Consider needs of disabled riders when designing routes

Much of the UK's cycling infrastructure is unsuitable for cyclists with disabilities, says DR WILLIAM CLAYTON from the University of the West of England.

There appears to be a widespread view in the UK that cycling is simply not possible if you have a disability. This assumption is very often incorrect, particularly considering the availability of adapted cycles. For many people with a mobility impairment, cycles (including bicycles) are in fact mobility aids which provide much greater freedom of movement and personal safety than walking.

However, there is clearly also a serious issue with infrastructure which does not cater for cyclists with disabilities. There are notable exceptions in areas where there is decent, inclusive infrastructure - for example, in London and Cambridge - levels of disabled cycling are much more proportionate to those recorded in the general population.

But this is not the case elsewhere; current DTI statistics suggest that across England the level of disabled cycling is down by almost half that of the general population.

Cycling infrastructure in the UK also too often excludes cyclists with disabilities, due to the dimensional requirements of adapted cycles. There is also a lack of understanding of the additional needs of some disabled cyclists beyond simply being on a cycle in motion. For example, mounting, dismounting, walking alongside the cycle, and balancing at very low speed may be required, but this may be impossible for a disabled person to achieve.

A study by the Centre for Transport and Society and Sustrans exposed the significant barriers faced by cyclists with disabilities, and issues particularly related to poor infrastructure, wholly inaccessible sections of cycle paths, and the cost of adapted cycles.

It is important that cycling infrastructure is usable by people with impaired mobility. There is clear evidence that cycling offers significant health benefits to disabled people. It improves energy, fitness, and mental wellbeing as well as mitigating secondary diseases and promoting social inclusion.

Cycling by disabled people deserves more attention in transport policy and design guidance. One in five people experience some form of disability, and just under two-thirds of disabled people have a mobility impairment. Opportunities for cyclists with disabilities will be limited until we have more inclusive infrastructure design. There are good examples of effective cycle design guidance in the Netherlands and Denmark because of its better suitability for all cycle types and types of cycle. Cycle infrastructure is accessible to all, and it will remain a step in the right direction for promoting and expanding opportunities for disabled cyclists. A network for all ability cycling is the therefore the desired goal.

William Clayton will be presenting his findings at Cycle City Active City.

We're on right path but 'much still to do'

Scotland must go “further and faster” in its efforts to close the gap with other European nations on cycling mode share, says Keith Irving, chief executive of Cycling Scotland. At Cycle City Active City he will present the key findings from an International Comparators Study, produced in early 2016 by Cycling Scotland, Urban Movement and the European Cycling Federation.

The report examined progress made in key European countries, regions and cities in the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Spain and Austria in increasing cycling mode share, with breakdowns by key city/region, bike ownership, age and gender diversity.

Irving said: “The report indicated that Scotland is on the right path but must go further and faster to increase cycling levels. As we know, many European countries and cities have started decades earlier on enabling more people to cycle safely and Scotland needs action, crucially at both national and local authority level to achieve progress and improve the health and quality of life for more people.”

“The report also shows that progress varies considerably within each country, region and locality and there are many challenges ahead to maintain the upward trajectory.”

While a clear pro-cycling policy is essential for change, the key measure of practical commitment to that policy is funding, said the report. That funding needs to provide better physical conditions for cycling as the top priority for growing mode share substantially. And efforts to grow cycling from a low base will be most effective when targeted on relatively short journeys.

The report also stated that training for school-age children remains important for growing and maintaining cycling. Also, mode share is the most reliable indicator of cycling’s popularity and needs to be the central aspiration of government (national or local) policy, said the report.

Advice on cycle route design to be published

Details of new cycle infrastructure guidance, which will feature in the Highways England roads design manual, will be presented at Cycle City Active City. The Interim Advice Note will be included in Highways England’s Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMMRb). The new document, due to be published in the summer, has been produced by the University of the West of England and the consultants Atkins and Phil Jones Associates.

Although termed an interim document, the note will have the full weight of other parts of DMMRb and should be used in the preparation of all trunk road schemes as soon as it is available, says Highways England. The document will be kept under review and will be converted to a long-term standard when sufficient experience has been gained.

The Interim Advice Note will set out the basic requirements for cycling infrastructure, with particular relevance for high-speed inter-urban roads. It supersedes and amends existing DMMRb Chapter 27 on cycling, covering cycling networks, motor traffic speed and flow thresholds for segregation; cycle design parameters; gradient; cycle lane and track widths; signing, construction and maintenance. It will also offer advice on suitability criteria for crossings, traffic signal timings as well as priority, traffic signals, monoblock and grade separated junctions.

At Cycle City Active City Phil Jones will outline the technical content of the Interim Advice Note.

Cycling audits in Sweden pay off

News of cycling investment in Sweden will be provided at Cycle City Active City by Lars Stroman, CEO of Cykelföreningen, a national organisation that promotes cycling transportation and recreation.

Stroman says: “Cykelföreningen has been instrumental in developing the Swedish national cycling strategy, which has established a goal to increase ridership across all age groups and improve cycling’s safety.”

He says the organisation has improved contact with politicians and decision-makers at a local, regional, national and international level through involvement in the European Cycling Federation. Cykelföreningen has monitored the level of cycling investment through its municipal cycling audit. “The organisation has received funding from municipalities annually for the past seven years,” says Stroman. “The audit measures local investment in infrastructure and associated documentation and maintains the funds for improving traffic conditions. Interest in the service increases every year and municipalities have successfully used the service to prioritise improvements.”

Book online at: cyclecityleicester.uk