



Sustainable Design Partnership

Safe Cycle Routes Avoiding Motorists - Creating the Infrastructure

Separating cyclists from motorists, especially in congested urban areas, clearly makes great sense, with over 3000 serious accidents or deaths of cyclists in 2011, the majority in urban areas.

Separation would increase both actual and perceived safety and therefore encourage more people to cycle. It would be good for health and improve the quality of life in our urban centres. Separation would help decrease car congestion and lower conflicts and frustration presently felt by opposing factions.

A proposal is briefly set out below which is to provide a safe cycling loop in each urban centre as a priority action. The loop is envisaged to intercept a gradually increasing number of improved radial routes and ultimately provide a usable urban network. It would be a relatively low cost infrastructure project, compared to Crossrail, HS2 and a Thames Estuary airport hub. A scheme could be started nationwide and relatively quickly, providing a boost to construction activity and jobs. It is envisaged as part of a longer programme to plan and construct a network of separate and protected safe cycle routes in all our towns and cities.

Most urban areas have some cycle route provision, but usually of low standard with poor continuity. The routes are stop and start, sharing hazardous road space with motorists across major junctions and roundabouts. Some of the routes share narrow footpaths with pedestrians, lamp posts, sign posts, parked cars and the rest and are almost unusable.

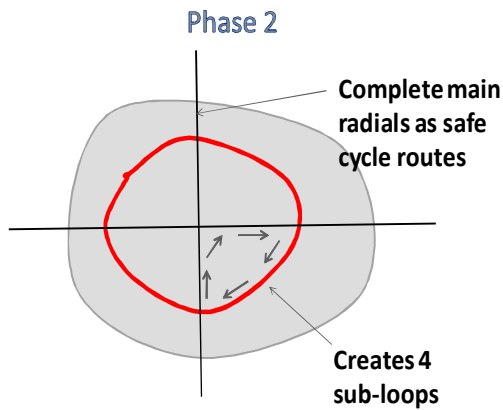
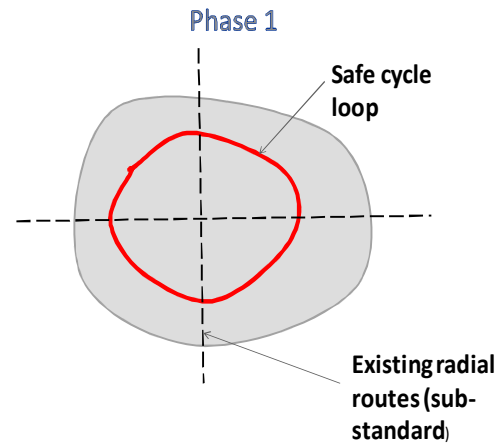
How?

Primarily, safe cycle routes need the conviction of the Government to legislate for separate cycling route provision. This would obligate the Highways Agency and Local Councils to commit an annual minimum budget spend on meeting targeted and incremental improvements. In summary, these could be:

- A common safe and separate cycle route design standard and completion targets
- Tangible improvements that are achievable in the short term
- A longer term programme with incremental steps, increasing the circulatory network of safe cycle routes

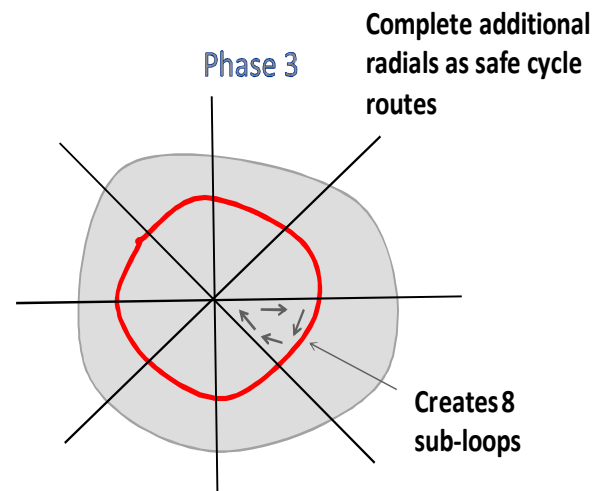
The Starting Point – a Safe Cycle Loop

Phase 1: Each town/city should immediately construct a safe cycle loop around the urban centre that is continuous and separate from motor traffic. The loop would connect existing radial cycle routes into the city or town centre. The loop would need to have underpasses and over passes and could connect parks and other green spaces. It could have its own footpath for pedestrians and runners.



Phase 2: Improve the main radials (suggest minimum 4, one from each direction). Gradually make the cycle routes separate from motor traffic. Each radial to be improved on a rolling annual budget, as monies become available. The 4 radials will then provide 4 inner city sub-loops and improve circulation on safe routes.

Phase 3: Increase the number of radials in larger cities and towns so that urban residents are no greater than say a half kilometre from the nearest safe cycle route. For instance, 8 radials would provide 8 circulatory sub-loops.





Construction Boost to the Economy

The success of the 2012 Olympics could still be used to promote a lasting cycling, running and green space legacy throughout the UK.

The job creation potential across the UK is high and would be relatively quick to take effect, particularly for the most viable schemes. It would provide construction jobs and help boost the economy. Whilst the large infrastructure schemes currently being touted such as HS2 (high speed rail) and the Thames Estuary airport hub would undoubtedly help the UK's future business position and provide many jobs, these will take many years to plan, design and implement – too late to stimulate the current ailing construction sector and UK economy.

Health Improvement and Quality of Urban Life

Health improvement from regular exercise needs to be encouraged in Britain, with nearly 25% of the population obese and trending upwards. Separating urban cycle routes from road vehicles is essential for safety which in turn will encourage cycling take-up.

Safe Cycle Loop – Funding and Implementing

- The planning, design and construction of at least one complete safe cycle loop should be the minimum aspiration in each city and town across the UK. The loop would need to achieve minimum set design standards to maximise use and be separated from hazardous vehicular routes and road crossings. A continuous annual budget should be made available, representing the 2% of road users that are cyclists. The funding should be ring-fenced by the Government for each city or town taking part. Further awards or increased budget could be made dependent on the local populace take-up, with the most successful schemes rewarded to make further improvements.
- The safe cycle loops could connect parks, green areas and recreation facilities.
- Canal paths could be widened and made more accessible, minor roads greened and closed to traffic (apart from essential access). Over-bridges, as planned for Copenhagen, and underpasses for busy junctions would provide continuous routes.
- Towns and cities across the UK could be invited to provide proposals, with the most viable selected for Government or Lottery funding. Corporations, public appeals and sponsorship by local business could be targeted to provide part of the funding.
- Viability and designs provided by the Local Authority with support from the Highways Agency could be supported by other interest groups, professional bodies and businesses. A voluntary steering group could be initiated for each town or city. For the new City Regions the mayor's office, as in London, could be the focal point. Each of the 36 London Boroughs could target completion of its own safe cycle loop.

Experience in Britain and Elsewhere

The Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland and other developed countries place much higher priority on safe cycling provision in urban areas. The Netherlands only has a 10% obesity rate, compared



to near 25% in the UK. Los Angeles and Palma (Majorca) have wide cycle, walking and running routes along their bays. The Swiss criss-cross their country with separated safe cycle routes.

Poznan in Poland has a large man-made rowing lake, used for international events, with a surrounding cycle, walking and running loops. Other exercise and sports facilities are located along the route – central planning by the communists had at least one brilliant outcome!

So, what has happened in Britain? Cities and towns do have walking routes, canal paths and existing cycle routes (of dubious standards). But rarely are these continuous routes and for cyclists rarely separated from motor traffic. Major hazards from road crossings, shared roads (over part of the route), traffic lights and rush hour congestion create major hazards and dissuade use.

There is a trend for more city living but there are no facilities for informal exercise by residents, or city workers. The cycle loops could also be used by runners and walkers, and for training and competitive events.

Taking Birmingham as an example, the present canal routes are too narrow for multiple users (pedestrians, runners and cyclists) and not linked to allow easy circulation or viable exercise loops. They have very poor or non-existent lighting and surveillance for safety over the long winter months. Separate and safe cycle routes are virtually non-existent, or intermittent. There are no central parks and no running loops for use by city dwellers and workers.

The feasibility of providing a complete cycle loop separated from traffic will undoubtedly need investment and commitment. Some towns and cities are better placed than others. Birmingham and Manchester, like many older UK cities, have extensive canals with tow paths and disused railway tracks. Others have good footpaths and parks close to the city or town centre. Each town and city would need to find its own unique solution to provide a safe cycle loop.

Canal tow paths could be widened and potentially used on both sides. Lighting and surveillance could be added to make them more secure. Minor roads could be closed to traffic and greened with trees, to assist routing and give some valuable green space back to the city. Other streets could be made one-way for traffic and access. The other half separated with a barrier, green verge or trees and reclaimed as a safe route for cycling, pedestrians and runners. Parks and remaining green space could be linked to form more extensive exercise and green travel routes. Witness the success of New York's abandoned overhead rail viaduct that has recently become a popular green oasis. Research has shown that green space also enhances the wellbeing and mental health of urban dwellers.

The struggling UK economy needs stimulation with new construction work that can be started quickly, within weeks, or months and not years. The proposed cycle loops and greening of the routes would provide welcome construction employment opportunities. Over time the envisaged central loop could be connected with improved radial routes to provide a comprehensive safe cycling network.