

Norwich Cycling Campaign

Newsletter 34
September 1999

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NORWICH CYCLING CAMPAIGN was formed in 1990 to promote cycling in Norwich and to lobby for better cycle facilities. It is affiliated to the National Cycle Campaign Network.

Lakenham gets its way!

On a beautiful sunny day on 30th July, Lakenham Way was officially opened by Charles Clarke MP. About 100 people came along, VIP's, Campaign members and local residents.

After years of planning the path took 3 months to construct and cost about £500,000. Although the path was behind schedule, the engineers decided to go ahead with the planned opening date to spur on the contractors, hence at the time of opening the work was not quite finished.

The embankments look a bit bleak and the recent heavy rain has washed quite a bit of soil down onto the track. Hopefully when the vegetation has grown both of these problems will be resolved. Curves and slight gradients make the path more interesting and don't present any problems to cyclists or wheelchair users.



Charles Clarke MP (right) with Claire Collen (left) at the Lakenham Way opening.

Within minutes of the opening local kids were belting up and down on their bikes and people were out walking their dogs - a valuable amenity for Lakenham.

No one has worked harder than Campaign member, Claire Collen. As Chair of the Lakenham Way Working Party, she has put in years of work and was over the moon to see the path completed!

Mike Savage
Editor

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(cycle-related)
accident.**

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be available.**

Campaigning comment

Some members have made the comment recently that the Cycling Campaign seems to do very little actual campaigning. This is just not true. Writing to the local and national press, attending forums (or is it fora?), conferences, working parties, committees etc, publishing this newsletter, liaising with the city council, are all part of 'campaigning'. These activities, and more, are done by individuals or small groups - often the same ones. Why don't you come along to one of our meetings and get involved?

Here's an example of something to campaign for. Since last June, local authorities have had the right to impose new speed limits without permission from the Ministry of Transport. So how about some 20mph limits on busy streets in the city?

Mike Savage
Editor

NB Closing date for items for the December newsletter is Wednesday 12th November 1999.

Fancy a visit to **Mike Burrows' workshop** at Rackheath? This brilliant engineer and cycle guru designed Olympic gold medallist, Chris Boardman's, bike. Provisional date and time is **Thursday 23rd September**, 7pm, with a pub stop on the ride back to Norwich. If you are interested, phone Pam on 01603 612014 by Friday 17th September.

And, don't forget the **Norwich 100km Bike Ride** on **Sunday 19th September**. This is an ideal opportunity for you to get out into the country AND raise funds for two worthwhile causes - the Greenhouse and us! See the enclosed leaflet for details.

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* Star letter *

Dear Mike,

The great debate about who should use bus lanes continues as cyclists and bikers trade letters through the Evening News.

Doesn't it strike anyone else as odd that no-one seems to have had the common courtesy to ask bus drivers for their opinion? As a bus driver, cyclist and motorcyclist, I am in a virtually unique position of being able to see everyone's point of view. Let's face it, cyclists need cycle paths, pedestrians need proper pavements and pelican crossings. Motorbikes should be on the road. In an ideal world the only vehicles in the bus lanes would be buses.

Cycling is a brilliant means of transport, mainly because it's so cheap, but it's not suitable for everyone. Granny Smith, 85 years old, is not going to cycle to Sainsbury's get her week's supply of cat food and rich tea biscuits. The elderly, the blind, the less able - these people need buses.

There are no easy answers to the traffic and transport problem. There is certainly not a panacea. Cyclists, small motorcycle and moped riders and transport workers should be uniting to campaign for a truly sustainable transport system and not squabbling among themselves.

I am now doing some voluntary work for the Environmental Transport Association Trust, promoting public transport. If anyone would like to get in touch with me about anything relevant (including invitations to parties or orgies) you can contact me on:

leofric@clara.co.uk

or phone / fax 01603 404381.

Yours sincerely,

Flora Dowson

EDITOR'S REPLY

Mobility is of tremendous importance to the elderly and disabled. Let's hope that the converted delivery vans in service at present will eventually be replaced by proper low-loader buses - like those already in service on some city routes. Bus lanes are far from ideal as far as cyclists are concerned and will become more dangerous as the size and frequency of buses increase. In the meantime we shall continue to campaign for better conditions for cyclists of all ages.

Keep off the cycle path?

.. Matthew Williams debates



It's fascinating to see how the arguments have developed over the years amongst cyclists concerning cycle paths - whether we should be asking for them, whether we should be thankful when we're given them, and whether we should be made to use them.

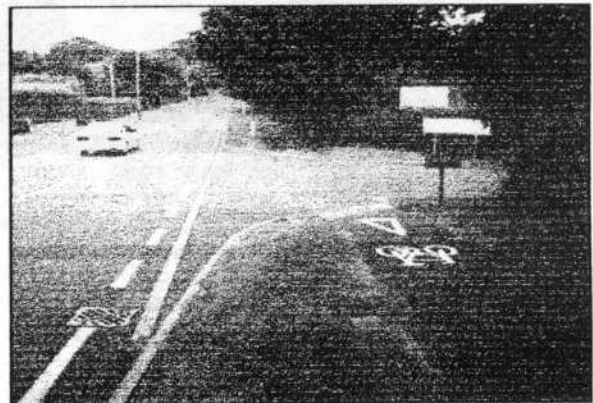
For many years Britain's top cycling organisation, the CTC, was hostile to the provision of off-road cycle paths because it was feared this would lead to the erosion of the cyclist's right to use the highway. In a way, that fear was borne out by the ban on bicycles on motorways and other major roads, some of which were built with cycle paths along the hard shoulder or verge: these inevitably became overgrown and/or covered in broken glass and other debris.

Then latterly came the rise of Sustrans, short for sustainable transport, a civil engineering charity dedicated to building traffic-free paths for people on bikes or using other environmentally friendly modes. These paths often follow disused railway lines or canal paths well away from busy traffic - very pleasant, but pooh-poohed by many 'serious' cyclists because of their lack of directness and clumsy access controls resulting in generally slow progress. It is still claimed that the paths do nothing to develop road sense or discipline and actually encourage pavement cycling elsewhere. Nevertheless, construction of the National Cycle Network received a major boost with the Millenium Lottery award, and these paths have proved to be very popular amongst leisure cyclists and those with young children.

Meanwhile the use of the bicycle for day-to-day transport in this country continued to fall away, and the vast bulk of the transport resources were poured into private motor travel.

In Norwich we have our fair share of purpose-built cycle 'facilities', installed in various places and at various times, each 'fossilising' the official thinking of the day, and most hardly touched since. From the 1970s we have the paths like that at Bluebell

Road, built primarily to get the pesky cyclists out of the way of fast-moving traffic on a narrow winding road. It is to the City Council's credit that from the same period some modest measures for cyclists were also put in off Unthank Road which were intended to be the start of an urban cycle network, but never completed after the council reorganisation in 1974. In the 1980s the vogue was for building-in cycle paths to new developments such as Bowthorpe, but there was an obsession with segregation from pedestrians and the paths came with ridiculous barriers and fearful kerb upstands at every road crossing.



Why should cyclists lose all their momentum and give way at this minor side turning?

The early 1990s saw the start of a more serious attempt to cater for cycling, but this was still in the form of an attempted 'retrofit' around existing road infrastructure often simply redesignating footways as 'shared use'. Such facilities were created only where they were cheap and/or highly visible to council officials as they drove past (the 'brownie points' effect), such as at Newmarket Road or Martineau Lane. In the late 1990s we finally have the recognition that people on bikes need convenient routes more than just facilities, and it is slowly beginning to dawn that a comprehensive network for the city will be achieved only by serious reallocation of road space currently commandeered by motorised vehicles.

Thankfully, at a national level, the attitudes of the CTC and Sustrans have converged, with general agreement that there is an important role to be played for high quality off road cycle paths, but that it is equally important to take radical steps to provide for safe cycling conditions on all roads, where cyclists have every right to be. In the last few months the best and the worst of cycle paths

has been brought to attention locally. The Cycling Forum has received strong criticism over the physical condition of the Bluebell Road / Earlam Green Lane cycle path - its deteriorating surfacing, overhanging vegetation and lack of proper dropped kerbs, to say nothing of the annoying (and demonstrably hazardous) requirement to give way at every side turning. Is it any wonder that many cyclists prefer to ride on the main carriageway? It seems the benefits are worth the harassment they receive from some motorists.

The Lakenham Way opening (featured on the front page) is clearly a success story both in engineering terms and as a community project. The well designed route will certainly be a great help for many journeys in that particular part of the city. But we have to accept that it is only one of only two such railway path opportunities (the other being Marriott's Way), and for the most people in the city, their direct cycle route to work, school or shops will always be on the existing road network. So should they be put on the pavement?

For me, I have come to the view that the bicycle really does belong on the road. For whatever historic reason, too many of the cycle paths in Norwich are a symptom of the failure to properly integrate cycling into the transport infrastructure. In many cases they have made things worse by reinforcing the view that cycling is a marginal activity, encouraging inconsiderate driving on built-up roads as well as irresponsible riding of bikes on pavements, and discouraging cycling as a serious mode of personal transport.

Of course, in certain circumstances purpose-built paths are needed to create particular links within the cycle network, even for just a few metres. However, in these cases they must be designed to a proper standard, meaning a smooth surface, direct routing, priority across side turnings and minimum delay at signalised crossings, all the sorts of things which are normal in the Netherlands for example. There should be no apology about this, because poorly designed cycle facilities are simply a waste of money.

My belief is that most of the necessary high quality cycle network for Norwich can be created without dedicated cycle facilities, but by proper road management including traffic calming, exemptions to one-way regulations and road closures. This will achieve far more than trying to build more cycle paths just to collect brownie points, and would at last signal the advent of joined-up thinking by our local transport planners.

100/100 for George

Last year, I completed the Norwich Century Ride on my Dawes Fireball Racer within the 10 hour category. I vowed at the end that I would not do that again. My hands were sore, my back and neck ached, my knees hurt, and as for my behind... It just hurt too much, I was in need of a serious drink!

As always, a year later the appeal of the Century Ride comes again, and I think "What a great idea - I would love to do that." This time (30th May), I get two friends to join me in my venture and also one other big difference...? I am not using my racer, but one of those funny bikes (as my friends call it) - a Recumbent Trike, to give it its proper description. It has 3 wheels (2 at the front, and 1 at the back), and you lay down in it rather than sit upright as on a 'normal' bike, the idea being that you are better supported/more comfortable, especially with regards to the back and behind. It was looking forward to the ride, especially as I would be laying down on the job for the duration!

So how did it go, I hear you ask?? It went very well, very well indeed. I managed to make the 8 hour category (actually taking 7:24 hours to complete the course). I hit a maximum speed of 63 mph coming down a hill into West Runton, on the way to Sheringham. And at the end, I got off the Trike and felt no pains, not even in my knees. Still it was tiring, and going up hills is not easy on a recumbent - you have to accept that you will be slower, but going down hills makes up for it for speed and excitement. The biggest plus is that you don't have to worry or be aware of keeping your balance/the bike upright. The trike can be thrown around corners with sheer abandon, no speed need be lost or worry about keeping balance. I have yet to fall off a 3 wheeled bike!!

At the end I still said, "Don't let me do that again", and had a drink, but was secretly amazed about how unhurting I felt. Riding a recumbent uses different muscles in the legs than a 'normal' bike and the next day I discovered that it wasn't just the legs which develop new muscles - but also higher up. I had difficulty walking up steps because of something I can only describe as a buttock-twinge! Roll on next year, when it will hopefully be a two wheeled recumbent....

George Prior

What George neglected to mention was that he also raised £70 in sponsorship for Norwich Cycling Campaign - sincere thanks - Ed.

Chairman's chat

As stated on the front page, Norwich Cycling Campaign was formed in 1990 to promote cycling in Norwich and to lobby for better cycling facilities. We've had some success with the second, but what about the first?

In fact, our success with the second seems to have exacerbated the first, since motorists are becoming more and more peeved at what they see as perks for cyclists at the expense of road space for them. Their disgruntlement is all the greater when pointing out that cyclists don't pay road tax - well, those of us who are not also drivers of motor vehicles don't. They conveniently forget that it is because of their great numbers and the danger to cyclists their driving and speed causes that cycling facilities are needed at all. There is also the case now that pedestrians see cyclists as invading their space, either legally through shared facilities or illegally - 'Cyclists acting as if they own pavements' (heading of a recent letter in the Evening News). The new regulation requiring all new bikes to be fitted with bells is seen as giving cyclists carte blanche to use pedestrian facilities. My comment when questioned by an EEN reporter was that new bikes fitted with lights would be far safer and more useful.

Why do cyclists ride illegally in pedestrian areas? I have never felt inclined to ask them. (If we have any illegal footway cyclists reading this, please write and tell us.) The latest anti-cyclist measure, £20 on-the-spot fines, may or may not have an effect. It probably won't stop the antisocial boy racers frightening people. They are probably under the age of 16 and so immune from prosecution. Those it will stop are the older, more nervous ones, using empty footways because they can't face cycling in traffic. They now have something else to fear and won't bother getting on their bikes at all. They'll get the car out instead.

It would be interesting to note whether this measure does have this effect - a decline in the number of cyclists plus an increase in the number of cars. Meanwhile, experience in Europe where cyclists are allowed in all pedestrian precincts as a matter of course, along with video footage taken in this country, shows that both types of user modify their behaviour accordingly and there is very little problem. However, cyclists are perceived to be a threat to pedestrians and other road users and better cyclist behaviour will raise cyclists' status in general.

In July, we had a Swiss family to stay, sampling the delights of cycling in Norfolk. Kathi is chairman of IG Velo, the Basel Cycling Campaign, a powerful organisation of several thousand members. She spoke of an adult cycle training scheme run by a local driving school. Could we get something similar here? Questioning of potential women cyclists for my Velo-city paper (see Newsletter 32) showed there is a need. It would also give cyclists more creditable status among motorists - any ideas?

Kathi also brought with her information on Rent-a-Bike, the company which arranges cycle hire, repair and sale facilities at railway stations all over Switzerland and now expanding into Austria. Could we have something similar at Norwich station, currently undergoing refurbishment? To date my contact with the station manager has brought no response. How difficult it is to get cycling recognised as a serious mode of transport.

Also in July, Richard Bearman and I attended a parliamentary meeting, held in the most imposing setting of the House of Commons. Organised by the Slower Speeds Initiative (SSI), the meeting concerned speed and the problem it causes in rural areas. The meeting was chaired by Jane Griffiths MP, a committed cyclist, and there were some excellent speakers and stimulating discussion. The meeting tied in very neatly with an AA report on why motorists speed. I sent a letter to the EEN (as yet not printed) including info given in the SSI policy briefing - see opposite. One thing is certain - a general reduction in speed limits, along with adequate enforcement, would do away with the necessity of providing expensive cycling facilities and would certainly encourage people back on their bikes.

Phyll Hardie

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Still on speed...

*Phyll writes to the Editor
of the Evening News*



Dear Sir,

The AA report (12 July) stating that drivers speed because they don't understand the reasons for limits shows that much more driver education needs to be done. Many drivers see only their own side of the situation and have little notion of the effects excessive speeds are having on the rest of the community. The benefits of lower speeds include:

Saving lives. Our record for child pedestrian safety is one of the worst in Western Europe. In the UK, cyclists have a casualty rate over ten times that of Denmark where there has been a heavy emphasis on slowing traffic. In our own Government's trial 20mph zones, casualties have fallen 60%, of child pedestrians by 70%.

Restoring freedom. Improving safety through lower speeds allows residents to once again walk and talk in their local streets and children to walk and cycle unaccompanied. It allows communities to use local shops and facilities without taking their life in their hands. For drivers themselves, high speeds, acceleration and aggressive driving are major factors in stress, tension and 'road rage'.

A better environment. Lower speeds and steadier driving help cut toxic emissions, which cause up to 24,000 premature deaths every year in the UK. Calmer, slower driving also brings personal and national benefits, through economy on fuel and repairs.

A quieter land. Noise from road traffic, including acceleration, high speed travel and vibration from lorries, disturbs households and buildings, disrupts sleep and adds to general stress. Rural tranquillity is threatened and wildlife killed. Drivers should be aware that up to 60 million birds, 100,000 hedgehogs and nearly 50,000 badgers die each year on UK roads.

Better health. Fear of danger on the road has led to a marked decline in walking and cycling, but regular exercise of this kind is vital for physical and mental health and well being. Lower speeds would greatly improve perceptions of safety on the road.

Saving money. Excessive speed causes 77,000 injuries and 1,200 deaths a year. The cost, in terms of hospital treatment, police time, loss of output at work, and personal grief and suffering, has been calculated to be £13.9 billion. As well as saving on these, speed controls would decrease the need for provision and maintenance of a national network of high speed roads and expensive bypasses, which recent Governments have found increasingly difficult to support.

Public opinion is already enthusiastic about many aspects of lower speeds, especially among people in rural areas. Driver education should begin early, as part of the National Curriculum in the last year or so of compulsory schooling, and should continue throughout life - the AA could be active here. One of your correspondents suggested raising the minimum age of drivers to 21. More effective would be for all drivers to have to retake a test every ten years, to take account of changing traffic conditions and to test evidence of drivers' ability to visualise the perspective of other types of road user. Speeding must become as socially unacceptable as drink driving has over the past few years.

*Yours faithfully,
Phyll Hardie, Norwich Cycling Campaign*

**For more information on the Slower Speeds Initiative, contact:
Norwich and Norfolk Transport Action Group, 213 College Road, Norwich NR2 3JD.**

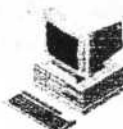
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DIARY DATES

Norwich Cycling Campaign monthly meetings

Held Wednesdays, 7.45pm at The
Greenhouse, 42-46 Bethel Street.
All members very welcome.

PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF TIME.

September 15th

Open meeting

Short presentation by Graham Elliott of
Sustrans on 2000 Ride the Net celebrations/
Slide show by Matthew Williams on The Key
Role Of The Bike In City Centre Transport.

October 20th

November 17th

The Norwich 100km Bike Ride

Sunday September 19th

In aid of Norwich Cycling Campaign and The
Greenhouse. See enclosed leaflet for details.

Visit to Mike Burrows' workshop

Thursday September 23rd (provisional)

See page 3 for more info.

CATI (Come And Try It) rides

Fortnightly on Saturday afternoons. Where
possible, tea stops will be made. Phone Phyll
on 01603 435547 for more details.

Saturday September 11th 2.30pm

Churches Sponsored Bike Ride. Meet at
Anglican Cathedral West Door for a Norwich
ride - lots of churches!

Saturday September 25th 2.30pm

Meet at Sainsbury's car park, Pound Lane,
Thorpe St. Andrew for a ride to Acle.

Saturday October 9th 2pm

(Note earlier time for October rides). Meet
County Hall roundabout. Details TBA.

Saturday October 23rd 2pm

For the last ride of the season, meet at
Marriott's Way / Barn Road r'bout for re-run
(almost) of this year's VIP ride during
National Bike Week, looking at
the city's cycling facilities.