



Welcome to the third issue of the SPOKES newsletter.

SPOKES in 2003

SPOKES Chairman Tony Vickers writes

The first year of West Berkshire SPOKES' existence has seen cycling accepted as an important part of local transport planning but not yet integrated into transport provision in the way we hope for. A member of the council's transport planning staff attended our launch meeting and by our first AGM (this month) there had been two meetings of a new Cycling Forum. SPOKES is a full member of the West Berkshire Partnership Transport Action Group (TAG) and I have met the Government's Regional Cycling Co-ordinator.

But a promise early in 2003 that SPOKES would be consulted on all major planning and highways proposals has not yet been acted upon. Consultation is ad hoc and often too late. Few decision makers 'think bike' and the public attitude towards cyclists remains negative.

Thanks to Stan Green and the sponsors he found, we began the year with a schools' logo competition and our cheeky SPOKES face appeared on mailings of the first newsletter issue to every school, GP practice and Chamber of Commerce member. We also appeared on the internet, at the May Crafty Craft fair and at most of the monthly Farmers Markets in Newbury, where our efforts at recruiting members proved most successful. 'Tags' hung from handlebars on parked bikes helped too!

We found over 20 volunteers to help conduct the second Cycling Census – only covering the Newbury / Thatcham area – brought forward to June to coincide with that of Reading. Help from Reading Cycling Campaign in various ways was most welcome and Slim Smith covered our activities in his column in their excellent newsletter.

Our detailed comments on the "Newbury Vision 2025" document highlighted the problems cyclists experience in reaching and crossing the town centre. We continued to object to any plans to ban cycling from pedestrianised areas until safe and convenient alternative routes are created. We have commented on over twenty planning applications in the urban areas – but only because two of SPOKES' committee happen to be members of West Berkshire Council and to receive notice of all planning applications. It remains to be seen whether our comments and suggestions for cycle routes through and near new developments will be acted upon.

The most important project of 2003 has been the Cycle Map. After SPOKES members gathered route information, which was independently checked by a student employed by the Council in the summer, Chris Hopkins and his Vodafone colleagues have been building a network of actual and proposed routes in electronic form. We hope to print and issue the map widely in early 2004. Subject to Council

approving the content of the map in January, we expect to have the map printed in time for a major SPOKES membership drive in the spring. Commercial sponsors are lined up.

Actual physical progress has also been significant. Three new toucan crossings have been built in Newbury and there is now a continuous cycle way from Monks Lane rugby club to Greenham Common, also from London Road (Faraday Road junction) along Lower Way to the Moors Estate in Thatcham. An improved canal crossing at Greenham Mill is nearing completion and plans for a replacement to the Monkey Bridge at Northcroft have been submitted. Dozens of shiny new cycle racks adorn enhanced Bartholomew Street. But crucial gaps in the network deter many prospective cyclists, as highlighted in our 'Update on Cycle Ways' article.

In 2004, we must ensure that the image of cyclists improves locally and procedures to make the most of limited funds for cycling are embedded in the Council's rulebook. We hope to work with employers, retailers, schools and local officials to raise awareness of the concerns of cyclists and recruit many more cyclists to become SPOKES members.

Cycling Targets...

"A national cycling policy target of tripling cycling use is dead in the water. We don't stand a chance of tripling cycling use because the tidal wave of traffic makes many cycling options untenable. Most cycling journeys in and around British cities are of poor quality and even when we have bike paths they get blocked with parked vehicles, are badly maintained, and stop when you need them the most. We could easily be like Copenhagen with one third of all our trips on bikes with huge gains in health and fitness and huge reductions in congestion. Whatever the national cycling strategy says and whatever the small number of excellent local authorities are doing (and there are some) it is not enough to bring about the huge increase in cycling to school, work and for socialising that is so desperately needed."

John Whitelegg, Professor of Sustainable Transport, Liverpool John Moores University.

Extracted from an article in the Green Party's magazine Green World

Questions to the Council

SPOKES Chairman, Tony Vickers, addressed a public question to the Member of Council responsible for transport issues at the December Executive meeting, in order to raise awareness of cycling issues:

"Given the good work by council officers and others in producing green travel plans for Vodafone, Waitrose and the new Newbury Hospital; what is being done to ensure that [the council's] own sites and people working there are contributing as much as possible to sustainable, integrated transport in the District?"

A second Question was put by Tony (himself a councillor) to the Chief Executive privately:- "Why were the new traffic barriers at the Market Street council car park entrance installed in such a way as to make it impossible to cycle through the site from west of the town centre to the railway station via Market Street?"

Trailer Tales

William Pitt writes;

We all know when it comes to transporting large or many things at once bicycles cannot compete with cars. However, there may be more middle ground than you think. I don't own a car so I rely on shops that can deliver, helpful friends and family with cars or simply doing without. This is my history of the options available to transport things by bicycle.

It began when I was 11 years old. The year I got a new five-gear, blue Peugeot racing bike for my Birthday. The bike had a rack with an integrated bungee. Since rucksacks were the domain of the camping fraternity in the 70s and not for general use, racks were the main safe option for the cyclist. Although hanging bags from the handlebars had their advocates too. I could go down to the beach or shops and carry a few items safely on the rack.

At the start of the 80s I regressed to balancing a bag on the crossbar and handlebar stem until I was equipped with a new bike, rack and panniers. I was now able to carry a week's food shopping home. I also learnt that racks with extra tubing at the back to stop the pannier swinging into the wheel were a better choice; having placed a carton of milk into an empty pannier's rear pocket and getting it shredded by the rear wheel.

By the 90s I had front and rear panniers for cycle touring and a handle bar bag too. My carrying capacity was still limited. Although I managed to carry a bag of cement on the rack, the rack didn't last much longer for some reason!

Having noticed the carrying capabilities of four-wheeled cycles and tricycles with integrated carriers, I opted to buy a trailer for my existing bicycle. No more quadruple trips to the supermarket, no more reliance on friends and I can even go to the car boot sale without a car!

You may not have seen many bicycle trailers, yet there are a great many different types out there: one wheel or two; solid wheels or inflatable integrated container or removable container attached to the rear axle, stay or seat post and even those with interchangeable parts for carrying goods, children or pets

I have used mine for:

selling items at a car boot sale; the table neatly fitted on top
shopping at the garden centre (12 miles round trip)
taking items to the dump/recycling centre (up a hill too)
supermarket shopping

going to the DIY store for some big cans of paint

I hope you enjoy the story and it gives you a few ideas of how to get more use from your bicycle.

Slim Smith writes;

Like many other dog owners I like to vary the walks we go on. Sometimes this means using the car to get to a particular walk. But as a cyclist I feel uncomfortable about creating an extra car journey, so a few months ago I started to look around for a bicycle trailer.

There are trailers designed to take either one large dog or two small ones, but I've got two Airedale terriers and I needed something bigger. Reading Cycle Campaign has a Columbus trailer, which it uses to take display materials to its Farmers' Market stand. I borrowed this to see if it was big enough and if the dogs would stay in it. It was and they did, but being a folding trailer it wobbled a bit too much for the dogs to be comfortable. So I have acquired a Roland Jumbo, basically a big solid box on wheels.

The trailer handles very well, I don't notice it's there most of the time, although going up hills can be a problem. It has reflectors on the sides and I clip lights on the back of it. Generally it gives more presence on the road, I can see car drivers do a double take as they see the trailer, and give us more space.

And we seem to give a lot of people pleasure, because they point and laugh (even pull out cameras) as we peddle past them.



Slim and the Airedales

If you'd like more information about trailers and what there is available, here are a few useful links.

www.orbit-cycles.co.uk/trailers.shtml (0114 275 6567)

www.bikefix.co.uk/brox.html (020 7405 1218)

www.bikefix.co.uk/b-bikehod.html (020 7405 1218) - William says, 'not recommended, I have seen these tip over many times'

www.twoplustwo.uk.com

www.living-lightly.co.uk

Cycleway News

Two new links to cycle ways in Newbury

At a recent Newbury Area Planning meeting, it was agreed in principle that the cycle-way between Town Centre and Turnpike could go through the new development approved for between Skyllings and Craven Dene (which was Riverside Packaging site). This would involve two new links:

1. Between Walton Way and the new site - about 70 metres off-road, currently a children's' play area on land owned by Town Council. This presupposes that the new bridge over Lambourn River where the old railway line went will get planning approval in a few weeks' time. £69,000 of the developers' money is set aside to improve this land.

2. A Toucan crossing of the A4 between Faraday Road and Skyllings. £150,000 is available from this developer to contribute to highway improvements.

Neither pieces of work are 'done deals' and SPOKES will need to lobby hard to get what cyclists want/need.

Comments on the Lower Way cycleway

Written by Kevin Bushell with contributions from Tony Vickers, William Pitt & Fiona Perry.



The cycleway is a link between Newbury and Thatcham and forms part of Sustran's National Cycle Network. Route planners see it as significant; all the more reason to ensure that the implementation is good. In summary, the surface is good - smooth and flat. Most junctions with carriageways have fairly flush dropped kerbs meaning smooth

transitions. The cycleway is about 3m wide for much of its length. It reverts to a shared use footway at its Western end, and ends abruptly at its Eastern end.

From the towpath from Newbury, you are expected to cross at the canal bridge on Hambridge Road. But, traffic is so busy and visibility is so poor, that a crossing here would be hazardous. SPOKES, supported by SUSTRANS, has suggested that a new toucan crossing be built on the Ham Bridge itself.

At London Road you reach bizarre "Cyclist Dismount" signage at London Road, which does not appear to have any use.

The first real obstacle for users to overcome is the requirement for cyclists to give-way at the entrance to Newbury Leisure Park, see the picture. This "priority inversion" is an excellent example where a facility intended to improve a cyclist's journey actually makes it more difficult.

A cyclist on the main carriageway does not have this concern and actually has an easier, quicker cycle ride than the cyclist on the cycleway!

There are three more such examples along the cycleway; the Thatcham Nature Reserve junction provides yet another example. Here, the cycleway turns into the entrance before turning sharply to a give waypoint.

At these junctions the cyclist must exercise increased caution to give-way to traffic joining and leaving the main carriageway.

Moving on; there is an entrance inset by gates that are usually closed. Drivers often use it as a lay-by. This blocks the cycleway causing not just an inconvenience but also a safety issue since it forces cycleway users to divert to pass.



The remainder of the cycleway up to its eastern end is remarkably hazard-free except for the unhelpful addition of a post in the centre of the cycleway. At its eastern-most point the cycleway ends abruptly, with safety implications and the additional inconvenience to the cycleway user to cross the carriageway to continue their journey. Needless to say, a cyclist remaining on the carriageway does not bear this inconvenience.

One of the more concerning problems is how cycleway users are intended to get to and from side-roads on the Northern side of Lower Way. There are side-roads where, in the main, there is no provision for cyclists to leave or join the cycleway.

This autumn the cycleway was not swept and became very slippery, completely covered by leaves in places. During frosty spells the cycleway wasn't gritted and was equally slippery. With safety hazards like this, cycling, and the use of this cycleway, is hardly being promoted.

To summarise, we welcome the addition of a cycling facility, and the mindset that led to its implementation. However, SPOKES cannot wholeheartedly recommend its usage. This is a disappointment to us as we desperately want to be positive about helpful additions to cycle friendly transport infrastructure, and this could easily have been a model cycleway to use as a benchmark.

Cyclists will follow a 'desire line' whether we like it or not. Unless they are to remain 'pariahs' we should be looking at where they need to go and making comprehensive provision for them.

Useful websites

www.westberkshirespokes.org

www.newburyroadclub.com

www.readingcyclecampaign.org.uk

www.readingctc.co.uk

www.newburyrc.co.uk

Diary of events

The next SPOKES meeting is the AGM on Monday 26th January 2004. To be held at Baird House on the Vodafone HQ Campus. The meeting will start at 7.00pm.

SPOKES committee meetings are on the last Monday of the month at 7pm. All are welcome!

Monday 23rd February 2004 in the Front Room at Hogs Head, NE corner of Newbury's Market Square

Monday 29th March 2004, venue to be advised on SPOKES website

Newbury's Farmers' Market is on the first Sunday of every month will normally have a SPOKES stall.

Cycle-IT has regular cycle rides welcome to everyone. If you are interested in joining any of these rides, please contact Laurie Lockwood, 01635 871182 (3-6pm). These are casual rides along countryside roads. Cycle-IT has no membership fee.

Anyone who would like to join SPOKES in the famous London To Brighton Bike Ride 2004 on Sunday 20th June should contact the Events Co-ordinator, William Pitt, by end of February 2004. It's a fantastic ride with 27,000 other cyclists over a very pleasant 55 mile route. Much of it is car free, even in London. It isn't a race and has many refreshment stops, mechanics and happenings along the way.

Events. If you would like any events to be advertised here, please contact the Events Co-ordinator, contact details at the end of the Newsletter.

Adverts. Please contact the Editor if you would like to place an advertisement in this newsletter.

Articles. If you would like to contribute or have any ideas you would like to suggest please contact the Editor.

Thoughts of a cyclist

Winter evenings, by Graham Hunt

Don't you just hate those cyclists you see in dark clothes and no lights? Why can't they nip along to the Cycle Shop and pick up a decent set of lights and a reflective belt? I have two front lights and two back lights – that way if a bulb goes, or the batteries go, chances are I can still get home legally. The lights always stay on the bike – I've never had a set nicked yet. Perhaps I'm just lucky. Perhaps that luck is why I've never been knocked off in the dark. Or perhaps it's just that I've got lights...

Contact details for SPOKES Membership

Families can join SPOKES for only £5 a year; individual subscription is £3. You will get a regular newsletter and a discount with The Cycle Shop, further benefits will be

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Events Coordinator	William Pitt williampitt@supanet.com Tel: 01635 529909
General postal address	West Berkshire SPOKES c/o Chris Hopkins, Vodafone HQ, Shaw, Newbury

advertised in subsequent newsletters. Please send your name, address, phone number and e-mail address to Graham Hunt, SPOKES Membership Secretary, 77 Enborne Road, Newbury RG14 6AP

As part of a drive for more members, SPOKES has received a grant of £100 from Newbury Town Council to enable us to print and distribute posters designed by James Cullen. A big thank you to the Town Council for their support! Please send any suggestions for potential A5 / A4 / A3 poster locations to Graham Hunt, contact details are above.

Alan Crow

SPOKES would like to wish Alan Crow farewell, as he is moving out of the area. Alan was involved with SPOKES from the start as the membership secretary, and was a very active participant. Thank you, Alan, for all your help and we hope to see you again!

Co-rider required, please!

An unusual request has come in from Mick Hutchins of West Berks Disability Alliance (01635 49701). He has been asked by a blind chap living in Upper Basildon if there is any way he can help find a sighted 'co-rider' for his tandem bike. If you would like to volunteer, or get more details, please contact Mick.

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