

Segregated Facilities. Paul Gannon, Nov 2000.

Segregated facilities are needed to encourage more cycling, by Paul Gannon, 1/11/2000

A discussion paper by Paul Gannon, Camden Cycling Campaign

This paper was written as a contribution to discussions within the London Cycling Campaign on whether we should press for continental style cycle facilities in London. This is an edited version of the original paper.

Introduction.

This discussion could be one of the most important that LCC has faced and it is now an appropriate time to review our attitudes to cycle engineering given the potential for support for some serious cycling provision in our capital city now that we have a London-wide local authority.

It seems to me that the arguments put by some LCC members against segregated facilities fall into two groups: 1) specific failings that are due to poor design, legal uncertainty, poor maintenance, etc. 2) points of principle such as the view that cycling in segregated facilities reduces the ability of cyclists to cope with motor vehicle traffic. A related argument puts forward the idea, in John Franklin's words in the semi-official manual, Cyclecraft, that "facilities segregated from the carriageway mainly benefit riders who fear motor traffic"1.

I accept that some opponents of segregated facilities may want argue that group 1 problems are inherent in segregated facilities, but I reject that argument entirely and point to the numerous examples of well-designed facilities in the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavian countries which do not suffer from the faults which routinely mar such projects in the UK.

I think we should initially try to set on one side the type 1 issues as they can get us bogged down in minor details and that we concentrate on the principles. Understanding the type 1 issues is, of course, vital for getting the design of such facilities right & especially at junctions & but doesn't affect the principle.

One person in the LCC discussion pointed out that glass builds-up in segregated cycle facilities (but failed to refer to glass build-up in non segregated facilities). This really isn't an inherent weakness, rather it's due to the council not understanding or not caring that cycle routes, segregated or not, need cleaning like all highways. These are points of implementation and shouldn't be allowed to prevent us supporting segregated facilities if we feel they are needed. That would be allowing the tail to wag the dog.

Similarly, John Franklin and some of the e-mail discussion correspondents have pointed out a failing of many segregated tracks is the way give way markings tend to proliferate at every driveway and thus cyclists lose the priority that they had by being on the carriageway. But once again, this is a little local difficulty & although one deeply embedded in the psyche of the British traffic engineer, and also to some degree in the oddities of English, and Scottish, law relating to the roads. To see that this is not inherent to segregated facilities, one again only has to take a proper look at the tracks in the Netherlands etc.



Two way segregated track which gives cyclists priority at unsignalled junctions. Royal College Street, Camden.

Principles

As I understand that argument of principle, put as far as I have seen most consistently by John Franklin, the main case is that segregated facilities reduce the ability of cyclists to cope with motor vehicle traffic when, as inevitably must happen, segregated facilities end and shared facilities are unavoidable; separating traffic reduces the ability of both cyclists and motorists to deal with one another when they do have to interact. As Franklin puts it, "using cycle paths can result in these cyclists being more at risk".

I engaged in a short correspondence some time ago with John Franklin when he described Dutch cyclists as

being less competent as cyclists than us Brits on his website and elsewhere 2. Having lived for three years in the Hague (and also for three years in Brussels) I found this comment demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of cycling in the Netherlands. Indeed, were it not such a serious subject, the view that British cyclists are more competent than the Dutch would be laughable. Unfortunately it is simply very worrying

For the undeniable truth is that the general level of cycling skill here in the UK is abysmal. It is several orders of magnitude lower than in the Netherlands - and I had to contact him to say so. His response was that he was describing how Dutch cyclists often report having problems with motor vehicle traffic when they come to the UK. This was what he meant by a lower competence. But this, and other discussions with people who oppose segregated cycle facilities, show just how much people misunderstand the reality of cycling in places such as the Netherlands.

Traffic is not just motor vehicles

I think this reveals the thinking that underlies the opposition to segregated facilities. There is a deep rooted, unquestioned assumption here – namely that the key cycling skill is about dealing with motor vehicles. The argument becomes a circular one – the skill that matters is dealing with motor vehicle traffic, ergo anything that reduces the relative significance of that skill is undesirable.

This is evident from Franklin's own, semi-official guide to cycling skills, Cyclecraft, where just two paragraphs are devoted to dealing with "other cyclists". Indeed, the chapter on "non-traffic hazards" only starts on page 117 – and this is the category in which Franklin puts "other cyclists" along with other such topics as "bad surfaces"! The underlying assumption throughout is that dealing with "traffic" (ie motor vehicles) is what matters and everything else is just *other hazards*. The chapters "Sharing the roads", "Riding along", "Everyday manoeuvres" and "The more difficult manoeuvres" are exclusively about motor vehicles.

This reflects an environment where motor vehicles dominate. But if you are an everyday cyclist in the Netherlands, your most common interaction is with other cyclists. And that requires a level of skill and awareness which is demonstrably absent in the British cyclist - however skilled he or she may like to consider themselves in adopting the fast, centre-of-the-lane-hugging, adrenaline-pumping, style of cycling effectively recommended by many opponents of segregated facilities.

I suspect that the fear of segregated facilities is really a fear that hard-won, highly-valued skills of handling all those motor vehicles will become less important.

**Core issue8*

The core issue, as far as I am concerned, is increasing the number of cyclists.

Now, I simply do not understand how the increase in cycling that I envisage is possible without high-throughput, high-quality, dedicated cycle carriageways – or segregated facilities. Let me emphasise that such facilities are not the whole answer, but they must play a key role in providing backbone network links, hopefully, integrated with other local measures such as motor traffic-calming, speed reduction, home-zone type engineering, cycle-exempted road closures and turnings etc.



A road closure outside an infants school creates a cyclists-only facility showing how segregation, road closures, and local environmental improvements can be integrated. Amsterdam.

There are two strands to this. First, as we know from repeated surveys, masses of people who want to cycle, or would consider cycling, simply dismiss it as too dangerous – and nearly all parents similarly rule it out for their children for the same reason. The number of people that fits into Franklin's category of those who "fear" motor traffic is vast. Do we not want them to cycle? Do we not bother about them if we can get things made slightly better for those of us mad enough to cycle in London now?

The key question is how do we deal with this? Do we, as I unfortunately all too often hear and read those cyclists activists against segregated facilities doing all too often, try to explain to these people that they are wrong? Do we, in effect, say the problem is with you for fearing motor traffic; if I can survive by cycling fast, holding the centre of the lane and using my presence to dominate potentially transgressive motor vehicles, so can you? Do we, in effect, say that cycling is only for the macho – for the types who revel in negotiating the big fast roundabouts?

Or should we accommodate people's fears and try to develop cycling environments that are attractive to the fearful? If we want to establish cycling as a mode of transport, it must become a thing which nearly everyone can consider doing – not just doubling cycling levels or even quadrupling them (though that is obviously the start). That means that we must tackle the issues that prevent cycling and no amount of lecturing people will change what they think. We have to change road conditions to create conditions where people are willing to cycle.

The speed reduction campaign is one part of addressing this, but any such campaign will only have an effect once speeds are reduced and that will take two to three decades at least if the breathalyser experience is taken into account – and that assumes, against current trends which are going in the opposite direction, that substantial police resources will be devoted to enforcement. It also assumes that the residual transgressor rate will be so minimal as not to impact on peoples' perception of the road environment.

Cyclists vote with their wheels for segregated tracks

In promoting the Seven Stations Link (a high-quality, segregated backbone link around Central London), we have found substantial support from non-cycling groups such as Local Agenda 21 and many local residents' groups. In the public consultation on the Camden section 76% of residents supported the proposal. Ordinary people say 'that is what would get me on my bike'. Indeed we must be aware that there are hundreds of thousands of unused bikes rotting in sheds or blocking their corridors of people who have given up cycling because of the conditions – and many of whom would cycle if they had continental style facilities. We ignore this at our peril.

And there is evidence from Royal College Street that existing cyclists too want this type of facility. The first figures from the council show that cycle numbers on Royal College Street have increased threefold since the

segregated track was opened. Now there is no reason to believe that this is due to new cyclists as you still have to cope with the Camden Rd gyratory at the northern end & and every reason to believe that cyclists who previously used the Somers Town backstreet route (through College Place) or the mainroads of St Pancras Way and Camden St, and probably other routes too, have switched to Royal College Street.

Give them the opportunity and current cyclists will vote with their wheels for segregated facilities

Personally I make no apology whatsoever for admitting that I fear motor traffic & as do most ordinary, sentient people. I understand fully the concerns of those who simply aren't prepared to cycle under present conditions. I have no problem in saying that I don't want cycling to be the preserve of 17 to 47 year olds & as is evidently the case in Central London. As I approach 50 and observe that accident rates rise for older people, I will not accept that I should have to think about giving up cycling because the cycling lobby isn't willing to take account of the overwhelming majority of people who quite reasonably fear motor traffic.

Changing the age profile of cyclists, both up and down, should be a primary objective - as it will definitely be a measure of our success or failure in the long-run.



Segregated cycle tracks as part of a city-wide cycle route provision results to a different age-profile of cyclists than we see on London's streets. Note how careful junction design overcomes potential conflict with motor vehicles. Munich

Also there seems to me to be one incontrovertible statistical correlation & in those countries where you have the highest level of high-quality, often segregated, cycle facilities you also have the highest cycling rates. Flanders is an interesting example. Outside of Brussels there are ubiquitous cycle tracks in every city, town, village and between them & and lots of people of all age groups using them. But in the biggest city, Brussels, where there are virtually no facilities, you see absolutely no cyclists.

I suggest that opponents of segregated facilities must address this point & that there is a clear and evident relationship between cycling levels and the provision of segregated facilities as part of a wider provision of cycle facilities.

The reason why segregated facilities exist in the Netherlands and not here, is, in my view, due to differences in the political process, not culture or topographic flatness or other supposed national characteristic. The critical point is that the motivation behind people wanting such facilities is the same as here as it is in the Netherlands & it is pressure from cyclists that leads to continued provision of high-quality and segregated facilities in such countries.



Coherent city-wide segregated cycle routes combined with traffic-calmed areas encourages parents to teach children to cycle in real traffic environments. note how quick and effective road space re-allocation is achieved with minimal engineering. This track will be upgraded when funds are available to a higher standard of engineering, but a key link in the city network across a bridge, has been quickly provided. Amsterdam.

**Cycling down a cul-de-sac*

The sad thing about this discussion is that we, that is cyclists' lobby, have been here before - more than once indeed. And we are in real danger that the fundamentalists, that is those who oppose segregated facilities, will again leave us as a lobby isolated and, much worse, end up with cycling itself constrained as a minority, crank interest. If these seem like harsh words, just consider what has happened in the past.

"The bicycle faction has also involved itself in political lobbying, some of which no seems a trifle wrongheaded", write Roderick Watson & Martin Gray in *The Penguin Book of the Bicycle* 3. They are referring to the late 1930s when the cycling lobby, represented by the CTC, opposed a government decision to make compulsory rear lights on bikes – "a decision which it considered pernicious and even dangerous".

"The main objection to rear lights was that the onus of avoiding accidents ought always to rest with the overtaker rather than the overtaken; motorists should adjust their speed to suit visibility and conditions and not depend on cyclists being self-illuminated." It was the CTC's determined and long held opposition to rear lights that left it regarded as a cranks' lobbying organisation rather than a serious part of the transport industry for many years. Of course, in fundamental terms, the argument is right – but it doesn't take account of reality which is necessarily a compromise between the differing characteristics of transport modes.

This episode is well documented, but a more recent and similarly isolating stance was taken in the 1950s. This is less well known and is recalled only by participants (on whom I am therefore relying) and involves opposition by the cycling lobby to the provision of segregated cycle tracks. Cyclists, it was argued, must integrate with other traffic.

It seems screamingly obvious to me that this approach is an abject failure. Cycling here has declined over the long run, while it has increased or stayed steady at high levels in those continental European countries which rejected our way of doing things. I repeat this is a point which those who oppose segregated facilities have to address.

My great fear is that, as we face an unparalleled opportunity here in London to reverse the damage done by 50 years of the previous policy, we will repeat the same errors and leave ourselves isolated once again as a marginal, fundamentalist lobby lecturing the world that everyone else is wrong, while the mass of people, who would cycle if the right conditions were provided, take no notice of us. If we don't directly



An example of how a continuous cycle route, plus accompanying traffic reduction and calming measures, can be created by re-allocating road space by effective segregation. The Hague. This is the model for the Seven Stations Link proposed by Camden Cycling Campaign.

References

- 1 Cyclecraft, page 149 2 "Sustrans has often cited the fact that Dutch cyclists sometimes leave the ferry at Harwich and find traffic so difficult to deal with that they go back home! Interestingly, this problem is not experienced by cyclists arriving from France, Spain or the USA. Proficiency in using roads on a regular basis is essential to maximise safety, and to maximise one's cycling horizons. I would not like to see Britain on the slope down to Dutch levels of cycling competence." John Franklin, letter to Sustrans 1998. 3 The Penguin Book of the Bicycle, page 274

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