

Response of the London Cycling Campaign in Hackney to the consultation on the draft Community Strategy (*The Future of Hackney*)

Introduction

Who we are

With over 800 members, the London Cycling Campaign in Hackney (LCCiH) is the largest local group of the largest urban cycling organisation in the world. As the draft strategy notes, Hackney has the highest levels of cycling in London (6.81% of residents cycling to work according to Census 2001 – a 70% increase between 1991 and 2001), and LCCiH seeks to represent the interests of all who use this mode of transport in the borough.

Why promote cycling?

Cycling is an obvious solution to London's transport problems. It requires modest investment but returns immense socio-economic benefits, vastly improved public health, greatly reduced pollution, equality, diversity, and social inclusion. Just as transport is at the heart of the capital's problems, cycling as a mode of transport is at the heart of their solution.

Recognising the cross-cutting potential of cycling in *The Future of Hackney*

We would like Hackney's Community Strategy to set out ways in which we can build on the present levels of cycling and make Hackney 'London's cycling borough'.

The positive contribution of cycling is already acknowledged in the transport section of draft community strategy, and we welcome this. The duty of promoting cycling should not fall entirely to the transport section of the authority, though, when the cross-cutting benefits of the activity are felt right across the board, especially in improved health, better access to employment and services, and in cycling's quiet contribution to the safety and cohesiveness of our community.

The Strategy should therefore reflect the requirement for the promotion of cycling to be done using all the tools available to the local authority – not just using its transport management and streetscape functions, but also through its guiding influence on other areas including land-use planning, housing, health, physical activity, education, and community safety.

The community's views are invited on the Strategy in order to make it “realistic and achievable”. While Hackney may not in a position to deliver major infrastructure projects in the short or medium term, in our opinion it is realistic and achievable for it to release the cross-cutting benefits of cycling to a much greater proportion of its population, through a combination of modest investment and cost-neutral policies delivered across directorates.

Comments theme by theme

A cohesive social and community infrastructure

It is to Hackney's benefit that its street layout remains of a human scale and has escaped major modifications for mass motoring. This encourages and supports street life, permitting proximity and interaction among the borough's diverse communities. Hackney should nurture this human-scale environment, favouring local journeys over longer ones and encouraging activities and developments which are easily accessible by walking, cycling and public transport.

Housing for a mixed and balanced community

We note the target set by the London Plan for new homes in Hackney, and the points made about the ability of the borough's infrastructure to respond to a growing population, and the impact of increasing built density on quality of life.

We believe that this impact will be much reduced, and the quality of life much improved, if housing developments positively encourage walking, cycling and public transport, and actively discourage private motor vehicle ownership. All new homes should facilitate the convenient access and storage of cycles, and we challenge the authority to set a target for a high proportion of the required new homes to be car-free. When existing housing is being refurbished and regenerated, Hackney's planners should resist the retro-fitting of extra car parking, and should encourage and if possible require improved cycle access and storage.

A safe, high quality public realm – crime and community safety

We see that vehicle crime is included as a key fact in this theme, and that Hackney's Safer Communities Strategy targets crimes against property. Cycle theft is now a widespread and valuable criminal industry in Hackney and is a major factor in deterring people from cycling, yet the significance of this under-reported crime is not acknowledged in the Strategy alongside vehicle crime, and it is still treated by police largely as an insurance issue. We suggest that the reduction of cycle theft should be a specific target in this section of the Strategy, to be delivered both through pro-active policing and also through high-quality cycle parking provision (secured or under surveillance) at trip-generating destinations, in town centres, and in housing.

More generally, promoting walking and cycling will increase the safety of our neighbourhoods, centres and open spaces by increasing the number of 'eyes on the street'.

Economy, enterprise and employment

The LDF aim of maximising opportunities for residents to access local employment will be assisted by the promotion of cycling, which combines affordability with unrivalled flexibility and journey times in peak travel periods.

We note and welcome the emphasis on the promotion of retail and commercial opportunities. Hackney should, however, oppose retail and leisure developments which are car-based and situated in out-of-centre locations.

Hackney has experienced a certain amount of 'de-localisation' in recent times, with local facilities (eg post offices, hospitals, schools) closing, and people having to travel to fewer, larger, more distant establishments. Hackney should work to ensure that its retail and service infrastructure is based on local facilities which are easily accessible on foot or by cycle.

We agree with the objective of limiting car access to town centres, and suggest that "better transport is needed" be expanded to "better public transport and cycle parking are needed".

Green businesses are mentioned as an important potential contributor to Hackney's economy. We would like to see measures to encourage human-powered vehicle (HPV) delivery businesses, as short-range deliveries by HPV could play a significant role in helping to reduce motorised traffic in our town centres.

Better transport

The emphasis on motor traffic restraint is most encouraging, and we are pleased that a 'green' travel policy is proposed, which will promote walking and cycling. This should include a strong emphasis on 'soft measures' such as training, in addition to physical infrastructure.

Under the transport, health and environment actions, we suggest the addition of "and cycle training" after "safer routes to school".

We would also like to propose an action to improve the permeability of Hackney's streetscape for cycling, by facilitating two-way cycle access on all streets and providing cycle access through all road closures.

Better life chances for all our children

Children and young people generally experience a far more confined and physically inactive life than was the case in the past, and this is largely due to the danger and spatial demands of motor traffic. The effects of this restriction of independent mobility on childhood development have been documented by authors such as Dr Mayer Hillman of the Policy Studies Institute, while the prevalence of childhood obesity is widely apparent and constitutes a public health timebomb.

To complement its work in the spheres of formal education and youth work, Hackney should be striving to create a public realm which is less constrained by the danger of motor vehicles, permitting children and young people to develop their life skills and experience through independent exploration of their environment, on foot, by public transport, and – given adequate training – by cycle.

Tackling health inequalities

We welcome the action to target obesity. Increasing the amount of exercise people take is obviously vital in this. While the Strategy mentions sport and leisure, it omits to mention the promotion of active lifestyles – that's to say those in which exercise is incorporated into daily activity. Utility cycling is an ideal form of exercise within an active lifestyle, and is more sustainable for many people than taking time out of busy routines to go to a sports facility.

We therefore suggest changing “active sport and leisure” in the first paragraph under the health inequalities heading to “sport, leisure and active lifestyles”.

In the next paragraph, after “encouraging enhanced exercise linked to sports services” we suggest the addition of “and the promotion of active lifestyles”.

Trevor Parsons and Oliver Schick, 30th April 2004