



Rea Valley Cycle Route Celebrates 25th Anniversary!

The Rea Valley Cycle Route was officially opened on the 4th April 1991, as the first planned cycle route in Birmingham. Cycling UK Chair, David Cox, wrote a review at the time, celebrating the alternative that the route provided to the Pershore Road, with the sound of the River Rea giving a welcome alternative to the sound of HGVs, buses and cars. The Rea Valley Cycle Route has proved very successful, providing both a leisure route at weekends and a commuter route into the city centre during the week. The Rea Valley Cycle Route is something that Birmingham City Council can be proud of: It is evidence that good cycle routes will help build communities who cycle

even in a city that seems as car-mad as Birmingham.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of this success, Push Bikes organised a ride. We met at Victoria Square, rode down along NCN 5 to the Rea Valley route, and then through to the new town centre at Longbridge. About 50 people joined the ride, filling the cycle stands at Longbridge to capacity. The weather was fine, but we were struck by the puncture fairy a few times. Shards of glass (from the city centre), stone chippings and old air-gun pellets were among the culprits, but experts in puncture repair were on hand to swiftly get us going again.

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**Getting Birmingham In
the Saddle**

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The Push Bikes website has regular updates about cycling issues in Birmingham, including updates about the Birmingham Cycle Revolution.

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➡ As a voluntary organisation, the office is not staffed on a regular basis. The most effective means of contacting us is by e-mail.

➡ We hold meetings on the 1st Tuesday of each month at 19:00.

Rea Valley Route 25th Anniversary.

The route has improved since David wrote his review 25 years ago. The paths have generally been widened, and many of the barriers have been removed. Only in a couple of places did the ride come to a stand-still as we wound our way, one by one, through motorcycle barriers. When riding alone, we become accustomed to these, but when encountering them with more than 3 or 4 other riders, we are soon reminded of how much they slow down cycle users. The route is fairly clean, but it is still unlit at night, so although the gates of Cannon Hill Park are not closed at dusk, the route does not have the same sense of social safety as brightly lit roads do. Despite these imperfections, the Rea Valley cycle route is much

beloved and appreciated by the people who cycle it.

In celebration of the Rea Valley Cycle Route's 25 years, we'd like to collect your memories of it. Robert, our Systems Manager, rode along it as it was being built. Meeting another cycle user coming the other way, they compared notes on how rough the new gravel path was before realising that they were riding on the core bed for the smooth bitmac surface that had yet to be laid. Use the contact form on our website to send us your memories: www.pushbikes.org.uk/contact We will publish a selection of your memories on our website.

Chris Lowe



Bringing Copenhagen to Birmingham

At the beginning of February, Sustrans organised an event called 'Bringing Copenhagen to Birmingham', to discuss the benefits that encouraging cycling can bring and presenting some examples of best practice in cycle infrastructure. The event was well attended, mainly by people involved in delivering the Birmingham Cycle Revolution (BCR) and those interested in cycle campaigning. Disappointingly, however, only one Birmingham politician was present - Councillor James McKay (Harborne) who initially headed up BCR.

Inspirational events like this are common in the cycle campaign world, but if politicians do not attend, then problems can arise. The discussion at the end of the event was lively, drawing attention to the lack of politicians present and the contrast with a recent Edgbaston District Committee meeting where local councillors questioned both on-street and off-street cycle routes. The audience were very concerned that Birmingham councillors still did not back BCR, and Cllr James McKay said that emphasis on reaching a consensus on the benefits of promoting cycling had led to the mistake of not provoking arguments through proposing controversial measures. He thought that BCR should have been more

ambitious and robustly defended from the start.

Ewan Hamnett, chair of the Birmingham Wellbeing Board, had a stark message: Healthy eating is no substitute for physical exercise, and those who stay active will enjoy an average of 17 extra disease-free years. This not only provides immense benefits to you, but reduces the burden on the NHS. Birmingham has a higher level of physical inactivity than the UK average. People who are active as children are much more likely to stay active as adults, so there is no time to lose in ensuring our children are as active as possible.

Phil Jones, of Phil Jones Associates, and Will Haynes, of Sustrans, provided examples of cycling infrastructure best practice. Phil Jones emphasised the need for strong political leadership and recognition that cycling is a legitimate form of transport. They both highlighted the importance of continuity for cycle routes and not asking cycle users to get off or stop.

A fuller report can be found on our website: <http://www.pushbikes.org.uk/blog/bringing-copenhagen-birmingham>

Chris Lowe



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One Man and his Bike

by Mike Carter

I tend to buy books from second-hand shops, returning them when read. However, *One Man and his Bike* I deemed too good to take back, deserving not just one re-reading, but several.

In this book, Mike Carter describes a journey around the coast of Britain in an anti-clockwise direction. One day on his way to work he wonders what would happen if, instead of turning left at Blackfriars Bridge as he usually did, he continued straight on, following the UK coast, until he came back at the point where he started.

He does just this. His preparation is brief: 'selection' is not a word he applies to his packing. He soon abandons this policy, however, ditching a large quantity of his possessions in the first B&B he comes to. He has no map initially but fortunately a sympathetic individual gives him one.

He states his aims: 'I'd set off on this journey to see my country, to meet people, not to break any records'. And this he does. In all, before he returns back to London, Carter travels 4,625 miles and climbed 232,000 feet, going

through most of the UK. Among the many places he reaches are Northumberland, Cape Wrath, the Assynt Mountains, the Outer Hebrides, Morecambe Bay, the Gower, the West Country and Bermondsey. His descriptions of the B&Bs and campsites he visits are interesting, as are his accounts of the individuals he meets along the way.

His communication is clear, the pace of his writing good and his directions easy to follow. The paperback version (which I possess) is sturdy and has survived several re-readings, the print clear and not too small. One quibble is that the book lacks an index, which would have been useful for quickly finding place names and other details in the book.

If you want something technical, this book is not for you. But if you want to do some armchair cycle touring using a book that's well-written and entertaining you couldn't do very much better and might do considerably worse.

Ann Griffiths

One Man and His Bike was published in 2011 by Ebury Press, and is available in paperback and digital formats.

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The cover of Mike Carter's book. Image courtesy of Amazon.co.uk

'Playing Out' What should our streets be used for?

The origins of the 'Playing Out' scheme are from a couple of parents in South Bristol who were frustrated that their children had nowhere to play. They knew of the procedure to close a road for a street party and so wondered if it could be used to close their street one afternoon just for children to play freely.

The first session happened on June 1st 2009 and the organisers received such a positive response that they decided to trial other streets. 'Playing Out' has now spread nationally and internationally receiving support from local and national government. It has partnered with many organisations who see the positive benefits for children's physical and mental wellbeing (and that of their parents!).

In August 2014 a local community group brought 'Playing Out' to streets in Moseley and Kings Heath as part of National Play Day.

Two years on, one street in Kings Heath have embraced the idea of 'Playing Out' and are now closing their street for an afternoon every 4-6 weeks to allow their children to play and for adults to drink tea and chat with neighbours.

I interviewed one resident to find out how the 'Playing Out' scheme

had begun and what it now means for them and their neighbours.

Question: How did you organise the original 'Playing Out' events?

Answer: *"We sent initial letters around asking if anyone wanted to be involved. A few people got in contact to say they would like to help. You have to talk to the residents because there are often concerns about parking and deliveries during the time that the road is closed. The main onus being the stewarding at each end of the road. We found some people liked stewarding because it gave them a role. There was a real sense of pride from the people on the street that they were doing something different."*

"At the first event in 2014 we had the Libraries come and do some storytelling and we had Active Parks who turned up with pop up badminton sets and we also had musical instruments for the smaller children."

When it first started it created such a profile that it became a public event. We had people from the other side of Birmingham coming to our street and we ended up just serving free tea and coffee... Initially we thought we had been really successful but then when we evaluated it asked whether this is really a success? "

After the first event in August 2014 the concept of 'playing out' was incorporated into a department within Birmingham City Council; thanks to internal advocacy for the scheme.

After the first few playing out days, the neighbours decided that less is more. It is now only publicised to the local residents who live in the nearby streets.

Question: How do you now arrange the street road closures?

Answer " *We stripped it right back and put the emphasis on people bringing things if they wanted to and about sharing which really seemed to solve it. So at the end of last year the play streets were more successful, they were quieter but the street enjoyed it a lot more and the street neighbours felt they had a more pleasant time because they had got to know each other a little bit more and then the kids are just free to do what they want.* **"**

The residents agree the dates for the road to be closed and issue the list to the council for approval. Once approved they close off their road using their banners provided by the council tethered to wheelie bins. Residents aim to relocate as many cars as possible to create a more open street to play in.

" *We let the street know our intentions for the year and offer people an opportunity to say they are not happy about any of the dates chosen.... Not all the street like it although no one has been difficult about it and even*

if people don't attend they still bring some food out or some sweets for kids so there is a real generosity even if not involved."

Question: Do you have any problems with vehicle access or from other road users?

Answer: *"This road works well because it isn't currently used for through traffic. Other roads in the area which have had 'playing out' days have had more difficulties with car users wanting to use the roads which can cause confrontation."*

Question: What have you learnt over the years of closing the street?

Answer: *"If anything the focus really needs to be about finding a mechanism for the adults to talk. Towards the end of last year we did something called a Sunday Social which we said was specifically for adults so the kids will come out and play but really it's about us meeting each other. All the tables went into the street a bit like the coronation! What was really fascinating is that far more of the adults got involved and everyone felt a level of ownership over it in a way they hadn't previously."*

The 'Playing Out' scheme appears to be successful due to its simplicity. Councils across the country including Birmingham City Council are realising the benefits of allowing people to reclaim their neighbourhoods.

.....Article continued on page 9 & 10

‘Playing Out’ continued...

“Our idea of success from the last one was that we were sat on the street drinking tea, there were basically about six kids going up and down the street on their scooters, and actually we think it was really relaxed. Our kids got to enjoy themselves and we got to enjoy ourselves too!”

‘Playing Out’ allows children and adults access to large spaces directly outside their doors to play and socialise, encouraging neighbours to get to know one another and form the beginnings of a supportive community.

Generations who grew up without the dominance of the car, reminisce about their childhoods

when streets used to be safer places to play and socialise. Elderly neighbours are encouraged to join the party and can sit outside and enjoy watching children play. The social importance of an inclusive street can’t be overlooked particularly in a world where gated communities and elderly housing villages are becoming so prevalent.



Christmas ‘Playing Out’ Street Party 2015 including a snow machine! (Kings Heath)

What can 'playing out' mean for cycling?

I believe there is significant benefit to the 'playing out' idea which can help the promotion of cycle infrastructure in the short and long term.

In London the three winning 'Mini-Holland' schemes have come under significant pressure from residents and business owners who don't agree with creating pedestrianised residential streets and diverting through traffic to peripheral roads. Thousands signed a change.org petition to stop the scheme, however Waltham Forest Cabinet bravely approved the delivery plan for the Mini Holland Scheme in February 2015. Then opposition filed a case to the High Court which was dismissed on the 6th November 2015. The scheme is now progressing; but the opposition created significant noise and disruption and should not be underestimated for their ability to destabilise this type of project.

In the cycling community the 'Mini Holland' concept is perhaps representative of a way to provide a better environment, healthier population and safer streets, however many in Walthamstow certainly didn't agree.

It is important to design such

infrastructure carefully; some areas in Birmingham may lend themselves more readily to this type of scheme if they have high population density and good transport links etc. Birmingham City Council could learn from the 'Mini Holland' schemes that it is important to be bold when designing infrastructure and aspirational with transport master-planning.

The residents in Kings Heath and across the country are taking back this public space and enjoying the simple rewards of safe streets. If 'playing out' streets became a regular event across Birmingham, perhaps it would be an easier transition for residents and businesses to then support permanent road closures in their area.

Parents could let their children play out once again without fear, cyclists could navigate their neighbourhood and actually enjoy it without fear of being knocked off and pedestrians could cross roads with ease.....taking back the streets feels too great an opportunity for communities not to seize now!

Catherine Watton

The term 'Mini Holland' is used to describe a neighbourhood design where cyclists and pedestrians can permeate but through traffic is diverted to the periphery. See the website article for references and for further information.

CycleBirmingham

The rides & social part of Push Bikes

Weekly Evening Ride & Social:

The rides vary from 2 to 12 miles, depending on season and weather, with the pace set by the group. We try to use quiet routes for most of the rides, and advise on route type for each ride. Most destinations have food if you don't have time to eat after work. We try and pair you up with other members of the group for your return journey home, for example a number of the women riders cycle home together.

Weekly Saturday Morning Rides in Bournville:

A gentle ride starting from Rowheath Pavillion, Heath Road (B30 1HH) 10am each Saturday Morning.

Monthly Sunday Rides:

The rides vary in length and tend to be a bit quicker and longer than the Wednesday or Saturday rides. They

usually return to the area they start from after a leisurely lunch at the destination.

Evening & Sunday ride details can be found on the following sites:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/CycleBirmingham

Visible without a Facebook account - Click 'Like Page' and Tick 'Get Notifications' and 'Following' to ensure you receive regular updates or bookmark it in your browser if you don't have a Facebook account. There is also an older Facebook Group in existence (This older group is only visible with a Facebook account).

Twitter: @cyclebirmingham

Saturday Bournville ride details can be found at: <http://bournvillegentlecyling.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/Futurerides>



BCR Update. The Last Corner?

Over the past couple of years, in successive newsletters, we have written that the Birmingham Cycle Revolution (BCR) on-highway works are just around the corner. That corner, each time, has proven to be deceptive as the highway works slip just around the next, tantalisingly out of reach. That last corner has been reached, we think, with work starting on many of the parallel routes and a few of the main corridor routes this spring.

The Birmingham City Council BCR page has links to updates on progress (see www.birmingham.gov.uk/birminghamcyclerevolution and follow the 'Progress Updates' link on the left). On the Push Bikes website we will be posting up details and maps of the routes, and inviting our members to submit comments on the routes. These will be found on the www.pushbikes.org.uk/bcr page, and will be updated in the following months, so please keep on visiting that page. We have been given estimated start dates for the on-carriageway works, but we are finding that some of the schemes do not appear to be starting on time. Our guess is that the contractors who have been awarded the on-site works are fitting in delivery of these schemes around their other contracts. So the BCR team do not have control over the exact date that the work starts.

In national news, the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS) that will be launched by central government this year, to allocate funds for cycling work to local councils. The draft strategy stated that central government wants "to make cycling and walking the natural choice for shorter journeys or as part of a longer journey." This is a good sentiment, but the actual goals set are poor – boosting cycling to roughly 3.5% of all trips in the UK by 2025 – and the funding available looks to be very low. There is potential for that funding to be increased in the future, and CWIS lays out how local councils can get that funding – through producing local cycle network plans that they want to develop. The positive for Birmingham is that Birmingham City Council will need to show that they are developing the BCR network in order to get further funding. The negative is that funding may be too low to make much difference.

Chris Lowe

Updates on the BCR programme can be found on Birmingham City Councils website. Go to this link:

www.birmingham.gov.uk/birminghamcyclerevolution

Then follow the 'Progress Updates' link on the left


Join Push Bikes

Birmingham is starting to plan better for cycling, but there is still a lot to do.

We currently have several campaigns in progress and are in frequent contact with local councils over cycling issues whether raised by cyclists or matters the councils contact us about, as they believe they might affect cyclists and therefore ask for our views. With the Birmingham Cycle Revolution

approaching its second stage, it is even more important that we influence local planners, Centro and local councils to build good quality infrastructure that increases the safety of cyclists.

Your support for Push Bikes will help benefit cyclists in and around Birmingham and Solihull.

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Red Kite Cycles	Shirley (B90 3DX)	Bikes
Sprocket Cycles	Digbeth (B5 5TH)	None
On Your Bike	Digbeth (B5 6HY)	Bikes
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Mechanix Bicycle	Moseley (B13 8EH)	None

Join Push Bikes

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