

Debate on Segregated Cycle Tracks

Summary of discussions on CCC mailing list 24th January - 8th February 2007

Terminology

cycle track: segregated, at the side of a road (with kerb) or not on a road.

cycle lane : a strip painted on the road but without a kerb.

cycling facilities: tracks, cycle-only bridges, contraflow lanes, plugs...

mix it : ride in the road with the other vehicles.

Overview

The majority of the arguments were from people at opposite ends of the spectrum between 'pro tracks and cycling facilities' at one end and 'mix it in the road' at the other end, referred to as *pro-tracks* and *pro-roads*. Few advocated both, although some attempted to predict the eventual outcome from one or the other approach.

How can we get more people cycling?

It's uncontroversial that encouraging more cycling is a common aim. We all wanted to identify factors that create high levels of cycling as in Netherlands, Cambridge. The *pro-tracks* lobby claimed it could be achieved with good cycle tracks, as in the Netherlands where 25% of journeys are by bike and cycle tracks are widespread. The *pro-roads* proponents quote Malcolm Wardlaw, "after WW2 there were more cyclists in Netherlands than UK, so with both declining, the former remain higher". Normal clothes, no helmets, looks safe, e.g. in Cambridge and Netherlands. *Pro-tracks* argued that Netherlands has better cycling facilities. *Pro-roads* said councils had been installing cycle facilities for many years, without numbers increasing. It is uncontroversial that in London, the C-charge and the 7-7 bombs led to a massive increase in cycling. They produced sufficient incentive.

Training vs infrastructure

Training is cheaper and is essential, since tracks will never be ubiquitous and all cyclists will need to 'mix it' in the road.

Arguments made in favour of segregated tracks

A segregated track is safe for those that use it and no worse for the few that don't. *Pro-roads* support new tracks that allow cyclists to go where roads can't take you. The big network of cycle tracks in Netherlands goes with numerous cyclists. Tracks are convenient.

Encourage new cyclists, gender and age balance.

Many people don't want to have to be assertive all the time.

Protection against being hit from behind, by car doors and drivers cutting in.

One person said RCS is unsafe, but would like a new track e.g. in Camden High St.

Arguments made against segregated tracks/facilities

Cycle tracks lead motorists to think cyclists should not be on the road.

Adjacent roads are 'no go' areas for cyclists.

Motorists don't get used to sharing with cyclists

Cyclists are in danger of losing facilities on the road, e.g. tracks on footways crossing driveways (not in Camden) where drivers object to cyclists riding in road.

Even the bridge over the A14 (Cambridge) has problems: it isn't de-iced or swept and the remaining junction on the road is worse for cyclists than before.

Tracks would need to be safe, they are not necessarily the solution for experienced confident cyclists in a hurry.

Comparative Safety of tracks vs lanes/mixing in traffic on road

The participants failed to reach an agreement:

The *pro-roads* think the roads are safer, quoting research on John Franklin's website: "it is 3-5 times more dangerous on cycle tracks than on the roads".

Pro-tracks rejected that research and asked for more evidence. Kaplan was quoted: "The relative rates for falls and injuries suggest it is safest to cycle on-road followed by off-road paths and trails, and finally least safe on sidewalks."

Safety of cycling in general

Opinions were polarised between those who hold that cycling is not dangerous, quoting figures showing it's safer than walking, but opponents argued that these figures were distorted by those who were too frightened to cycle.

An uncontroversial factor is the figures showing 'safety in numbers' or 'critical mass' e.g. TfL state that since the number cycling inside C-charge zone in London has doubled, the number of cycle casualties has halved.

Safety perception

Pro-tracks argue they make people feel safer so more will use them, *pro-roads* that they reinforce perceptions that cycling is not safe, otherwise why would you need to build them. Analogy of handing out parachutes at check-in to nervous flyers.

Comments on Royal College Street

Dangerous at the junctions of Pratt and Plender Streets, particularly southbound.

Some contributors said they ride in the road northbound to avoid all the bumps, but most users have not observed many cyclists doing that.

It is better than SSL. But not safe enough for children to ride alone on it.

At design stage, CCC asked for the side roads to be closed.

Comments on Seven Stations Link (SSL)

The section in Byng Place/Gordon Square/Tavistock Place is hazardous - vehicles take cyclists' right of way from three directions.

Moving north-south is difficult.

Left turn off track is difficult – need to cross cyclists and two lanes of motor vehicles.

Difficult to overtake - and avoid collisions with other cyclists.

Junction with Tottenham Court Rd - need to be on left: how about a contraflow?

CCC survey at Byng Place (Feb 2004) showed that 83% of 42 users find it pleasanter and 64% safer than before the track was built. But 93% said vehicles turning across the track are a problem and 21% that they had been in a collision.

Anti-track comment: CCC surveyed only those who had chosen to use the track.

Pro-track suggestion: a better implementation would close the side roads, leaving only signalised junctions to cross.

Reference: John Franklin's website, *Cycle path safety: A summary of research*, www.cyclecraft.co.uk/digest/research.html

Summary: based on 66 messages from Tony Raven, Paul Gannon, David Arditti, Ralph Thomas, Michael Stuart, Meade McCloughan, Tim Timms, George Coulouris, Richard Thomas, Lionel Shapiro, Martin Parkinson, Anne Boston, David Scollan, John Chamberlain, Helen Vecht, Anthony Hynes. Total: 19,500 words.

The other references given by participants can be found from the Links page on our website.