cycling would help, but it is clear they would need to work closely with cycle forums or whatever is put in their place. While the Strategy rightly places emphasis on the role of the boroughs and districts, it is important to avoid a silo approach. Journeys do not stop at borough boundaries and many schemes (eg Godalming/Guildford routes) involve more than one borough. SCC needs to ensure a joined-up approach. Specific mechanisms – perhaps including annual meetings involving members of all forums – will be needed.

The Strategy cannot succeed unless local people are fully engaged. For example, the aim for every child to be able to cycle to school in safety is of huge significance and has massive implications for the cycling infrastructure. You will need people who have an intimate knowledge of the area – not just the roads and routes but also what puts potential cyclists off. Strong political leadership, and technical expertise provided by people with a grasp of what cyclists need are prerequisites for success. It is unfortunate that there have been frequent problems with the few schemes that have been implemented due to poor attention to detail.

In working up local plans the question needs to be: "What has to happen for this Strategy to work?" The assumption has to be that over the life of LTP3 funding will be available to make it work. Failure is guaranteed if the authors of plans assume that things that need to be done will be too expensive so there's no point in suggesting them.

I have seen the response of the Guildford Cycle Forum and strongly support their recommendations. The language of the Strategy is too tentative in tone. It is easy to 'consider' things and tick the 'job done' box. But the job is only done if changes happen on the ground so that more people ride bikes. The fact that neighbouring forums have reached similar conclusions is significant in itself given that between us we have a lot of expertise to draw on.

Summary of key points

- In endorsing the Get Britain Cycling report Surrey is rightly aiming high and this is most welcome given that it envisages a massive increase in the level of cycling (eg fivefold by 2025).

- Previous ambitious targets have been missed because they have not been supported by the necessary political and financial support. How will this be tackled?
- For a rural area like Waverley, offroad routes could play a much bigger role. A lot of would-be cyclists are intimidated by the level of traffic on many of Surrey's roads. The lack of any reference to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a surprising omission as it involved a lot of SCC effort and is highly relevant.
- Two-way cycling on one-way streets is a tried and tested way of providing safe cycling access to town centres. The fact it has proved impossible to implement in Godalming illustrates a wider problem: if local opposition is allowed to frustrate evidence-based schemes, how can the Strategy possibly work?
- There have been successful bids for funds in Woking and Guildford. The lesson is that each borough should work up detailed schemes so that they are in a position to make persuasive bids whenever opportunities arise.
- Often there are pavements alongside busy roads outside towns. They are a largely wasted resource because they are usually empty, while the adjacent roads have very high volumes of traffic. On many roads there is insufficient room for cars to pass each other if there is a bike in the way. Well-surfaced shared-use pavements with vegetation and debris removed could help.
- In making better provision to encourage less confident cyclists it is important not to forget the needs of fast, confident cyclists: some commuters can average 20-25mph and need continuing freedom to use roads.
- Since concerns about safety dominate individual decisions on whether or not to cycle it is vital to address this head-on. This requires the kind of detail promised in Annex A of the Smart Cycle Safety Plan but it was nowhere to be found in the draft document.
- Casualty analysis should make more use of data from hospitals and surveys as the police data has severe limitations.
- The data on the amount of cycling in Surrey is full of gaps. If targets are set for increasing the amount of cycling then some serious work is needed on measurement. It's technically complex.
- The Travel Smart table had relatively little to say to motorists. Many of the things aimed at cyclists were not relevant to "tackling casualties". Some things defined as "anti-social behaviour" clearly are, but others are not.
- The rules governing sports events seemed out-of-place: this issue has nothing to do with development of the infrastructure and getting ordinary people to cycle more. It generates strong passions – both for and against – and it is unfortunate that much of the discussion of the Strategy has been about this single issue where cycling is viewed as a problem rather than a solution.

David Moxon
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SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL CYCLING STRATEGY

Response by David Moxon, Chair of Waverley Cycle Forum

The strong pro-cycling approach in Surrey County Council's draft Cycling Strategy is very welcome. It is also timely, as Waverley Borough Council is due to update its own Cycle Plan dating from 2005. The Foreword to the Cycling Strategy says "...we are proposing the development of local plans for each of the Surrey boroughs and districts, to ensure that solutions are tailored to local needs". WBC will need to work closely with SCC in preparing its new plan.

There have been various ambitious targets in the past – such as a quadrupling of cycling by 2012 (set in 1996) - which have failed for lack of commitment to the measures needed to bring this about. It is essential that we learn from past failures. There need to be strong mechanisms for moving from proposed schemes to implementation. Waverley's cycle plan originally listed 37 schemes, yet eight years on hardly any have been implemented while more have been added so the list has simply grown. Even when there is strong support from all interested parties, and funds are available, the processes seem designed to impede rather than support progress.

What follows mostly picks up on points which illustrate more general issues, though some more detailed points are also covered.

We will encourage the provision of off-road cycle routes and activities which aid transport and contribute to health and wellbeing

This is particularly important in a rural area like Waverley. There is an exceptionally high level of car ownership and usage, and while there is a good network of country lanes that are ideal for cycling, the roads between towns and villages are often very busy. Whatever the reality of risk, the perception is that many roads are unsafe for cyclists and potential cyclists are deterred.

There are a lot of excellent offroad routes, a mixture of bridleways, permissive paths and sections of Sustrans routes. However, they do not amount to a coherent network and provision is patchy. Many of the paths which are barred to cyclists would make excellent cycling routes. Yet in parts of Surrey cyclists have been arbitrarily banned from MoD paths which they have always used, and an excellent leisure route on Frensham Common has been withdrawn. This runs completely counter to the spirit of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan published in 2007 which sought to make better use of the network of paths to facilitate cycling and walking routes. My comments on the draft RoWIP, dating from 2007, are attached at Annex as they address some of the key issues affecting offroad cycling and are just as relevant today.

Rural issues: off-road cycling can have negative impact on the countryside. Any activity to encourage off-road cycling needs to consider the protection of wildlife habitats

This is true, but unduly negative. Cycling *can* have a negative impact but it rarely does. Research (mainly from the US) shows that cycles generally have no more impact on path erosion than walkers, and much less than horses. Of course, if a lot more people are attracted to an area the pressures do need to be managed and the work at Leith Hill, through the Surrey Hills Partnership, is a model of good practice. In some areas the 'conservation' card has occasionally been played in circumstances where no amount of probing has identified what the problems are. With a growing population and a need for people to become a lot more active it will be increasingly important to manage demand rather than curb it.

Any measures that increase congestion or reduce parking are likely to be highly controversial

Part of the point of improving cycle provision, as discussed elsewhere in the paper, is to reduce congestion and the need for parking by getting more people to leave their cars at home. So there is something of a puzzle here: it would be illogical to block the development of schemes which should cut congestion and the need for parking overall (by encouraging people to leave their cars at home) because they might *cause* congestion.

Two way cycling permitted on one-way streets

This is a very important issue to which reference is made in several parts of the paper, eg in Section A2.2 of Appendix 1 to the Environmental Report for the Surrey Cycling Strategy. However, the case of Godalming is instructive. In 2001 an Inspector's Report recommended two-way cycling in Godalming High Street on an experimental basis. This was backed by research undertaken by the University of Surrey and was incorporated in the 2005 Waverley Cycle Plan, and was subsequently supported by Godalming Healthcheck. But it has never been agreed by the Council. While there has been a tolerant approach to cyclists riding against the flow hitherto, cyclists have recently been threatened with on-the-spot fines. So not only has all pressure to remove the prohibition on cycling been resisted, but the ban is being more vigorously enforced.

The history of this scheme raises a key question that challenges the whole cycling strategy: how can measures that are supported by national government (see eg Cycle Infrastructure Design and Manual for Streets), by local government in its own agreed plan and which provides vital access to a town centre, be thwarted by local opposition? The quantum shift in cycling that is being sought will not be possible unless there is effective leadership with the power to implement schemes that have strong evidence-based support. Going one way down Flambard Way and the other down the High Street just doesn't cut it so far as cyclists are concerned.

The recurrent refrain under various headings “consider on a case-by-case basis” is perfectly sensible as far as it goes. But unless such consideration is based on the best available evidence and analysis it is inevitable that schemes will be blocked whenever there is local opposition, particularly if there is no local leadership or championing of cycling. Time after time, when changes such as contraflow are introduced there is strong initial opposition but then everything settles down and people wonder what all the fuss was about. Unless evidence of what works determines what happens on the ground, and local leaders are prepared to work on the basis of evidence, the new strategy will go the way of previous attempts to promote cycling.

Increased funding pressures on local government and competing priorities can make funding difficult to secure and costs are outweighed by economic benefits

Taken together these points illustrate a familiar dilemma. Things don't happen because funds are tight so the economic benefits that could flow from those investments are not realised. The problem often comes down to a lack of joined-up government, so that one organisation bears the costs but another gets the benefits. The most detailed study of cost-effectiveness estimated that for every £1 invested in cycling there was a return of £4, suggesting that failure to invest in cycling imposes substantial long-term costs on society.

On busy roads, physical separation of cyclists from motorised vehicles and pedestrians is preferred

Separate provision is the best option but often there is not enough room to provide segregated cycle lanes. The issue can then come down to a choice as to whether cyclists share with motorised vehicles or with pedestrians. Outside towns and villages there are often little-used pavements alongside busy roads. In some places pavements have been dedicated to shared use – Meadrow (Godalming) and the route to Shalford are examples. There are a number of National Cycle Routes

which use pavements and Sustrans paths are designed for shared use. So there are plenty of precedents. There is, though, often a problem with these paths in that surfaces are poorly maintained and not wide enough. The problem is exacerbated when vegetation encroaches and debris accumulates. Clearing vegetation often reveals that paths are wider than first appears. Rural pavements do, though, have the potential to provide an important and cost-effective addition to the cycling infrastructure and should be discussed in the paper.

Objective 5: We will continue to monitor cycle casualty rates and locations, and target efforts at those groups and locations with high incidence of cycle casualties

It is essential to have really fine-grained information: solutions only work if the problems are clearly identified. Was it the fault of the cyclist? A driver? A pothole? (Anecdotally, and from personal experience of Forum members, potholes have been the cause of a number of accidents.) What mix of factors was involved? Ice? Poor visibility? Technical problem? If so, what kind of problem? Etc – the list is long. Perhaps it is covered in Annex A of the SMART section but it's missing from the document.

Surrey Cycling Monitoring Plan

Casualty analysis

There is too much reliance on Stats 19 (police) data. A more detailed look at the published national statistics show that hospital admissions for cycling road casualties are more than three times as high as shown in the police figures. The emergency admissions figures for cyclists in non-traffic accidents is not that much lower than for road accidents (in 2010 the figure was 6464 against 7476). Data from the National Travel Survey is more comprehensive, as it covers injuries whether or not they came to the attention of the police or hospitals. This provides a central estimate almost six times higher than the police figures.

While surveys produce the most comprehensive data they wouldn't work at the local level: fortunately only a very small proportion of the population are cycling casualties in any given year and numbers will be too small to reveal trends. Hospital data is much more comprehensive than police data, particularly given the high proportion of cycling casualties that do not involve other vehicles and the substantial number that do not occur on roads at all.

Results of qualitative surveys of users and on-users

This will be worthwhile and important. Where new cycle schemes are implemented it will be particularly helpful to get good 'before and after' data to assess what works and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each initiative. This will be invaluable in terms of ensuring that future schemes incorporate lessons from previous ones. The public should be fully engaged in putting forward ideas which would encourage them and their families to cycle more.

The processes for moving from initial ideas to viable schemes needs to be spelt out. Detailed local knowledge is important in this context and local people need to be encouraged to generate ideas, and there need to be good mechanisms for assessing the viability of proposed schemes and then making them happen. Given resource constraints councils will no doubt need to rely on a fair amount of voluntary effort. But there needs to be more clarity than in the past as to exactly how volunteers can contribute most effectively. It is all too common to hear complaints that volunteers, whose sole interest is in making a difference, feel that great effort has been expended to no purpose.

Count data

Choosing one day a year per location looks particularly problematic for cyclist numbers because the weather will have a big effect.

SCC automatic counters

72 sites across Surrey isn't many. These counters could be particularly useful, though, where special efforts are being made to increase cycling. They will presumably miss all offroad cycling and Sustrans routes. Sustrans do count usage on some routes – if they do any measurement in Surrey this would be worth a mention. Levels of cycle parking at places such as schools and railway stations could help if counts are done in a systematic way.

Research and best practice

Not sure where the 10 per cent figure for cycling in Cambridge comes from. A figure of 20 per cent has been used elsewhere and the latest Census figure for cycling to work in Cambridge is 18 per cent.

Drive SMART Cycle Safety Plan

Where is Annex A? It is difficult to comment on the rest of the safety plan without access to the detailed information and analysis.

Table 1 is about behaviour designed “...to reduce casualties and to encourage cyclists and motorists to share the road considerably”. But 10 of the 16 boxes in the Tackling Casualties column have no ticks. A Cycling Safety Plan should surely confine itself to those issues that directly affect safety and be based entirely on evidence. Other things, such as letting vehicles overtake on narrow roads, are important. But they are best dealt with through Codes of Practice (which need to be included in training and disseminated effectively).

Don't use a mobile phone or earphones while cycling

Mobile phones are one thing, if they mean your hands are far from the brakes. But what's the problem with iPods etc? Is it that the cyclist will not then be giving the road their full attention? If so you'd need to ban car radios. Or perhaps it's about cutting yourself off from vital information. But unless used at very high volume earphones do not block out sound. You are probably less insulated from the sounds around you than a car driver is, and will hear emergency sirens, car horns, bicycle bells etc and even whether your chain is sitting comfortably on its sprockets. If it's about hearing cars approaching from behind, what are you supposed to do with this information? You should never rely on hearing before changing course: you may well hit a quiet vehicle – such as a bicycle! Otherwise you should just stick to a correct position on the road which won't be affected by whether or not a car is coming. Always use your eyes if changing direction or road position. There are many deaf cyclists and there is no evidence that they are at special risk or are anti-social.

Engagement with sports cyclists

This seemed out of place insofar as it relates to road cycling. It's not that the issues around sporting events aren't important, but rather that they don't bear on issues to do with infrastructure etc. Policies in respect of competition will evolve over time as nature and demand change, as they have in recent years. So policies may be more transient than is the case with other elements of the strategy. It was unfortunate that, on the Surrey Radio programme, the issue of cycle racing hijacked what should have been a constructive discussion about how to encourage cycling by ordinary

people.

Offroad sports cycling is a bit different, in that a certain amount of separate provision will be needed so is clearly relevant. Incidentally, while it is quite plausible that Peaslake attracts 700 people on a busy weekend day the figure of 200 users per weekend day in the whole of Wales is a vast underestimate. There are lots of good centres, and a lot of old drovers' roads, bridleways etc and the true total will run into thousands. Wherever the figure of 200 came from it is wildly inaccurate and the reference should be deleted.

To sum up

The new strategy represents a real opportunity to bring about a change to a more cycle-friendly culture. Central Government is sympathetic and there is strong cross-party support: cycling can be part of the solution to the problems our reliance on cars is creating as set out in the strategy. Inspirational leadership is needed, with real commitment to overcoming the many obstacles that have frustrated so many past attempts to get people cycling. Robust mechanisms are needed if a substantial shift from cars to bikes is to be achieved. Experience from some British cities as well as other European countries show that this is realistic if backed by sufficient investment and political commitment.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Surrey

Comments on consultation draft May 2007

General comments

There is much to welcome in the draft report. There are lots of good ideas and the challenge will be to ensure that mechanisms and resources are in place to enable improvements to be implemented.

Cyclists are the second most numerous users of rights of way, after walkers, followed by equestrians. Yet cyclists and equestrians have a legal right to use only 35% of Surrey's rights of way and not all of these routes are in practice usable. Although the figure of 35% is higher than in neighbouring counties, it means that equestrians and cyclists must share a modest proportion of the network, sometimes with offroad vehicles. By contrast, 100% of the network is available to walkers and they have exclusive use of 65%. The report rightly recognises the shortcomings of the network for cyclists and equestrians in particular. Provision is patchy across the county and in some areas the bridleway network is very disjointed. Getting to grips with the fragmentary nature of much of the network is one of the most important things that should flow from the document.

Improving accessibility and information

The report's recognition of the importance of the network in providing access to local facilities is most welcome. As the report says, "There is considerable potential to upgrade routes, particularly bridleways, to provide multi-user routes for offroad walking and cycling links" (para 17). The report also highlights the need to gather accessibility data including surface conditions, slopes and structures including barriers. "If made publicly available this information would enable people, particularly those with disabilities, to make informed decisions about where to go".

Providing potential users with the information they need in order to decide whether a particular path is suitable for them is crucial. Surrey deserves credit for one of its own initiatives, namely the groundbreaking work on the latest set of Surrey Cycle Guides. These include gradings which indicate suitability for different kinds of bicycle and rider so that less confident cyclists, those wanting to introduce their children to cycling and so on have useful guidance. It would be worth including these as an option on the Surrey Interactive Map if this is technically feasible.

Although designed with cyclists in mind these Guides may also be of use to wheelchair users where, as a minimum, the easiest routes are likely to be suitable. More importantly, the methodology - getting local people to assess rights of way for their suitability for different categories of user - sets a useful precedent. It should be possible to engage ramblers and others in gathering information that will help guide people to paths they can cope with and enjoy.

Improving cycling provision

In a key passage (para 33) the report says:

With the preparation of this Rights of Way Improvement Plan, for the first time we have been challenged to look at the public rights of way network with fresh eyes, not simply as an historical legacy to be preserved, but as a valuable asset to be developed and improved for future generations.

From a cycling perspective this approach is key. The historical legacy scarcely addresses the needs

of cyclists at all. The legislation governing cycling access to rights of way, essentially the Countryside Act 1968, far predates the invention of the mountain bike. The terrain that modern bikes can use has changed out of all recognition, but there has been no attempt to assess how the law governing access for cyclists reflects the practical realities. It is obvious to anyone who has walked and cycled in the Surrey countryside that many footpaths would be fine for cycling whereas many bridleways are unrideable (eg deep sand or so narrow and eroded that it is difficult for users to pass each other). We are currently saddled with a legal framework which was essentially a pragmatic compromise in the 1960s but developments in cycling and society mean it fails to meet 21st century needs.

It is not just that most of the bicycles sold are designed to cope with far more rights of way than the machines of 40 years ago. It is also that the vast increase in traffic has made many roads less suitable for cyclists who are deterred by the perception of risk (whatever the realities of risk). The problem is particularly acute for children for whom there is no minimum legal age or qualification for cycling but who are inevitably constrained by traffic.

The National Cycle Network, developed by Sustrans, has achieved much. But even at 10,000 miles (most of it on quiet roads) it does not compare in distance with the 20,000 mile network of rights of way legally available to cyclists which remain an underused resource in many areas, including Surrey.

To summarise, the key issues are:

- More of the rights of way network should be opened up to users other than walkers. Many paths could cope with shared use.
- Signage should be greatly improved, including information on destinations and distances.
- More information should be available online about paths other than definitive rights of way - for users the distinctions between permissive and definitive rights of way, for example, are of no practical consequence. They just want to know where they can go.
- Volunteers (eg from RA, BHS, CTC) could be enlisted to provide more information about the characteristics of different paths that may determine suitability for individuals following the precedent of the Surrey Cycle Guides.
- Be more ambitious on targets. One new bridleway link per year does not match the need if we are serious about getting people out of cars and onto feet and bikes. And is 250m of improved access per year really the best we can do on the Basingstoke Canal and Wey Navigation?
- Effective means of prioritisation will be crucial, coupled with effective implementation so that a real shift in provision happens.
- Improvements to the network cannot be divorced from maintenance issues: it is good to get new provision but resources to maintain both new and existing paths is essential. Many have deteriorated over recent years and funding for maintenance has been quite inadequate.
- As our climate becomes more extreme, erosion problems will increase - as they will if, as hoped, there is greater usage.
- Given resource constraints, how about 'sponsor a path' schemes to help with development and maintenance of the network? Some local businesses and voluntary groups might be willing to help.

