

Transport Team,  
Reading Borough Council,  
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**Reading Friends of the Earth,**  
C/o. 27, Instow Road,  
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10<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

Dear Transport Team,

### **Comments on Cycling Strategy Consultation – October 2013**

#### Introduction and general points:

We welcome the revision of the cycling strategy for Reading and the opportunity to comment on the draft. The draft strategy recognizes many of the social, economic and environmental benefits of cycling and cites many useful principles and standards.

However, we believe the negative consequences of the current vehicle-dominated transport mix in Reading are not fully acknowledged, and the opportunities and benefits of cycling are underplayed. We hope our suggestions will help you build on the draft to improve the final strategy.

We want transportation in Reading to work well ... all the time ... but at present traffic congestion is a real problem at peak hour traffic densities. Not only do the delays have economic and social costs but they have serious environmental and health and safety consequences.

Reading's transport system must evolve to become much more environmentally sustainable - to respond to threats of climate change and peak oil, and to improve air quality. Safe and easy cycling is part of the solution, as are low-cost, excellent public transport, and control of traffic-generating development, but we think it will be necessary to re-allocate some road-space from vehicles and reduce the amount of vehicle traffic in the town.

As well as a hierarchy of provision (Page 14) there should be a statement of hierarchy of priority for transport users: walking, cycling, public transport, and private vehicles. Need to re-assign shares of road- and pavement-space.

We question whether incremental change ... as envisaged ... can deliver the required modal shift ... some places have gone for bold step-changes.

We would like Reading to be more ambitious – Groningen is a city of 185,000 people (more than Reading) with a constrained core - it has become a leading cycling city with 37% of area commutes by bicycle. See:

<http://planologie.wordpress.com/2010/03/15/case-study-groningen-netherlands/> and  
[http://www.eltis.org/docs/studies/Groningen\\_Green\\_in\\_every\\_direction.jpg.pdf](http://www.eltis.org/docs/studies/Groningen_Green_in_every_direction.jpg.pdf)

In the UK Exeter seems to have made good progress <http://www.cycleexeter.org.uk/> and <http://www.exeter.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=10020> and <http://www.cycledevon.info/> ... can Reading learn from this experience?

We appreciate that a Strategy is not an Action Plan ... so not the place for too much detail of schemes ... but it should quantify the scale of change expected in more detail. But there should be an Action Plan, and if it is in some other document there should be clear linkage to it.

The Strategy should do more than list a number of schemes that are already well-defined and in progress, and repeat targets for 2015 that are already defined in the Climate Change Strategy – this document runs to 2019 and should contain targets for future years beyond 2015.

We are aware that the Reading Cycle Campaign have submitted a much more detailed response to the consultation. We hope you will take full account of this – we do not have the expertise to respond with their level of detail.

#### Influencing behaviour and travel modes:

We welcome the training which is advocated for cyclists.

We agree it is important to modify behaviour (especially speed, but also awareness of cyclists) of drivers of motorised vehicles ... but what is to be done to influence drivers who often get no training after they pass their test?

Influencing drivers is mentioned on Page 18, and using the Variable Message Signs will be welcome, but the Strategy should identify more local initiatives.

Reducing the number of motorised vehicles should play an important part in encouraging cycling and improving the transport system. One area for action to encourage use of cycling and public transport would be to reduce town centre car parking provision and adjust the tariffs.

Road user charging was recommended by the 'Reading Transport Commission'. If an area-wide scheme is not achievable this could start with a cordon at the river crossings using established ANPR technology – charges should vary depending on time of day and characteristics of vehicle. Reading residents, especially those with special needs to drive, could have discounted charging rates, or be given a number of free or discounted passes, or discounted bus fares.

In his comments on the Reading Transport Commission report Sir David Rowlands (Former Permanent Secretary at the Department for Transport) said: "The most challenging aspect of the report is its recommendation that the case for managing demand by road pricing needs urgent examination. But without it, the rest of the package of proposals will not deliver a long term solution as demand continues to grow constrained only by the physical limits of the roads themselves."

#### Budget and statistics:

We suggest that a percentage of the transport infrastructure budget should be ring-fenced for cycling. Based on the proportion of trips made this would be about 8% but a much higher figure may be appropriate to achieve more modal shift. Spend on cycling infrastructure and training should be published annually with statistics for the various travel modes in Reading.

#### Routes and Facilities:

We want a comprehensive network of safe, comfortable and continuous routes, but it must be safe to ride on roads anywhere.

It is good that the Strategy recognises that different types of cyclist need different facilities:

- To encourage cycling it needs to cater particularly for less-fit and less-experienced cyclists – with provision of safe routes and off-road facilities.
- Some cyclists will prefer 'quiet routes' offering fresh breathable air, away from roads with their traffic fumes, noise and danger.
- However fitter cyclists will want to use main roads, which presumably have evolved to give the shortest journey times.

- Colour Coded Routes are all very well but there are cross-town desire lines as well as radial – and to choose to cycle people need good, direct, fast routes from home to their particular destinations - so all roads and junctions must be cycle-friendly where possible.

Shared use for pedestrians and cyclists is controversial but we think it has an important part to play if it is done well. In general 'shared' space (whether on roads or on pavements) should ideally be segregated to keep cyclists and pedestrians safe, and to reduce conflict.

- The Council should evaluate total width of road plus pavement for opportunities – wide pavements could be reduced in width to allow for on-road cycle lanes, or pavements could be widened to allow a segregated cycle route to be provided on the pavement.
- More shared use – even unsegregated – can be good in some situations ... 'overcoming barriers' can mean allowing cycles to use pedestrian routes between quiet streets.
- Shared bus lanes can appear lethal to cyclists, and slow cyclists can delay buses if there is not adequate width to overtake.

Nearside Cycle Lanes (Page 24) need enforcement. Enforcement of cycle lanes is important – cars parking or waiting inappropriately can be extremely hazardous.

We agree with the comment on Page 28 that roundabouts are dangerous ...

- Slowing the speed of vehicles would presumably reduce the risks – traffic signals or speed tables should be considered.
- Consider changing roundabouts to 'intelligent' traffic lights – sensing cyclists, pedestrians, and vehicles – with advanced stop lanes? Groningen has traffic lights that allow cyclists more time when it is wet ... but Groningen gives cyclists priority on them.

Towpaths – along Thames, Kennet, and Kennet-and Avon - could be improved as shared-use, off-road cycle routes. Surface is often not good and in some places proximity to water (especially on blind bends) can impact perception of safety.

#### Cycle Hire:

Could be good for tourism as well as for business/commuting. Need to understand - who is going to use it, and for what journeys – and then ensure that infrastructure is put in place to support those journeys. Is it for people coming to town by bus, train or car to complete their journeys, or for residents to use for occasional (or regular) trips from home?

There seem to be no docking stations south of the Thames to the West of A33 line except at Green Park, and none in the far south-east. Are there no origins or destinations there?

#### Specific Observation – Portman Road:

Changes to Cow Lane bridges will make Portman Road (Route 5) a much more attractive route for all road users, including cyclists, and vehicle speeds and traffic densities may increase. It is important that it is upgraded to provide high quality facilities for cyclists.

Yours sincerely,

John Booth,  
Reading Friends of the Earth.