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Benefits for cyclists – and pedestrians – can be particularly achieved by holistic thinking in the planning and implementation of public transport developments. This is a cycle lane within a bus lane in London.

# Taking cycling seriously

- All transport professionals can be Cycling Officers, says our new Cycling Forum's John Martin CMILT. He reveals why cycling is no longer the Cinderella of transport.

At a recent meeting of the new CILT Cycling Forum Committee (CILTCFC), the subject of local government and staffing reductions in a financial climate of recession raised debate on the need for a Cycling Officer:

The National Cycling Strategy objective was to double the number of trips by cycle by the end of 2002 and to quadruple the number of trips by the end of 2012: a 400% increase over the 1996 baseline. In order for a local authority to meet this and numerous other related sustainable transport development policies, it is generally accepted that a dedicated Cycling Officer post is essential.<sup>1</sup> In London, many local cycle campaign groups have lobbied that a dedicated Borough Cycling

Officer is essential to foster cycling in their areas, and initially to determine a London Cycle Network and then implement it. I would basically agree with the reasoning of the statement about the need for a Cycling Officer by Lewisham Cyclists on its web site<sup>2</sup>, and it is hard to challenge the sentiment.

But recent staffing budget reductions appear to have led to the disappearance of the Cycling Officer post. This seems a backward step in the battle to improve the role of cycling in an integrated sustainable transport strategy, which all transport authorities should be implementing to meet 21st-century environmental targets.

I worked on introducing cycle policies and associated infrastructure measures to improve the mode of cycling in the transport mix during a local government career of nearly 30 years. Providing for cycling was often overlooked and under-resourced, contributing to the barriers and constraints facing cycling. I long advocated the need and importance of the post of Cycling Officer to promote this Cinderella mode in the transport hierarchy of road-users. Yet it may not be essential to have a Cycling Officer as such in the current decade to achieve this objective.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the improvement of cycling in the highway infrastructure and associated soft engineering measures, such as road safety cycle training, to influence attitudes and behaviour were often left to the engineering and road safety technicians, almost as a token gesture for the local authority to show its commitment to a sustainable transport development. But during my apprenticeship in traffic engineering, I was encouraged and taught to consider potential side-benefits for all road-users, which can be incorporated alongside the main scheme objective, whatever budget was funding it.

In the first decade of the 21st Century, the tide has turned. Many local authorities have recognised the importance of cycling policy and have employed dedicated Cycling Officers to fulfil the function. But having approached the ideal, financial restraints now mean it is almost a case of last in, first out.

However; this need not be the end of the promotion of cycling. Every professional officer in the transport or traffic sections of Environmental Services departments can contribute to the betterment of cycling as a mode of transport. The now traditional four Es must be remembered and put into play. The officer must be take every opportunity to gain improvements for cycling in whatever way to secure advantages and holistic gains through:

- Education – working with road safety and education colleagues, not forgetting members themselves
- Engineering – apart from the obvious cycle infrastructure measures of specific cycle schemes, such as cycle lanes, direction signing and cycle parking, every type of traffic scheme may have a cycling benefit features included to eliminate barriers to continuous cycling; benefits for cyclists – and pedestrians – can be particularly achieved by holistic thinking in the planning and implementation of public transport developments; the need for maintenance of existing and new cycling infrastructure is often ignored, but likewise the potential for small gains for cycling in liaising with highway maintenance work is under utilised
- Enforcement – liaison with the police and civil enforcement officers to encourage support for cycling, to ensure enforcement of the law so that cyclists are not put at risk by dangerous drivers or illegal parking – and against cyclists who endanger other road-users by irresponsible cycling – and especially to reduce the risk of theft of parked cycles; the lack of secure cycle parking at the trip end – not only at the workplace, shops or leisure centre, but also at the home itself – is often not fully recognised as a major deterrent to using the bicycle for the short regular journey

- Enthusiasm – most of all, the officer responsible for cycle measures must be enthusiastic and resilient
- Vision – one does not stop at the Es, of course – to realise that the potential for cycling as a transport mode requires maximising opportunities in the planning of transport infrastructure and of a sustainable development strategy; the dynamic officer will recognise the principles of partnership working with colleagues, such as in development control, when planning gain can be achieved to include the engineering benefits and the important financial input from new developments whether small-scale residential or large-scale commercial or industrial; the concept must be extended to officers in other sections of the authority and with many other public and private sector partners to gain advantages for cycling in its many formats

Local authorities need to ensure in their development plans that the promotion of walking and cycling is central to the determined effort to reduce travel by car. They must work on policies to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, ensure new developments allow ready access, and create new land use patterns to allow for shorter journeys between activities that could be more easily undertaken by cycle. This needs more than just a Cycling Officer. Allocation of resources has tended to reflect the prevailing level of cycle usage in the context of the traffic mix. But new formulae in the evaluation of schemes and accordingly the job specification, evaluation and description of the officers whose duties should include cycling improvements will enable best use of resources from various disciplines. The health, environment, employment and leisure benefits derived from cycling as a transport mode justify seeking and gaining resources and cross-sector joint working with, for example, the commercial retail and industrial sectors and health trusts. The potential for gain with many other organisations in freight – for example, DHL – and logistics centres, and players in the local authorities area is open to visionary thinking of all participants in the welfare of local communities.



A false one-way street in London still gives cycles access

## Optimism

Cycling has to be a vital part of urban transport policy alongside improvements in public transport, walking and more responsible car-use measures. Cycling must be taken seriously, and in an ideal world have a Cycling Officer whose job is essential to improve conditions for cyclists as part of the integrated approach to transport policies.

Whether cycling improvements are the responsibility of an individual Cycling Officer or not, the important factor is that local authorities should ensure that a delegated senior officer has the remit to ensure that:

- Awareness and consideration of cycling issues permeates through all departments
- A key point of contact with members and the public for cycling issues is known
- Sufficient staff time and financial resources are allocated to ensure that the responsibility for cycling policy improvement implementation is maintained

Professional bodies such as CILT have the opportunity and duty to provide the platform of knowledge and best practice dissemination to enable players in public and private sectors – whether in mobility management, sustainable transport development and construction, public transport, parking provision, health provisions or social centres – in order to maximise improvements for cycling.

It may be anathema to accept that a local authority need not have a Cycling Officer. A dedicated Cycling Officer with specialist experience is the optimum way of

improving cycling as a transport mode. There are reams of papers and cycle lobby reports over the last 20–30 years promoting the cause and the rationale for having the cycle champion at work. This article will no doubt raise some heckles amongst the cycle campaigners, and rightly so. But a debate on the need for a dedicated Cycling Officer post per se risks diverting attention from realising that traffic, transport and infrastructure are concepts closely linked to the welfare, safety and security of our local communities. There are holistic benefits to be gained from working with organisations in this wider realm of development for the benefit of cycling. These players also have some responsibilities and resources to assist in delivering better cycling conditions.

*'A change in perceptions is needed:*

- *More local authorities should consider the potential for cycling from the outset in planning and traffic management*
- *Developers, local authorities and transport undertakings should make secure cycle parking more widely available*
- *Major employers should recognise the economic and health advantages the encouragement of employees to cycle can offer*
- *Cycling should be more commonly seen as a sensible means of local transport'*

This quote is from a Government statement on cycling by Robert Key, Minister for Roads and Traffic, in 1994, but still seems valid today.



Lancaster's Millennium Bridge benefits cyclists and pedestrians



## About the author

**John Martin CMLT** is a committee member of the CILT Cycling Forum.

## References

1. 'The essential tools are a person or a unit responsible for the pro-cycling policy', from *Cycling: the way ahead for towns and cities* European Commission, Luxembourg, 2000
2. London Borough of Lewisham's web site, dated 2005, [www.lewishamcyclists.net/Campaigns\\_5.html](http://www.lewishamcyclists.net/Campaigns_5.html) 'In contrast to other inner London boroughs (eg Hackney, Southwark, Lambeth), Lewisham does not yet have a dedicated cycle officer... We argue that planning, infrastructure and local issues specific to cycling require a greater degree of specialisation and more staff resources to be truly effective and to deliver the council's commitments... Other boroughs have dedicated cycling officers and have shown the effective role such dedicated posts can play, especially in getting a cycle strategy moving. Why should Lewisham be any different?' The position of Cycling Officer was filled in 2008.

## Further information

This article is in accordance with CILT Cycling Forum's Terms of reference – aiming to promote cycling as a means of transport and to highlight good practice and guidance through submissions to *Focus* (Core Purpose 2). For more information on our Cycling Forum, in our Active Travel and Travel Planning Professional Sector, see our web site for more details: [www.ciltuk.org.uk](http://www.ciltuk.org.uk)