

# Enterprise and Learning Committee

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## Sustrans Cymru

The committee's consultation on the draft proposed LCO has revealed considerable support from a broad range of organisations.

Witnesses have captured the wide benefits to health, tourism and sustainable transport that would flow from a well maintained network of traffic free routes.

Indeed it is notable that no organisation has opposed the powers being drawn down.

Since the committee has begun scrutinising the draft Order, further evidence has emerged about the gravity of threat from climate change. In recent weeks James Hansen, the NASA scientist who did much to draw attention to the dangers of global warming in the early 1980s, has written that "recent evidence reveals a situation more urgent than had been expected, even by those who were most attuned". However, he concluded that if prompt action is taken it is still possible to "avert or reverse consequences that had begun to seem inevitable, including loss of Arctic ice".

The LCO would help position Wales as a leader on sustainable transport. Some 13% of our carbon emissions are generated by cars, and yet over half of the trips we make are under three miles. A network of traffic free paths would put in place an attractive alternative to motor transport helping to achieve modal shift, and would make an important contribution to the annual carbon reduction targets that will be in place from 2011.

A consistent theme in the evidence presented to the committee has been the health and wellbeing benefits from increased physical activity. Expert evidence from Age Concern and Play Wales underlined the benefits of a well-designed network of multi-user paths to vulnerable groups. The BMA noted that the increased sense of wellbeing that would be promoted alongside a reduction in "the risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, colon and breast cancer".

There is widespread agreement, therefore, on the benefits of the proposal. There remain, however, concerns about conflict between users on shared paths from organizations representing people with visual and hearing impairments.

It is worth noting that our monitoring of the National Cycle Network shows that 3% of trips on the Network are made by people with a disability last year - this rises to 5% in those over 60. In Wales that equates to over 1 Million trips by people with a disability.

The Pedal Power charity in Cardiff point to great advantages to some disabled people from shared use paths. Pedal Power works to make cycling accessible to all and they operate a centre on the Taff Trail from where they hire specialist cycles to disabled people and their carers. The project manager, Sybil Williams, says that whilst there are concerns over some cyclists travelling too fast on the Taff Trail, on balance she prefers the whole of the path to be available for disabled walkers and cyclists so that they have maximum flexibility in its use.

Of course, disability is a spectrum. We recognise there are real concerns by users with limited sight or hearing who are intimidated by the behaviour of others. In their evidence Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Disability Wales and the Royal National Institute of Blind People Cymru acknowledged that "the extent of the problem of collisions between cyclists and pedestrians has not been adequately researched".

Much of the research cited by the disability groups was anecdotal. Sustrans commissioned Transport Planning Consultants Phil Jones Associates to review the existing evidence into segregated and non-segregated traffic-free paths.

The literature review noted research by the Countryside Agency (now subsumed into Natural England) by the University of Surrey in 2003. The researchers carried out a series of video surveys, together with user interviews both on site and later at home. Over the period filmed (45 hours) more than 1500 people were filmed, only about 12% of whom met other users and only two recorded incidents involved actual conflict (but no collision occurred) - a cyclist swerved to avoid another cyclist and a cyclist came within the collision zone of a dog walker.

Interestingly when people were asked on site whether they had met other path users they recalled more interactions (20%) than had taken place; and when they were asked again two weeks later via a home questionnaire, the proportion reporting an encounter rose to 40%. This suggests that passing other users is a memorable event, and that path users remember the path as being busier than it actually was.

Focus groups were convened and the research found that discussing conflict escalates users' perceptions of it. Most of the focus groups suggested user Codes of Conduct as a means of addressing conflict, together with good maintenance to make the full width of the path available.

These studies found that conflict on non-segregated paths is an extremely infrequent occurrence. However, when people talk about conflict, its assumed incidence increases and appears to be more serious. The discussion and focussing of attention on conflict serves to escalate its perceived existence.

This is supported by the research report published by the Department for Transport's 'Road accident casualties: a comparison of

STATS19 data with Hospital Episode Statistics' (2006), which concludes that 2% of pedestrians admitted to hospital have been injured by cyclists. The report does note that this is some 3 to 4 times the number of casualties that are recorded on STATS19 forms, however.

Nonetheless segregation of pedestrians and cyclists is often suggested as a solution.

In their evidence, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Disability Wales and the Royal National Institute of Blind People Cymru quoted the Hierarchy of Provision to suggest that shared use paths should be an option of last resort.

The Hierarchy of Provision was developed in response to Local Authorities routinely converting pavements into shared use paths. It offers a series of options for achieving the appropriate conditions on roads. Its preference is to allow on-road cycling by reducing traffic volume and speed. Where this is not considered practical it suggests a series of options, the penultimate option being the provision of a traffic free path and the least favoured is conversion of an existing pavement. Sustrans sees this approach as a last resort measure for all but very lightly used footways such as along fast rural roads.

However, the Hierarchy of Provision does not purport to deal with situations where a new route is being created away from the highway. It is worth repeating that the aspiration behind the LCO is to do something new. We are aiming to attract inexperienced and returning cyclists or offer a pleasant leisure experience to a wide group of people, including families and people with disabilities; we need to provide a higher standard of facility to cater for these users than can be offered on most highways.

The newly published Government 'Cycling Infrastructure Design' (applicable to England, Wales and Scotland) says "some cyclists are more able and willing to mix with motor traffic than others. In order to accommodate the sometimes conflicting needs of various user types and functions, it may be necessary to combine measures or to create dual networks offering different levels of provision, with one network offering greater segregation from motor traffic at the expense of directness and or priority". This statement acknowledges that there is a range of cyclists and their needs cannot necessarily all be met by one single approach in any location. Those who are deterred from cycling will need a higher level of provision (often a largely or entirely traffic free solution) than regular commuter cyclists who are happier on the road.

Therefore where a traffic free route is feasible and desirable Sustrans sees no role for the Hierarchy of Provision in determining whether there should be a traffic free route. It is erroneous to quote the existence of the Hierarchy in opposition to the LCO's aims.

A design solution needs to be appropriate to its context. Following our initial discussions with Guide Dogs we suggested an Equality Impact Assessment be embedded into the Assembly Measure to ensure that any new path is suitable to its setting - just as we routinely assess risk we would also make an assessment which takes into account user needs alongside practicality and proportionality.

Insisting on separate paths in all circumstances would mean that in many cases no path at all would be built, denying the multiple benefits that it is widely agreed that they provide.

The literature review we commissioned from independent consultants concluded: "Our review has identified a number of indicators that point towards segregation or non-segregation being the most appropriate response in a particular situation". In other words, there is no design panacea. In some settings a segregated path will be appropriate, in others it will be better to share space.

The report further noted:

"Sustrans do accept that segregation is appropriate in some circumstances, particularly in high use urban locations; and Guide Dogs / JCMBPS (Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People) accept that non-segregated paths may also be possible, albeit only on very lightly used rural routes.

The issue can therefore be seen not in terms of absolutes - whether either segregated or non-segregated are generally better - but in trying to define the circumstances when one is to be preferred over the other".