

Walking and Cycling Strategy and Infrastructure Plan 2019-2029

Of Birmingham City Council

Consultation Draft June 2019 closed Fri 2 Aug 2019

Response of Birmingham Friends of the Earth

AIM

The key aim of the strategy is to: Increase walking and cycling in Birmingham, for transport, leisure and health, particularly for short journeys and in combination with public transport.

BFOE response

We welcome the aim, which is correct, but it is much understated. The strategy should give the **reasons why** a large increase in walking and cycling is necessary for the future. Cycling and walking are not just good for individuals, but are essential for the future functioning of the city.

The UK Parliament has voted for a plan for the whole country to achieve zero carbon by 2050. The hottest recorded ever temperature has been experienced in July 2019. BCC voted for a declaration of Climate Emergency on 11 June 2019 and to plan for net zero carbon by 2030. The updated Carbon Roadmap will have to show how to cut carbon emissions from transport in Birmingham. Walking and cycling are nearly zero carbon and also cheap. They are not just leisure activities, but survival technologies.

There are illegal levels of air pollution across Birmingham, especially in the city centre and on the main arterial roads. Everyone suffers, every day, from the over-use of private cars. Electrification of engines alone cannot achieve the targets, according to research by FOE; there have to be many fewer vehicles on the road. Car City is unsustainable and we need to imagine and plan for a city that is a lot less dependent on private cars in 20, and even in 10 years' time. The 25% of car journeys of one mile or less are unsustainable and alternative provision has to be put in place rapidly.

Cycling as daily transport can do a great deal to solve congestion and parking issues, with their huge costs in wasted time. Bicycles make 19.5 million trips a year and this takes up to 14,462 cars off Birmingham's roads each day, according to 'Bike Life' by Sustrans. Walking and cycling are the most space efficient modes, so can actually cure traffic congestion. Cycling is already the quickest means of transport for shorter journeys. Time spent on active travel is exercising, so it is not a cost.

'Car City' is very inequitable with those without access to a car disadvantaged. These circumstances need to be reversed with priority given to walking, cycling, bus, ahead of the mostly single occupant private car.

The City's revised Transport Strategy following "Birmingham Connected" is expected shortly. This strategy should follow and implement its principles, which we very much hope will be to change dramatically the modal split of journeys.

OBJECTIVES – the three key objectives:

1. **Enable** walking and cycling in Birmingham, by providing training, improving access to bikes and securing funding
2. **Develop** a great city for walking and cycling, by improving infrastructure: paths, parking and public transport, managing traffic and maintaining streets
3. **Inspire** walking and cycling by organising events and campaigns, distributing information and evaluating outcomes

BFOE response

Objectives should relate to measurable outcomes.

Enable. This Objective could be to give pedestrians and cyclists the advantage in convenience and safety to substantially increase people's willingness to make journeys by these modes of travel.

Develop. This Objective could be to maximise the number of destinations to which people can walk and cycle in safety in the next 10 years.

Traffic danger is the dominant restraint on people's behaviour. . Nationally, 62% of people think that the roads are "too dangerous for them to cycle" in the National Travel Survey 2017. This is much worse in Birmingham, where Sustrans report 2017 found only 22% of Birmingham residents think cycling safety to be "good". The strategy draft document has illustrative pictures, but they do not have vehicles in them, so the central issue of traffic danger is not shown.

It will be hard to "inspire" and "promote" what is not generally provided, i.e. safe cycling and walking on the city's streets. The road system has to look a lot less car-dominated and frightening. Birmingham has fallen far behind other cities in making streets safe, so the "infrastructure" i.e. the design of streets has to change and BFOE's comments mostly relate to this transformation.

That said, safety could be helped by educating drivers in how to overtake cyclists, look out for cyclists, give priority etc, as would training people in safe cycling techniques. Everyone has to take more responsibility.

Targets - the targets in the draft Strategy seem to be those from the Birmingham Cycling Revolution; 5% of all trips by 2023 from the 1% baseline and 10% of all trips by 2033.

Many trips into Birmingham are too long to be cycled and walked, so a more relevant measure would relate to trips undertaken by the residents of Birmingham. Sustrans report 2017 says that 3% of all trips by residents are made by bike "Bike Life Birmingham ". There is huge scope to expand this according to Sustrans, since 44% households already have access to at least one bike, but currently only 12% of residents are cycling once a week or more. However, 56% would like to start riding a bike, or ride their bike more. 73% agreed that Birmingham would be a better place to live and work if more people cycled.

The scope for ambitious walking and cycling targets is clearly huge, but only if safety on the street is improved.

Birmingham City Council can consider adopting a vision of Zero Collisions by 2040, as do some other cities, and then work towards it. Example "Vision Zero for London".

What infrastructure improvements would help you to walk more in Birmingham?

BFOE response

Enforcement of a ban on pavement parking with physical barriers where needed; a minimum width of footways, wide enough to accommodate for walking for everyone, but wider where there is a good flow of pedestrians; reporting and fix of trip paving slabs; zebra crossings, pedestrian islands to allow crossing in two stages, 'courtesy' crossings at low speeds, which are cheap to provide. Junctions, in particular, need to be safe for pedestrians to cross, without long time delays waiting to cross. Getting rid of subways and steps. Quicker responses from traffic lights to pedestrians and cyclists. Greater understanding of desire lines for pedestrians and for them to be given priority as opposed to catering for the car user at the expense of the convenience of the pedestrian. Greater acknowledgement of the importance of priority for pedestrians also benefit the less able when they are not in a car. Enforcement of 20 mph and other speed limits on the streets and roads of Birmingham. More tree planting to provide shade as well as cleaning the air locking in carbon and providing wildlife corridors.

Walking and cycling improvements can benefit each other.

What infrastructure improvements would help you to cycle more in Birmingham?

All of these... Two-way segregated cycle tracks alongside main roads Green routes (cycle paths through parks) Signed cycle routes on quieter streets Cycle lanes on roads Canal towpaths Lighting Seating Trees and plants Fewer steps Cycle parking More cycle crossings More time to cross at crossings Less delay at crossings Fewer parked cars Less motor traffic Lower speed limits Restrictions on polluting motor vehicles Better public transport services **Other; Cycle routes that feed into train, tram and bus stops**

Do you have any comments on the Regional Priority Cycle Routes?

BFOE Response

The regional priority routes include very different ideas; off road, back street and main highway routes, but there is no explanation of how they have been chosen and why they have been allocated to Phase 1, Phase 2 etc.

Phase 1 - A34 & A45. The road hierarchy for motor traffic A, B etc. is not a ranking of desirability for cycling. Rather it may be inverted, i.e. cyclists tend to avoid the more heavily trafficked routes, where there are many demanding junctions and a poor environment, with high pollution & noise levels.

Length of journey. Bike is not a strategic mode but a very local one, more comparable with walking. Journey time means few people will cycle the longer distances e.g. 2 miles is 15 minutes cycling time and 6 miles would take 45 minutes. 'A' roads are designed for the longer journeys between urban centres, by cars, vans and buses and may not have the characteristics of a cycle route. The new route along the A38 Bristol Road to the University seems to be a success, but it may have favourable characteristics that will not be found on every arterial road, e.g. it was once a segregated tram route.

Cycling is not a fast mode over longer distances and it will be slowed by frequent junctions and stop lights. The most direct route on a map is not necessarily the least time or trouble to cycle. Cyclists may "rat run" and divert onto the side streets, for the same reasons that drivers do. The Walking & Cycling map of Birmingham already identifies a network of quieter routes.

Cost effectiveness. More engineering will increase the cost of a route. Cost benefit criteria would favour the least engineering and the least conflict with other modes of transport, and that is best met on the ordinary street network. The cost per mile should be one criteria used, but we do not know if has been used. A much more complete network may be achievable, within time and cost, if the ordinary streets are used, where there can be co-benefits for both cycling and walking.

Cycling does not need to compete with public transport. Main roads such as A34 and A45 are already well served by public transport e.g. bus, tram, train, Sprint bus. These big vehicles can be sources of danger on street for cyclists, as we said in our response to the Sprint consultation. Cycling to a stop will generally make more sense than following along beside, or behind, the service vehicle (which keeps stopping).

The new A34 Walsall Road cycle route has not yet been evaluated. We do not know how safe people feel on it, nor how willing they are to use it. It may be considered that its success should be determined before an extension of it is built in Phase 1.

The A45 Coventry Road has been heavily engineered for large volumes of fast moving traffic, with some large roundabouts. It is not a cycle route at present. It bypasses Small Heath and does not relate well to local streets, so there is a question how well-used it would be as a cycle route. We also wonder about the demand to cycle to/from the Airport.

Digbeth & Deritend is a road that can bring back life to a section of the city that is currently dominated by traffic and we would wish to see and to comment on any plan to reduce traffic and make space for walking and cycling.

City Road may be good for cycling lanes, as it is not too busy or wide. Augustus Road may offer a parallel route to the Hagley Road. There are many opportunities across the city to give cyclists protection, such as grass verges and the reservations which once had tram tracks on them.

Birmingham Cycling Infrastructure plan

This might include comments on particular routes, suggestions for other routes, which routes or local areas you think are the most important.

BFOE response

We agree that existing cycle routes need to be surveyed and reinstated with signs and links made between them. Many low cost changes are crying out to be made that will make the routes more attractive and signal that cycling is being taken seriously.

We want to see specific assessments of roads, as to whether segregation will be best, or sharing at 20mph, or a parallel route, rather than have decisions made on the classification of the road, A road, B road, side road etc. If an arterial traffic route is to be made the arterial cycle route, then it has to be argued for each case that this is the right solution. Cycle routes to be assessed on how useful they are, not by a simple division of green leisure routes versus commuter routes. The Rea Valley route for example is both on and off road and it is a very popular cycle commuter route, as is the Worcester canal towpath into town.

Speed of traffic is crucial. At 20mph you can ride in the traffic flow and be accepted as a vehicle by others. Drivers can respond to pedestrians by letting them cross. At 30, 40, 50, 60 mph this in-flow cycling is lost. The time to see and respond to a cyclist reduces rapidly with more speed, as does one's sense of security.

Size of vehicle relates to danger. Buses and HGVs occupy the whole road space and they have restricted sight lines when turning, and a long stopping distance, so cyclists behave quite rationally in choosing routes well away from them, because of the consequences of a collision.

Cyclists want to go directly to destinations, not to by-pass them. The Middleway (A4540) was built to divert traffic at speed out of/around Birmingham city centre, and does not have any particular attraction for cyclists. The same applies to the Small Heath bypass, and the Northfield and Selly Oak bypasses.

Segregated cycle tracks along main roads have to allow for every side road, roundabout, or major junction. There is a danger that cyclists can lose awareness of danger and have a false sense of security by being on a blue surface. Drivers may assume cyclists will never come off the blue surface. Segregation on a busy road, if it requires many stops and controls, could remove the time and convenience of cycling. It may be costly to separate and manage several modes of transport in same space. The length of cycle route and number of beneficiaries, for the expenditure, may be low on the arterial roads.

It is impossible to segregate cars and bikes on all roads and in all situations, therefore we need to ensure that on most of the road system, the space can be shared with reduced risk. This means lower speeds as well as a strong element of driver education and reducing the number of cars on the road and various other measures.

Birmingham is not flat like a map. We expect that routes would follow river valleys, so as to avoid unnecessary climbs. The least effort route is not always a direct line, if it avoids hills. Hills slow you right down.

Money from the Cycle Revolution budget was spent on making 20mph zones in neighbourhoods where there was a demand from residents. Most of the city is still not covered by the default 20mph limit on residential roads which BCC committed to rolling out across the whole city several years ago. The council should continue to press ahead with 20 mph. The city is yet to see an evaluation of its 20mph zones and how well they have worked to cut traffic danger and encourage walking and cycling. There is a considerable overlap between areas where significant numbers of people already cycle to work and the areas where the speed limit has been returned to 20 mph, so there is an argument for putting facilities where they are most likely to be used. More money could be allocated to designing streets down to 20mph and rebalancing them in favour of pedestrians and cyclists, especially at junctions, to make slower driving and sharing the road into a permanent reality where people live. New cyclists will make short journeys before they make long ones and will start from their door.

Cycle stands should generally not be put in car parks, which are not a destination for a cyclist. They should be close to the entrances of buildings, where they are overlooked. Where they do have a place in a car park, stands should be at the expense of at least one car park space and should be located as close as possible to the building to be entered thus showing that cycling is a valued form of transport and is being given the priority it deserves. It also helps if those stands are under some form of shelter. Cycle stands and infrastructure prominent should be well designed and attractive and integrated well into the street scene.

Priorities – BFOE is in favour of any measures that help walking and cycling, and there is a mixed bag in the Infrastructure Plan, but which of them are going to happen soon, later, never? Priority should be given to those that change the most journeys and benefit the most people, for the money spent.

BCC should hold an open Cycling Forum event or events to hear what they have to say about the kinds of facilities and locations would be most useful. The strategy will be much better if it is informed by a broad range of cyclists' experience. BFOE would support such events.

City Centre Cycling Infrastructure plan

This might include comments on particular routes, suggestions for other routes, which routes you think are the most important.

We need at least an effective North-South and an East-West route.

Cyclists want the quickest route, not complicated routes.

Prioritise:

- Getting into the city centre and across it, from other parts of the city.
- Improving junctions - more signs/warnings.
- Discourage driving to/in the city centre by closing streets or lanes in streets and reallocating space.

Some on-road routes are on very busy, congested roads, e.g. Digbeth High Street, or Colmore Row, where there are lots of buses.

Cyclists in bus lanes are not the solution, because buses occupy the space and they keep stopping.

On-road parking may need to be removed from safe cycling on streets, to free up road space, and because people opening car doors is a hazard.

There are safety concerns about cycling alone along the canals. Need to make them safer e.g. lighting, tackle anti-social behaviour, more benches so people can take a rest.

The Middleway (A4540) was built to divert traffic at speed out of/around Birmingham city centre, and does not have any special attraction for cyclists.

Digbeth/Deritend the proposed "Mixed route with Sprint, Metro" sounds dangerous and we would like to see the plans and to comment.

Duddeston Viaduct Skypark may be expensive and difficult to achieve; such facilities could be better realised at ground level.

A bike share scheme does not seem to figure in the strategy, although these have had a big effect on the popularity of cycling in many cities all over the world. People do not always have their own bike or somewhere to put it. The City Centre would be the logical place to start this.

Crime in the city centre - bikes being stolen. Secure bike storage is needed and added to the proposals map. New Street station is under-supplied. Covered bike storage which fits children's bikes & women's bikes, please.

Road maintenance is needed - potholes threaten cyclists with injury.

Make driving more difficult – there are too many car parks in the city centre.

Employers' incentives to encourage staff to cycle to work.

Core walking zones

This might include comments on particular zones, suggestions for other zones, which zones you think are the most important.

The city centre should aim to be largely car free by 2030, i.e. walking, cycling and access only.

Priority is walking zones around public transport stops. Stride and ride.

This will largely coincide with where people congregate; local high streets, health centres, schools and dense residential neighbourhoods.

Walking has to be appealing and safe for walkers, avoiding areas with high pollution from vehicles.

Low speed neighbourhoods at 20mph offer the chance to upgrade pedestrian safety measures and to remove those that favour fast traffic.

The River Rea can offer a green walking route all the way into the city centre from the south. Edgbaston Reservoir offers a similar opportunity to the west.

What criteria do you think we should use to prioritise future investment?

Please tick all that apply.

High levels of cycling demand (existing and potential) Links to existing walking and cycling facilities **Other - Routes into public transport nodes**

Which criteria for investment do you think is the most important?

Invest where people are, residential areas and local centres, which were designed pre 1960 for high levels of walking and cycling, to get best result for investment.

Routes into colleges and big education providers, to get young people walking and cycling as their normal, independent travel experience.

Routes into bus, tram and train stations, to connect public transport services rail, tram and bus; with walking and cycling offering the Last Mile to the destination.

Which areas of the city do you think we should prioritise? Why?

The higher priority should be for where people are, that is places of dense population, which suggest that change should focus on the city centre and the inner areas. This could mean starting the transformation in town centres and working outwards (as phase 1 BCR did). Then the older suburbs, built pre motor car; restoring the way these areas were built to operate. They already have a base of walking and cycling, lower speeds and they tend to lower car ownership. City-wide, 36% of households do not have a car, but the figure will be much higher in some neighbourhoods. Most car journeys are to local shops and schools and not in or between city centres.

A lower priority for routes along main roads out of the city which are less useful for walking and cycling, in so far as they go through low density suburbs, with high car ownership. Journeys may be too long for the active modes. Demand will have to be assessed realistically.

INFORMATION

Do you feel that the information provided has enabled you to make an informed comment on the proposals?

Yes No

What additional information would have helped you to comment on the proposals?

The reasoning behind BCC's selection and prioritisation of projects is not explained. How do they meet cost effectiveness and evidence of demand, in terms of the destinations served? In particular, A roads, which are not currently

cycle routes, and have many other functions. Why these were chosen and what was the evidence base?

The council needs to do an in depth look at what routes would be most beneficial and take evidence from cyclists and residents of local communities. We understand in Bristol the city council has implemented schemes that were all requested by cyclists.

Partnerships to implement the strategy

The Dutch Cycling Embassy can advise, based on Dutch experience, the best way to achieve a transition to high levels of cycling in a city.

In Birmingham; Sustrans, Living Streets, Birmingham Friends of the Earth, local bodies such as Sutton Town Council. Walking and cycling are not sectional interests.

Involve groups that represent people with disabilities, bus users, elderly people.

We suggest a Cyclists Forum opportunity, for all cyclists to discuss the strategy.