

# Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 30-08 (p2) : 3 December 2008

## National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Learning Committee Inquiry into

(Legislative Competence) (Traffic Free Routes) Order 2009

### Response by Countryside Council for Wales

#### Summary

Overall, the evidence relating to traffic free non-motorised routes appears to indicate that they can contribute significantly to increasing utility walking and cycling participation as they reflect user preferences and increase safety. However, it must be made clear that this benefit will only be realised if these routes form a comprehensive, interconnected network that directly connects the places that people want to travel between, rather than an ad-hoc approach to walking and cycling infrastructure provision that connects short sections of traffic free routes with busy roads. These routes should also be part of a wider approach to increasing walking and cycling based on residential traffic calming, revised town planning, improved public transport provision for bicycles, and training for both motorists and cyclists.

The successful development of interconnected network of traffic free non-motorised routes will also be dependent on the provision of adequate funding and resources to the bodies charged with the development and maintenance of such routes.

#### 1. Introduction

(i) The Countryside Council for Wales champions the environment and landscapes of Wales and its coastal waters as sources of natural and cultural riches, as a foundation for economic and social activity, and as a place for leisure and learning opportunities. We aim to make the environment a valued part of everyone's life in Wales.

(ii) Increases in walking and cycling can provide significant benefits, in particular:

reductions in car traffic (and associated emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, as well as other pollutants)

improving people's health & well being (through increases in physical activity and contact with natural heritage; improvements to social cohesion

local environmental improvements (where replacing car use: reduces noise and demand for space and improves air quality)

improved pedestrian and cyclists' safety

economic benefits (including to local communities adjacent to recreational routes; to those without a car; in the form of lower transport costs)

(iii) This submission considers the issue of traffic free routes together with other matters we consider to be relevant to the overall aims of the Legislative Competence Order (LCO) and the benefits it seeks to achieve.

#### Consultation Questions [and associated evidence]

##### 1. What are your views on the general principle that legislative competence in the area identified in Matter 10.xx be conferred on the Assembly?

1.1 We believe that an LCO can help support the benefits increasing safe cycling and walking can provide. We therefore support the principle of providing legislative competence for the Assembly in the area in Matter 10xx.

We have set out our reasons for supporting the LCO below.

##### Do traffic free routes lead to increased participation in cycling?

1.2 Overall, utility cycling rates in the UK are very low, and have been steadily declining since the 1950's. Cycling for travel purposes (as opposed to recreational purposes) fell by an average of 14% per person, and by 15% for walking in Great Britain between 1996 and 2005. There was also a fall in the average distance travelled of 11% for cycling over the same period - although distances for walking were more or less the same (Transport Trends: 2007 edition). The 'Living in Wales' Survey has shown that in Wales only 1% of the population travel to work by bicycle, and that even this small number are mainly men with very few women cycling to work.

1.3 A comprehensive international review of utility cycling has shown that participation rates in the UK are similar to those in the US with approximately only 1% of all trips being made by bicycle, which contrasts strongly with that of The Netherlands at 27%, Denmark at 18% and Finland, Sweden and Germany at 10-11% (Pucher & Buehler, 2007). Furthermore, there is not the gender or age imbalance in cycling participation in these other European countries, with a relatively equal number of women and men cycling, and only a very slight

decline in participation with increasing age.

1.4 It was found that, as in the UK, cycling rates declined in The Netherlands, Denmark and Germany from 1950 to 1975. However, since 1975, participation in these 3 European countries increased, whilst in the UK it continued to decline. During this period, The Netherlands doubled its already extensive network of bike paths and Germany tripled their bikeway network between 1976 and 1995 (Pucher & Dijkstra 2003).

1.5 International comparisons indicate that there is a significant correlation between the provision of an extensive, integrated network of traffic-free cycle paths and high utility cycling participation rates. It would also appear that the provision of traffic free cycle paths is linked to more equitable cycling participation, particularly in terms of gender and age.

1.6 Traffic free routes typically show a mix of walking and cycling use. For example, around 48% of users of the National Cycle Network were walkers and 50% cyclists.

### **Preferences for provision**

1.7 There is a clear expressed preference amongst both current and potential cyclists for traffic free routes for both utility and recreation purposes (see for example Lancashire County Council: Cycling Demand Study 2001). A survey undertaken by the CTC on the views of users of traffic free routes found that the majority of cyclists felt that the paths had resulted in them cycling more (CTC 2000).

1.8 In addition it has been noted that it is essential that these routes are:

Convenient and locally accessible

Interconnected, and not piecemeal or ad-hoc

Direct to destinations and not circuitous

High quality and well maintained infrastructure and local environment

The attraction of traffic free routes for cyclists and walkers are generally similar (Westerdijk, P.K. (1990).

1.9 In more detailed studies of cycle route preferences, it has been found that both current and potential cyclists have the highest preference for bike-only, paved, off-street cycle paths. Traffic-free multi-user paths are the second most preferred option, as are 'next to street routes' that are separated from traffic by a physical barrier (Winters & Cooper 2008; Countryside Agency 2003). There is far lower preference for any type of 'beside road' cycle path that does not have a physical barriers to separate cyclists from motor vehicles, and support for these types of routes declines even further when there are parked cars, heavy traffic or buses.

### **Safety**

1.10 The relationship between traffic free cycle routes and safety has been considered in terms of the impact on the number of cyclist fatalities and serious injuries. International comparisons of data have been made between the fatality and injury rates of countries that have very few traffic free routes, and countries with an extensive cycle path network. It has been found that the average number of cyclist fatalities in the UK per km travelled is three times that of The Netherlands (Pucher & Buehler 2007).

1.11 It is likely that the provision of a network of traffic free routes has a positive effect on pedestrian and cyclist safety in two ways: firstly by removing the actual proximity of vehicles, secondly it would appear to lead to an overall increase in walking and cycling. Increases in the numbers of pedestrians and cyclists on/beside the road have been shown to be correlated with a "reduction" in accidents with vehicles (Jacobsen, 2003). A number of reasons are put forward to explain this relationship: improved behaviour of road users particularly drivers (in response to more frequently encountering walkers and cyclists and because more drivers have cycling experience). Also, lower car use; and greater investment in safe infrastructure for cyclists in response to high levels of cycling.

1.12 There is a highly significant relationship between traffic free routes and the perception of safety. Perceived traffic danger has been found to be one of the most important deterrents to cycling participation (Garrard "et al" 2008; Winters & Cooper 2008). Safety concerns are particularly high amongst women and older people, and although it is an issue for all cyclists, fear of traffic is the main barrier expressed by potential cyclists. In a UK survey, it was found that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement that "due to the amount of traffic, cycling is not safe", whilst the report concluded that perceptions of road safety were far more important in suppressing cycling participation than either bad weather or hills (CTC 1996).

### **User Interactions on Shared Use Routes**

1.13 Traffic free cycle paths can be either cycle only, or shared use (usually with pedestrians). Although there are concerns about potential conflict between these two user groups (CTC 2000), there is a consensus from more detailed studies that:

There is a significant difference between 'perceived' and 'actual' conflict

Personal reports, when compared to site observation, show misleading higher levels of perceived conflict as respondents tend to 'talk it up' when gathered together (Countryside Agency 2001)

Users tend to modify their behaviour when they come across another user

Actual conflict between users is extremely infrequent and slight, and involves 'intrusion' rather than actual incidences of contact between users (Countryside Agency 2001)

Conflict is mainly associated with shared routes in areas of very high population density, in particular within 100km of London (Countryside Agency 2003)

Higher levels of perceived conflict are reported amongst walkers who had not encountered any cyclists, with negligible perceived conflict reported by those who had met with cyclists. This indicates that perceived conflict is often based on wider social values than actual interpersonal encounters (Cessford 2002)

Older walkers and those who were not expecting to encounter cyclists are also more likely to perceive conflict.

## **Recreation and Utility Cycling**

1.14 There is little research evidence connecting leisure walking and cycling and utility cycling. A detailed study by Gardner (1998) considered why the substantial increase in recreational cycling has not led to a similar increase in utility cycling. Gardner notes that one reason could be the different images that the respondents in this study had: recreational cycling was perceived as 'calm, peaceful and liberating', whilst utility cycling was seen as 'dangerous, demanding, and stressful'. These views would appear to support the evidence that of people's preferences for safe, traffic free routes. Gardner's research also found that the majority of respondents who cycle for utility purposes claimed that leisure cycling did encourage them to try cycling to work. This would appear to indicate that participation in recreational cycling is an antecedent to utility cycling, however the evidence in this area is not robust, and further research is needed.

1.15 Use of Sustrans' National Cycle Network has been found to be predominantly recreational. A review by Cope et al (2003) found that two thirds of all use was recreational, compared to only one third for utility purposes. Cope's evaluation of the NCN also found that recreational cyclists travelled further than utility cyclists. Studies have consistently found that recreational leisure cyclists prefer traffic free routes. A Sustrans (2007) study found that 82% of all journey's on the NCN use the traffic free sections, despite this only representing a third of the overall network. Sustrans also found that 41% of the users of the traffic free sections of the NCN were likely to want to cycle or walk more in the future, compared to only 1% of users of the road-adjacent sections of the NCN.

## **2. What are your views on the terms of the proposed Order? For example, are they too narrowly or too broadly drawn? If necessary how should the proposed Order be re-drafted and why?**

2.1 Given the current low levels of utilitarian walking and cycling we welcome the broad terms in which the text of the Order has been drafted, allowing for flexibility to specify measures to address a range of relevant issues.

2.2 In this context it is worth noting that in reviewing successful approaches to cycling, Pucher and Buehler (2007) and a 2006 review published by the Dutch Government's Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, highlighted a number of success factors:

A national legal and policy framework

Interpretation and implementation of the national framework and policies at the local level

The prioritisation of the needs of cyclists [and non-motorised users] were sustained and implemented over many years

Integrated transport planning, linked to spatial planning

Sustained, significant investment

Provision and maintenance of extensive, good quality cycling networks and associated facilities

Improvements to safety and the perception of safety

Traffic education (for motorists and cyclists)

Wide ranging and positive promotion

2.3 The inclusion of 'highway authorities' in the wording of the Order is appropriate given that transport delivery will primarily be through local authorities or WAG and it also ensures measures brought forward can include all areas of Wales

2.4 We would expect the general reference to highways in the text of the LCO to allow, where relevant, for measures that facilitate improvements to the vehicular highway network for non motorised users and to non-motorised highways (such as the nearly 33,000 kms of public rights of way (PROW)) not only for development and improvement of new traffic free routes.

2.5 Experience shows that developing non-motorised routes and networks for walking and cycling routes necessitates a mix of new traffic free routes, existing traffic free highways (PROW and cycle paths), together with some provision on or adjacent to existing carriageways. For example the National Cycle Network has around 66% of the network on carriageways - mostly quiet roads. The Glyndwr's Way National Trail in Powys has around 20% of its route on roads - albeit generally lightly trafficked. Use of existing routes is also likely to be more cost effective when developing networks and also reduce local environmental impacts.

2.6 We also welcome the fact that the proposed wording does not differentiate between recreational and utilitarian improvements for

non-motorised users. The results of user surveys, conducted by Sustrans in 2004 for 70 shared use routes, found that both rural and urban routes were used for recreational and utilitarian purposes. (The results are also a reflection of the fact that the UK has low rates of cycling for sustainable transport purposes.)

3. Would the terms of the proposed Order allow for the development of traffic free routes in Wales by means of measures? If not, how would the proposed Order need to be re-drafted and why?

3.1 We believe the terms could provide an important impetus for the development of traffic free routes.

3.2 Although there are existing powers for creation of highways (such as those for creating PROW and cycle tracks) the relevant legislation is fragmented and would benefit from being overhauled. In addition current practice is not leading to levels of cycling and walking achieved in comparable European countries. Research carried out for CCW and the Countryside Agency (2005) in relation to the creation of PROW (which can include the creation of public footpaths, bridleways and restricted byways) showed that the powers are not widely used by local authorities. Where they are used they tend to be for specific projects such as the current work to develop the Wales Coast Path, the creation or improvement of National Trails or the National Cycle Network. Common features of these projects are a clear aim and dedicated financial and staff resources.

3.3 National guidance on implementation was also noted as a factor in successful cycling policies of the Netherlands (see above). A broad wording of the Order would also allow for measures setting the requirements for strategic planning of networks and routes for non-motorised users (including on PROW). For example the legislation requiring local authorities to review their Right of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs) has led to all local authorities having 10 year strategic plans for PROW in place - although the Plans will not apply after 2017.

#### **4. The proposal is "Provision imposing duties on highway authorities in Wales in relation to the development and maintenance of network of highways for the use of users other than motor vehicles." What are your views on this?**

See comments above.

#### **5. Should the terms "development" and "maintenance" be defined within the matter?**

5.1 We note the WLGA's comments in their submission about the need to clarify the nature and scale of the intended 'development'. Existing duties and powers in relation to highways are wide ranging. It is the performance of those powers and duties (such as maintenance) that is crucial for users of the highways. For example the 2006/7 Performance Indicator for the PROW network shows that only around 51% of the network is fully open and available for the public (the average for England is 76.3%). CCW research in 2002 into the condition of the PROW network in Wales estimated that the costs of putting the network into good condition was approximately £26m and around £8.4m to maintain it thereafter (excluding staff costs).

#### **6. Are any of the transport-related exceptions contained in Schedule 5 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 (for example in relation to Matter 5.10 (Learner Travel) also relevant to this proposal?**

We have no comment to make on this matter.

**Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru**  
**Countryside Council for Wales**  
**November 2008**

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