

Review of Witham Cycle Network

Review of progress since 1992 and proposals for urgent refocusing of plans.

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This report has been prepared and presented by Witham Cycling Campaign.

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The challenge

The Government has set a target of quadrupling cycling use by 2012 which means an extra 12% every year for the next 12 years! This is an exceptionally stiff target and nobody expects cycle routes alone to bring this level of increased use about. The WCN is only one part, but an essential part, of that campaign. If adequate facilities are available on the ground more people will be encouraged by the efforts of the local authorities to use them and feel confident doing so.

The opportunity

Witham is 10 minutes from side to side by bike.

Anyone who walks 10 minutes each way every day could save an hour a week by cycling instead.

Anyone who lives and works in Witham should consider cycling.

Commuting by bike from outlying villages can be made viable.

The ground to make up

Transport infrastructure and those responsible for designing, implementing and maintaining it are not switched-on to cycling.

Commitment to real change in all aspects of planning takes a back-seat to commercial and political considerations.

There is no proper investment policy and very little investment.

Opportunities in the south of Witham will be lost for ever unless immediate action is taken to redesign cycling facilities.

Summary

When reviewing the existing progress and plans we found:-

- The implementation program had lost focus
- The main Riverwalk route appears to work well though there are areas of poor implementation.
- The 1997 plans for estates should be scrapped and all estate roads made safe for all users rather than providing special cycling facilities.

When we turned to what we thought should be done we concluded:-

- Remedial action is required to fix design problems with the existing cycle routes.
- Improving existing facilities is a cheaper way of providing better routes than major full-specification projects. We have highlighted examples where signs and simple remedial work should be carried out.
- Places which are particularly problematic should be looked at by experts to see if there are any measures that can be taken at these hazard hot-spots.
- Commuter routes of high quality for speedy cycling to major traffic generators such as the industrial estates on the East and new housing on the south is required..
- If there are to be more than 800 houses built on the south at Motts Lane then the two existing routes (Bridge St. and Maldon Rd.) into the centre of Witham will become intolerable and therefore a traffic-free route is essential. We suggest this should run from Howbridge Road through the park.
- A cycle-only route through the new Maltings Lane development is required. Urgent action is required to ensure this is incorporated into the development plans.
- Hatfield Peverel can be brought within safe and convenient commuting distance by incorporating a cycle-only route on the north side of the A12. This would then connect with the Maltings lane trunk route and thence to the town centre or the Rail trail.
- The disused railway track is ideally positioned to service the industrial estates. The bridge over the Brain needs reinstatement and some junction work at the Catholic bridge, but otherwise this is not a matter of major construction.
- Silver End is cut-off at present due to frightening and indirect roads. We have identified an opportunity to convert a direct across-the-fields footpath. This would bring Silver End within easy (and safe) cycle commuting distance of Witham.
- We also emphasize that quality of implementation and vigilance at the planning stage, (both functions of the District council in particular) need to be maintained at a high level (ie Higher than currently.)

Our proposals are in part 2b
Recommendations are in appendix A

With a major development in the offing and the likelihood of section 106 money becoming available now is the ideal time to reshape these plans so that the new developments are properly designed and served with sustainable transport facilities and the existing network improved.

The focus of this review is on routes and not facilities in general. It should be remembered that routes are only one part of building a cycling culture. Research has shown that cycle routes on their own do not stimulate cycling. However they do improve safety and are 'lollipops' to entice people onto their bikes. They give the public the clear signal that the authorities really do care about cycling.

Thought

Today cycling is in the same position that recycling was a decade ago. A lot of what was seen as simply being politically correct then is now beginning to be accepted as essential. Providing facilities is just the sort of job councils should be good at - but encouraging people to use them is a much less concrete, but just as important, task.