

Editorial

If only we all lived in Woking instead of the backward East Kent. Why is it that in Woking of all places, the local authority is so inspired and inspiring? Woking is to receive £1.82 million after winning Cycle Town status from Cycling England. This money will be spent over the next three years on cycling initiatives in the area as long as this sum is match funded by Woking council. In Canterbury, our planned cycle routes from 1996 have still not been completed. The only money we hear about is the £6 million pounds apparently lost in Iceland. If only our council had spent the £6 million on the desperately needed cycling provision instead.

Woking is one of the ten towns in England which is a Cycling City. The rationale behind the status is show that by increasing the funding for cycling per head of the population, the number of people cycling will increase and health, congestion, the environment and the quality of life for all of those in a Cycling City will improve. On average, cycling has increased by 20% in the existing Cycling Demonstration Towns.

Ashford, Thanet and Shepway appear to be waking up with their Cycle Forum initiatives. We can only hope that Canterbury and Dover can be woken from their coma like slumbers. East Kent needs to learn from places like Woking.

Chairman's Ramblings

What is Spokes? Is a question I have heard far too often over the last year! What are we campaigning about? Is another. Strange even though the name is emblazoned across the front of the event stand "Spokes East Kent Cycling Campaign", people still ask. There are many answers, some very idealistic and fanciful, some more down to earth and based on realism. The truth is, well there are many truths, many different views, opinions, objectives and even dreams. For me it is safe routes to our schools, communities linked by cycle routes and shared use paths. The creation of practical local networks, where people don't feel intimidated and frightened by our seemingly increasing traffic problems. It can happen, you only have to believe and trust that transport policies will eventually change and planners will finally get the message and create the right changes to our transport infrastructure.

Many cities and towns in Europe are already benefiting through policy changes. The great metropolis of Lyon in France recently introduced the pay and ride public bike system to great effect. It's something that could be easily done in our own towns. The initial cost of setting up the bike scheme could be met by the taxpayer or through commercial sponsorship, all monies being recouped in the hire cost over the long term. In the Dutch town of Assen, the local secondary school has a student population of 750 and bicycle parking for 850, benefits are obvious. I'm not even going to try and find a comparison here as I go out and fight my way through the school run. At Groningen railway station, also in Holland, parking provision has been provided for an unbelievable 6000 bicycles! My local station has a mixture of iron railings and an old chain link fence. The situation here is slowly improving though. Folkestone has a very dedicated Cycle Forum and hopefully we shall see many improvements and changes in that area. Ashford too is preparing a new transport strategy and will also see the rebirth of a new Ashford Cycle Forum as well. Thanet Cycle Forum is doing good work - I'm hoping soon that cyclists will once again be able to travel on the ferries from Ramsgate. We're still laying the foundations; maybe in thirty years time we will have a transport infrastructure to be proud of - something the Netherlands started investing in thirty years ago.

Steve Fawke

Letters to the Editor

Referring to the editorial on helmets use I was surprised that Spokes chose to publish very questionable information which suggested helmet wearing was pointless, perhaps the article was inserted to promote discussion?

Having cycled on and off road for many years I declare myself in strong favour of helmets for both uses, during a recent night ride my helmet saved a nasty blow direct to my head which would have knocked me off the bike this was from an overhanging tree in a narrow lane, several months ago whilst off road in Exmouth my helmet was my saviour in a minor mishap in which my head made contact with the surrounding rocks, whilst cycling to work a few years back early morning ice took me off and I sat in casualty for four hours waiting to be stitched up, a helmet would have saved this inconvenience to me and the hospital! Helmets provide warmth in winter, the peak protects your eyes from the rain bullets and the brighter coloured ones make you more visible to other road users.

Statistics can be used to prove anything but sometimes experience and common sense are a better yardstick! Some web sites advocating helmet use:- BMA, CTC,RCN,BRAKE etc...

Chris Harrington

The real health and safety issue are motorised vehicles. Around 3,000 people are killed annually on the roads in the UK, 40,000 in Europe,1.2 million worldwide. Millions of people across the planet are injured, maimed or disabled every year in road accidents. The hospitals and mortuaries are full of vehicle drivers, their passengers and other road users. Why is it, that helmet wearing has not been made compulsory for drivers and their passengers? Why is it that speed limits have not been reduced to 20 mph? Why has there not been a complete ban on motorised vehicles? If we don't make our roads less dangerous for all road users, the road slaughter will continue unabated and cycling levels will continue to fall with or without... cycle helmets.

Myths of cycling – No.3: The wind is always against you

On the flat, air resistance is the major consumer of the energy you generate when cycling, so cycling with the wind against you can be an exhausting business.

If you are making a round trip by bike, having the wind against you in both directions seems somewhat unlikely. Most of the time, you should be able to take advantage of the wind strength and direction on one leg of your trip. The chances of encountering a head wind in both directions are pretty small, though it is more likely if you live near the coast (on-shore breeze on a warm day, off-shore breeze in the cooler evening). It is also possible that the strong wind of the outward journey has dropped to a gentle breeze and is not providing anywhere near as much assistance as it did resistance.

In town, wind direction is influenced by having to flow between buildings and this can result in more head wind than one might reasonably expect.

As your speed increases, you are rushing through the air and that feels the same as the wind blowing past you while you're standing still. In other words, it's not easy to tell what is head wind and what is a result from one's own motion. It's natural, therefore, to feel that the wind is against you all the time.

Sometimes, of course, there is no doubt about wind direction. When trees are bending towards you, when flags are out-stretched on your side of the flagpole, when umbrellas are turning inside out. On those days, it may be best to leave the bike at home.

Andy McNally

Cycle census *continued*

Oak Road in 2005 they must have been observed from the same point. This year's record was labelled St Stephen's Roundabout and all directions (including Broad Oak Road) will have been covered. There are no counts specifically recorded as on Falala Way, but in 2005 these were counted by the same person as those at the Leopard's Head, so both sets of figures are assumed included in data from Domino's Pizza. So the results are actually worse than as described at the AGM! The following is a summary of findings. More details can be seen in the spreadsheets of data on the Spokes website.

In 2005 (also in cold dry weather) there were a total of 929 cyclists counted. In 2008 the number at all locations was 833. This represents a reduction of just over 10% which is very disappointing. However, none of the routes have changed in the three years since the last census (i.e. no new cycle paths have been created in the area) while the car traffic is at least as bad as before. It was noted by one observer that 100 single occupancy cars passed before a car with more than one person inside was observed; others reported similar but unquantified observations. This would suggest that the council's aim of encouraging car sharing has been a dismal failure (or at least not a notable success!) Most people give as a reason for not cycling their fear of motorised traffic, and around Canterbury this fear has not been allayed over the past three years.

Of the total number of cyclists counted exactly the same number as before were counted on footways. The reduction is all in 'legal' cyclists i.e. those on roads or cycle paths. Unfortunately our counts do not separate those riding on roads from those on cycle paths, though it is interesting to look at points where there is no cycle path. For example on Sturry Road, where there is a bus lane only in one direction (for which there is an alternative route for cyclists, using Brymore Road) there was a 34% reduction in cyclists, both on the road and on the footway. At Old Dover Road, where there are short cycle lanes and advance stop areas marked on the road in one direction, there were 11% more cyclists than before, but while in 2005 none cycled on the footway, in 2008 38% of cyclists were using the footway. The Wincheap count includes those pushing bikes over the Pin Hill footbridge (which is on a cycle route); the total count increased from 86 to 111 and most of this increase was in cyclists on the footway. We hope the opening of the Horses and Goats tunnel will help here by providing an alternative route.

The other data collected was whether the cyclists were adults or children and whether they wore helmets or not. Among adults there were 20% more wearing helmets than in 2005, and 18% (of a much larger total) fewer not wearing helmets, with more of those who were not wearing helmets riding on the footway. In other words adults do seem to be more safety conscious than 3 years ago. The overall reduction in adult cyclists was 8.8%. In 2008 ¾ of the cyclists counted were adults. Among children there was a 32% reduction in the number wearing helmets and a 13% reduction (of a very much larger total) in those not wearing helmets, with a 14.5% reduction in child cyclists overall; there was no apparent change in behaviour of children related to wearing helmets. From this it would seem that encouraging children to cycle to school is not yet working, and schools are not insisting that children who cycle there wear helmets, which is surprising.

To summarise: there are 10% fewer cyclists than 3 years ago, with a slightly greater proportional drop in child numbers. The number of cyclists riding on the footway has not changed. Adults (approx ¾ of the total of cyclists counted) are more inclined than before to wear helmets or ride on the footway, showing risk aversion which is not evident among children. There is clearly no 'modal shift' to travelling by cycle, and observations suggest no shift to car sharing either. For the environment of Canterbury and the health of its population this is worrying!