



# A Manifesto For Cycling Provision in West Berkshire

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## Summary

Cyclists need more than just cycle facilities or cycle routes. These can be valuable, but they are not enough. Cyclists need the whole road environment to be suitable for them. Some cyclists feel vulnerable riding on the carriageway, and instead cycle illegally on the footway because they perceive it as safer. Spokes does not condone illegal cycling but recognises that deficiencies in highway design are at the root of this issue.

In this document we describe some of the ways in which the ordinary road network can be made more cycle-friendly without providing specific cycle facilities. The most important way is to reduce the speed and volume of motor traffic. Another is to design the road layout to minimize conflict between cyclists and other road users. At the very least, those features of road design which are notoriously cycle-hostile should be avoided. West Berkshire has a legacy of road layouts which are unfriendly to cyclists and more are still being constructed.

In some places it will, however, be appropriate to provide specific facilities for cyclists. It is important that such facilities are well planned, well designed and well made. Poor quality facilities, or facilities in the wrong place, are at best a waste of money and at worst can be downright dangerous.

In this document we describe some characteristics of "good" and "bad" cycle facilities, in the hope that we can improve the standard of cycle facilities being built.

## 1. Cyclists in towns need to be able to go everywhere

Cyclists in towns like Newbury and Thatcham ride everywhere, along all roads and across all junctions. Although cycle schemes which aim to "funnel" cyclists onto particular routes do have a value, they will never remove the need for cyclists to be able to use all parts of the road network.

The reasons why cyclists need to be able to use the entire standard road network include:

1. The start and end of almost all cycle journeys is on the standard road network
2. The standard road network frequently offers the most direct and convenient route.

Thus all of the road network must be suitable for cyclists. In particular, it is essential that junctions on the standard road network are suitable for cyclists. Diversionary routes will never be enough.



Junction design should take into account that the main direction of cycle flow may be different from the main direction of flow for motor vehicles.

Spokes recognises that some cyclists perceive it to be safer in certain circumstances to cycle on the pavement. Spokes does not condone this but encourages all members to report situations where they feel pavement use is a safer alternative to the Spokes highways officer, so that investigations for relevant highway improvements can be made.

## **2. Reduce the speed and volume of motor traffic**

The most effective way of providing for cyclists is to reduce the speed and volume of motor traffic.

Traffic speeds can be reduced by:

1. Greater enforcement of existing speed limits
2. Changing social attitudes to speeding, so that speeding becomes socially unacceptable in the same way that drink-driving now is.
3. Reducing existing speed limits.
4. Introduction of traffic calming measures.

Traffic volume can be reduced by:

1. Provision and promotion of other means of transport: public transport, park-and-ride, - and cycling.
2. Land use policies which reduce the demand for travel.
3. Bans and restrictions on motor traffic - and not just in shopping streets.

## **3. Provision for cyclists means more than just cycle facilities**

Cyclists need more than just cycle facilities. They need a cycle-friendly road environment. Because cyclists need to be able to use the entire ordinary road network, the entire ordinary road network needs to be suitable for cycling. This means that roads and road schemes should always be designed with the needs of cyclists in mind.

This is not technically difficult, and need not necessarily require extra money. It simply means avoiding features of road design which cyclists find difficult,



unpleasant, or dangerous, and replacing them with more cycle-friendly equivalents.

- Avoid high-volume, high-speed roundabouts and circulatory schemes. (e.g. the junction of Newtown Rd with St Johns Rd and Andover Rd). Consider using traffic signals instead.
- Avoid multi-lane roads, especially lanes that join on the left and left-turn-only lanes.
- Avoid measures which make the road so narrow that cycles cannot be overtaken safely, particularly when designing traffic calming schemes and when extending the pavement into the road.
- At signalled junctions (i.e. traffic lights) provide advanced stop boxes, with cycle approach lanes for cyclists to ensure that cyclists can safely turn right, and to enhance priority for cyclists.

#### **4. Provision for cyclists should cater for their "natural desire lines"**

Cyclists should not be expected to make excessive diversions away from the natural desire line. It should be recognized that the ideal route for a cycle is almost always a straight one between origin and destination.

Cyclists should not simply be diverted away from a difficult junction, if this results in a longer journey. If anybody should be forced to make a long diversion it should be motorised road users. After all, cycling requires physical effort; driving a car does not!

In general, one-way streets should allow contra-flow cycling in a dedicated cycle lane. Streets which bar entry through a No Entry sign should contain a cycle bypass to allow legal entry into that street (without recourse to dismount and remount once past the no entry sign, as occurs presently e.g. West Mills AND Bartholomew St at the junctions of both streets).

#### **5. Provide Secure Cycle Parking at Destinations**

Encourage cycling to destinations by providing lockable cycle parking points at or close to entrances to destinations which are significant trip generators.



## 6. Reclaim road space from motor traffic

If, in order to provide for cyclists, additional road space is needed, then this should be taken from motor traffic rather than from pedestrians. Current practice is usually the opposite.

## 7. Go for quality rather than quantity

When cycle facilities are to be provided, we believe it is more effective to spend a given quantity of money on a smaller number of high-quality schemes rather than on a larger number of lower-quality schemes.

The West Berkshire area already has a large number of low-quality cycle facilities. Many simply represent a waste of money. We do not want our local council to waste any more. In particular, many shared-use footway schemes are unsuitable and of poor quality, and as a result can be poorly used.

It would be a mistake to aim for "x km of cycle routes" each year, since this would encourage quantity at the expense of quality.

## 8. Cycle routes should be usable for cycling

Remarkably, many "cycle routes" cannot actually be cycled on for their entire length. A cycle route which requires a cyclist to dismount is not a cycle route. (For example, the route to avoid the pedestrianised Bartholomew Street route may actually cross a proposed pedestrian zone itself, so a dismount is still required, and Sustrans' own National Cycle Network Route 4 requires cyclists to cross the high-speed hazardous Hambridge Rd carriageway from shared-use footway to canal-side path unaided).

In addition to being usable by cycle, a good cycle route should be physically convenient to use. This means that:

1. Cycle routes must have a smooth road surface (which need not always mean tarmac).
2. The cyclist should not be asked to dismount at places along the route. (e.g. National Cycle Route 4 requires cyclists to dismount at the junction of London Rd and Lower Way).



3. The route should have suitable gradients, curvatures, widths and visibility to accommodate a steady pace of 20mph and to allow two bikes, or a bike and a pedestrian, to pass easily.
4. The route should require as few stops, turns and awkward manoeuvres as possible.

A good cycle route should be capable of attracting cyclists to use it, and a convenient cycle route will be more attractive than an inconvenient one.

## 9. Some cyclists will always prefer to use the road

It should be recognised that there will always be cyclists who prefer to use the road rather than an off-road cycle facility.

The provision of a cycle facility should **never** compromise such cyclists. In particular, provision of an alternative route for cyclists should never be regarded as an excuse for rendering the original road or junction unsuitable for cyclists.

## 10. Cycleways should be as convenient as the main carriageway

(For the purposes of this document, by cycleway we mean a segregated cycle path alongside a carriageway, possibly shared with pedestrians).

Where cycleways are provided alongside carriageways, the cyclists using them should have the same (or greater) priority at junctions with side roads as is enjoyed by traffic using the main carriageway. Cyclists should not be penalised for using a cycleways. This means that cycleways alongside roads must have priority over side roads. Continuing the cycleway across side roads at a raised level can reinforce this level of priority.

Cycleways should be subject to the same gritting and sweeping maintenance standards as carriageways – at present, the council never grits cycleways in winter and there is little evidence of any cleaning.

Cycle lanes on the carriageway (as opposed to cycleways) should continue straight across a junction with a side road, to emphasize their existing priority over side roads, and perhaps be further emphasized by surface coating.



## **11. Cycleways alongside roads can be valuable if they are of high quality, but useless if they are not**

Cycleways are frequently totally unsuitable for cyclists because:

- of the need to give way to side roads
- they are less well-maintained than the adjacent carriageway
- they are frequently overgrown
- they are hard to turn right (or rejoin the traffic) from
- they are often poorly lit (sometimes being behind the street lamps)
- they are often blocked by parked vehicles
- they are often blocked by street furniture, road signs and trees
- they are rarely gritted in icy weather
- facilities shared with pedestrians cause conflict

However, in places where these problems can be avoided (such as rural and semi-rural locations) cycleways can be valuable.

## **12. Shared paths with pedestrians have additional requirements**

In addition to the points in the previous section, cycleways should only be shared with pedestrians if:

- they are wide enough to ensure conflict is minimised
- both cycle and pedestrian traffic is low

This is not the case with many such facilities in West Berkshire.

## **13. Consider personal security on quiet cycle routes**

When considering off-road cycle routes, or cycle routes away from main roads, issues of personal security must be considered.

Routes across open spaces, through subways and along back streets can be scary in the dark, even if the actual risk of assault is low and such fears are not justified. After all, the Police do consistently advise people to avoid such places after dark.



This has two main implications:

1. Cycle routes in quiet areas may require additional measures to make users feel safer, such as improved lighting.
2. Even though quiet routes can make ideal cycle routes during the day, many people will prefer to use the main road when it is dark. This is yet another argument for keeping the ordinary road network cycle-friendly despite the existence of alternative routes.

## 14. Maintenance matters

Cyclists are more sensitive to a poor road surface than the occupants of motor vehicles or pedestrians. This means that standards of road maintenance are particularly important to cyclists.

A poorly-maintained road surface is at the very least uncomfortable, and can be dangerous. A pothole or badly-filled trench can be enough to throw a rider off their bicycle, possibly into the path of a following motor vehicle.

Particular attention should be paid to the edges of the carriageway, since this is where cyclists ride for most of the time. Unfortunately this is also the part of the carriageway where most of the hazards tend to be - in particular, sunken or badly- maintained drain covers.

**Policy ends**

