

BIRMINGHAM Cyclist

The newsletter for *push*  bikes



Three years to install this sign?

Birmingham City Council moves at a glacial pace to improve cyclists' safety in Tyseley.

see page 4

A cycling mayor for Birmingham?

What can we learn from Cambridge and London? Public meeting on Tuesday 27 March, 19:00 at the Council House

see page 3



Push Bikes on Facebook!

A new group to promote and publicise our work. To join visit: www.facebook.com/groups/PushBikes/

see page 3



Blow away the cobwebs!

Push Bikes rides continue right through the winter. For the list of forthcoming rides:

see page 12

If you would like to help make the new s-
letter happen,
please contact
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New sletter
team.

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View from the Chair

Pushing the politicians: what local improvements do you want?

Whenever I have any contact about cycling with councillors or officers in Birmingham it is clear that pressure from voters is the only way to influence policies. This was emphasised yet again at the recent Cycling Forum. It raises the question: how can Push Bikes and its members be more influential? Push Bikes responds to policy initiatives such as the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. We react to poor schemes e.g. Selly Oak New Road and support others e.g. secure cycle storage. We bring forward ideas and discuss these with transport officers and political masters.

But where we are less active and therefore less influential is on specific improvements at a local level. We need to make it clear to the councillors that their reaction will change the way we vote. This can only be done by individual members (Push Bikes doesn't have a vote!)

I am therefore asking all members to raise the profile of cycling by contacting their councillors. You can find who they are and how to contact them at:

www.writetothem.com

There are two specific issues permitted by recent changes in transport regulations and supported by us that members could raise:

- Allow contra flow cycling on one-way streets in your area
- Introduce more 20mph speed limits.

Additionally you may well have other local cycling problems that your councillors should help in solving. Elsewhere in this issue you will see that Graham Hankins has, through contact with his councillor and perseverance, secured the installation of a road sign to protect cyclists. Please mention Push Bikes and send a copy to us (and any response). Don't hold back: this is what they are elected to do act on behalf of constituents!



John Bennett

Safety of Cyclists Research

The Department for Transport commissioned a literature review to consider the role of infrastructure in relation to the safety of cyclists. The main findings were:

- Of all interventions to increase cycle safety, the greatest benefits come from reducing motor vehicle speeds. Interventions that achieve this are also likely to result in casualty reductions for all classes of road user. This may be achieved by a variety of methods, including physical traffic calming; urban design that changes the appearance and pedestrian use of a street; and, possibly, the wider use of 20 mph speed limits.
- Most cyclist injuries in multi-vehicle collisions take place at junctions. Reducing the speed of traffic through junctions appears to be an effective approach to reducing cycle casualties, and physical calming methods are a reliable means of achieving such a reduction.
- Providing segregated networks may reduce risks to cyclists, although evidence suggests that the points at which segregated networks intersect with highways can be relatively high-risk, sometimes of sufficient magnitude to offset any safety benefits of removing cyclists from the carriageway.
- A number of infrastructure interventions that are not widely used in the UK have been implemented on the continent to increase safety at junctions. Particular examples include cycle lane markings continued across junctions, cycle pre-signals and Tixi mirrors (mounted below signal heads to allow drivers of heavy vehicles to see cyclists at their nearside). The literature suggests that, appropriately applied, the former two approaches can have a beneficial effect on cycle casualties.

The full report, *Infrastructure and Cyclist Safety* by the Transport Research Laboratory, is published by the TRL (PPR 580).

To download a free copy, go to:
www.trl.co.uk/online_store/reports_publications/free_reports/



ACTION POINTS

This symbol indicates items where readers can take action such as writing or emailing

A cycling mayor for Birmingham? Public meeting on Tuesday 27 March, 19:00 Council House

This May, Birmingham's citizens will not just vote for local councillors; they will also decide whether Birmingham should have a directly elected mayor as leader of the council. This is in contrast to the current 'leader and cabinet' model in which the leader of the council is chosen by other elected councillors. Although a campaign backed by the Birmingham Mail for a referendum in 2008 failed, 11 cities will vote this May on whether to have a mayor or not. A local-authority elected mayor has powers similar to those of the executive committee in a 'leader and cabinet' model.

But what does this all mean for cycle campaigners in Birmingham? Should we support a mayor or not? Or should we even care? To help answer these questions, Push Bikes is organising a public meeting on 27 March at the Council House to discuss and debate the issue. Doors will open at 18:30, the meeting will start at 19:00 prompt and will finish at 21:00. Our two main speakers will come from the London Cycling Campaign and the Cambridge Cycling Campaign, two strong campaigning groups operating in different local government environments. We will hear about the visions that they have for their cities, and how they try to promote those ideas. They will also talk about how they interact with the local government structures in their area, and the challenges and opportunities that are presented by them.

After the speakers, half of the meeting will be dedicated to audience discussion, to debate the merits (or not) of a mayoral system, and what direction cycle campaigning in Birmingham should take. Push Bikes hope that at the end of the meeting, not only will everyone be clearer about where they stand on the mayoral debate, but that our campaigning may also be invigorated by new ideas and blood, and that we will be ready for the future, whether it involves a mayor or not.

Further reading:

The campaign against a Birmingham mayor: <http://www.votenoapowerfreak.org.uk/index.htm>

The campaign for a Birmingham mayor: <http://yestobirminghammayor.com/>

The arguments for and against: <http://wrangl.com/mayorforbirmingham>

Chris Lowe

Discover Cycling Day, Sunday 1 April

This is intended to be a unique opportunity for 'budding', 'beginner' and 'bike everywhere' cyclists to meet the professional bodies in Birmingham who promote cycling as part of their jobs.

- For the 'budding' cyclist there will be information on how to choose that first bike and setting up the important adjustments.
- For the 'beginner' who has just bought their first

bike there will be safer riding advice and how to carry out those simple repairs that will keep their bike 'on the road' for 99% of the time.

- For the cyclists with a few miles of pedalling already, come and meet officers from Birmingham City Council, the Centro Sustainable Travel team, discuss the National Cycle Network with Sustrans and the new Bike Hubs from 'BeActive'. All these have been notified of the event.

To give all comers the maximum opportunity to come along, it is planned to run the day from 10am until 8pm. Birmingham City Council, Sustrans, BeActive and Centro have all been invited to express indications of support. Centro is interested in associating this with its Pershore Road Sustainable Travel scheme. We hope the others will respond very soon!

Where?

Graham Hankins

Stratford Road / Highgate Road Junction

Push Bikes requested that Advanced Stop Lines (ASLs) be provided for cyclists as a part of this junction improvement scheme. However the response received from Birmingham City Council was that 'that ASLs were not appropriate at this location'. Some of the reasoning given for this was that there was an alternative parallel on-road route, that there was not adequate room for vehicles and cyclists to share lanes and that ASLs would cause additional delay at traffic lights.

Push Bikes refute the claims made and have responded in strong terms, pointing out that cyclists should be able to use the whole highway network within Birmingham safely. Alternative routes, like the Stratford Road Parallel Route, are generally of local or other limited use and no help to users who are making other journeys. Each junction that is redesigned without taking the safety of cyclists into account, will impede modal shift towards cycling. It seems also that some council officers are still unaware of technical cycling design issues.

New Push Bikes FaceBook page

Last year a Push Bikes FaceBook group was set up to promote and publicise our work. People can apply to join the group. Once accepted as members, they may then read and contribute to discussion threads. A number of postings are to publicise forthcoming rides, but members have also used it to inform people of proposed cycle routes or other schemes. So far we have 60 members and hope to build this up in 2012.

For more information, see:

www.facebook.com/groups/PushBikes/

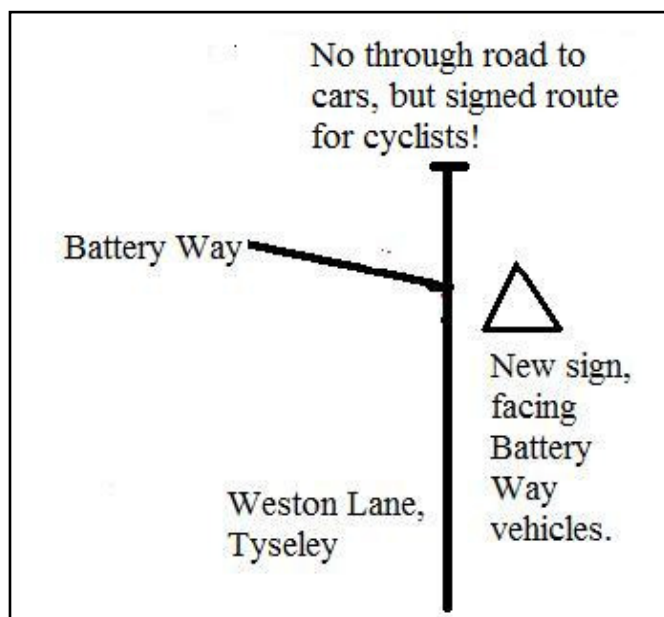
If you are not a member of this group yet, why not put in a request to join? You will be very welcome!

David Gaussen

The Saga of a Sign

My regular cycle route into the city centre takes me down Weston Lane, Tyseley, to join the Warwick Road. Weston Lane itself does not have a junction with the Warwick Road: it is a 'dead end' for motor vehicles because there are small industrial units here, with a small turning head. But it is a through route for cyclists, who can pass through to use the Toucan crossing on the main road.

Battery Way joins with Weston Lane at a 'Give Way' signed junction, but there is usually very little for Battery Way drivers to 'give way' to, as Weston Lane cars cannot pass the junction because of the 'dead end' ahead and a 'No Through Road' sign informs them of that. So cars exiting Battery Way generally do not even pause at the Give Way. Because of the No Through Road to their left they come straight out and turn right into Weston Lane. This is extremely hazardous for cyclists, as drivers are not expecting or looking for anything going straight ahead, across the junction.



At the first Push Bikes public meeting in October 2008 (yes folks, 2008) one of our many issues for Birmingham City Council (BCC) was that a warning sign was needed, telling drivers to watch for crossing cyclists. BCC's reply then: "Unfamiliar with situation. Site will be visited". We are not aware if any visit took place, or if any decision was made.

Jump to October 2010. Push Bikes writes to the Cyding Officer, with a reminder of issues still outstanding from meetings in 2008 - 10, 'Many specific issues were raised in 2008, several of these were repeated in 2009 and most still await a resolution today'. With regard to Weston Lane, the Cyding Officer replies: "Recent funding arising from Section 106 planning agreements with developers to improve the Cole Valley Route between the Warwick Road and the Stratford Road will be able to improve directional and safety signage in this location. Anticipated action will be in early 2011".

As we were now entering the third year after this issue had first been raised, I decided to 'up the stakes' and,

shortly after the May elections, wrote to my Ward Councillor. In June, he receives a reply from BCC's Alistair Campbell, Head of Resilience and Local Engineers, to the effect that there had been a delay in a development scheme and thus to proposed signage works, continuing: "It is hoped that these works will commence later this year (2011) and that the requested signage will be included". Why the provision of one sign should be dependent on a larger development scheme was unexplained, but at least the answer was not no.

Jump to December. It's clearly, 'later this year' (2011) but there is still no evidence of any 'Development Scheme'. My councillor's second (reminder) letter to BCC has, presumably, been unanswered as my councillor had not written further to me. There is a BCC Pedestrian and Cyclists' Task Force meeting during December, which I will be attending.

The day of the meeting arrives. Arranged for 2pm, I cycle into the city in the morning. Passing the Battery Way junction, I nearly become a 'KSI' statistic (Killed or Seriously Injured) when a motorist comes straight out. Only by observation and preparedness do I avoid a collision. Now furious, I raise the incident formally at the meeting. Cllr Tim Huxtable, Task Force Chair and Cabinet Member for Transport, asks the cycling officer to write to me.



Date: 21st December 2011 (so about three years and two months since the matter was first notified to BCC). An email is received from the city's Cyding Officer:

"Dear Councillor Harmer and Graham. I'm pleased to report that the Battery Way sign was erected yesterday".

A long awaited warning sign!

NOTE: the provision of this warning sign is of much greater significance than a 'win' for Push Bikes' and increased safety for cyclists. Except for signs which must be obeyed by law i.e. circular regulatory signs such as speed limits, it is not an offence to ignore a warning sign unless doing so causes an accident. So if a collision with a cyclist occurs at this junction, there may be a stronger case against a motorist for ignoring or failing to see a warning sign! Of course, we all hope that no cyclist ever has to do this.

Graham Hankins

Icknield Port Loop: Another link in a Birmingham Cycle Network?

Late 2011 saw another proposal for the development of the Icknield Port Loop site submitted to the planning department. Push Bikes saw the proposals, and have responded with ideas on how to exploit this development by providing a quality link through for cyclists.

Icknield Port Loop lies between Edgbaston Reservoir and the canal, with Ladywood Middleway to the south, and Dudley Road to the north. It lies at a strategic point between Smethwick, Winson Green and the city centre. The most attractive cycle route through that area is currently on the canal towpath, as both Dudley Road and Icknield Port Road have high levels of traffic.

The advantage of the Icknield Port Loop development is that it could provide a safe, fast, high-capacity, alternative to Icknield Port Road and the canal towpath for cyclists. This would also provide a low traffic link to the Harborne Walkway, which starts at the other side of Summerfield Park, providing a pleasant cycle route right into the centre of the city, as well as linking up Edgbaston Reservoir to the city centre.

Push Bikes has submitted this proposal to Birmingham City Council and developers. At a Ladywood ward meeting on the 7th of January, key parts of the Push Bikes proposals were accepted positively by the developers, so there is hope that this link may be built! However, the developers still need to put forward our suggestions to the highway authority (Birmingham City Council), who may reject them. So we cannot rest yet!

How can we check the planning proposals? In 2011, Birmingham City Council introduced a new on-line database for planning applications. Each application has a unique code e.g. the Icknield Port application is 2011/07399/PA, which you can enter to view details and to submit comments. However, the period to respond is only a few weeks so you need to be quite quick.

The weekly lists of planning applications can be found at: <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/planningweeklylists>

The on-line database can be found at: <http://eplanning.birmingham.gov.uk/Northgate/PlanningExplorer/ApplicationSearch.aspx>

The main drawback to this system, however, is that it does not cover any proposals that deal purely with the highways: a major omission for cycle campaigners.

Bournville Lane / Hay Green pedestrian and cycle improvements

This scheme proposed to install three pedestrian refuges. While of use to pedestrians (as the refuges divide a wide road into two 'crossings', they are presenting a significant hazard for cyclists because motorists insist on trying to overtake while passing through the gap. Push Bikes replied objecting to the plans as follows:

While appreciating that these assist pedestrians to cross, they are also posing, locally and nationally, a significant point of conflict between cyclists and drivers, who will insist on or try to overtake cyclists passing through the gap. Or, cut across cyclists on the approach to the gap in order to get through the narrowing before the cyclist. Advice to cyclists to 'take the lane' i.e. adopt the 'primary position' as taught in Bikeability training, and position themselves in the middle of the gap, thus preventing overtaking, goes largely unheeded as most cyclists have never undertaken training to even hear of the primary position, or are very reluctant to position themselves there anyway.

Some authorities provide short lengths of cycle path on the footway to enable riders to by-pass the gap, while others make the gap narrower by providing a kerbside 'buildout' with a cycle lane cut through it. To date Birmingham City Council has rejected both of these alternative options, when raised in other parts of the city following complaints from members. Push Bikes has also asked Cyclenation, the federation of cycle campaign groups, to take up the issue of cyclists at refuges at a national level.

Graham Hankins

Bikes for Africa

In the September edition of Birmingham Cyclist we appealed for any unwanted bikes for a collection for charity, Re-Cycle which collect and ship them to different African countries. In the autumn a total of 115 bikes plus a huge amount of spares and tools were collected in Coleshill, which really exceeded all expectations. Sainsbury's helped with the transport to Re-Cycle's base in Colchester. From there they were loaded into a



shipping container and shipped via Felixstowe to one of Re-Cycle's partners, The Bicycling Empowerment Network in Cape Town, South Africa. People in both Cape Town and a wide area outside will now benefit from affordable transport helping to create new work and education opportunities. In addition BEN, a Public

Benefit Organisation provides local employment – see www.benbikes.org.za/about.php for more information. Thanks to everyone who contributed to the collection.

Michael Groll

Cyclists' Forum, November 2011

With the intriguing question "What on earth is a cycle passport?" hanging in their minds, around 100 cyclists came along to Austin Court (opposite the Sea Life Centre) for Birmingham City Council's (BCC) second annual meeting on 22 November 2011.

These public fora had, of course, been started by Push Bikes in 2008, it held another in 2009; the council then held its first in 2010. While Push Bikes welcomed BCC's involvement, the event last year was marred by too many speakers (around 10 we think) and too little opportunity to closely question BCC on its cycling policies. So in November there were just four presentations.

'BikeBirmingham' – usually printed in green and followed by a cycle wheel graphic, is the latest 'badging' for BCC's various initiatives to promote more cycling. The five-year Cycling Strategy had been published several months ago but still awaited an 'official launch' said Mike Cooper, Company TravelWise Team Leader. The Company TravelWise scheme helped businesses to use more sustainable travel choices. Mike then explained the make-up of the council's Cycle Co-ordination Group and made the curious statement that "training was everywhere at the moment". Really? Do tell...

'Bike North Birmingham' is the largely off-road collection of cycling (and walking) routes and paths in the Pye Hayes/Sutton Coldfield area. A new section was opened just a few months ago (see previous newsletters) and in total is a £4.123M project. This 'four-digit' figure is the one always quoted, rather than 'rounding' to 'over £4M'! Richard Leonard (another BCC Team Leader) stated that this would "remove the barriers to cycling". Presumably this implied that the "barrier to cycling" was the road system. To many of us, the roads are no 'barrier' at all! Whether 'trained' (see later) or otherwise. 'Bike North Birmingham' would offer Bikeability Plus training to adults, for parents and staff at schools, plus maintenance training. Well, if you will ask Push Bikes, we know all about and can help with both! And we are volunteers, no budget needed!

Next speaker was Dawn Rahman. Dawn signs herself in emails as Recreation Manager (Birmingham / West Midlands) for British Cycling and runs the BeActive exercise programme for adults. This has mainly concentrated in encouraging walking and visits to gymnasiums (300 000 sign-ups so far!), so it was good to learn that BeActive is expanding into cycling. Dawn was intending to set up seven 'cycle hubs' in the city, with free bike hire, short led rides, cycle training for those who could not cycle and bike maintenance. All good stuff! This was to start in January, with ride leaders taken from community groups.

Right. Here we are then, February 2012! I have already volunteered as a ride leader and written to Dawn explaining the training and maintenance advice that Push Bikes can offer. We await her call!

So what, then, is the 'BikeBirmingham Cycle Passport'? In an effort to trace more stolen bikes, BCC and West Midlands Police have devised a Passport document, for your bike! Not a book but the same size as a passenger passport, the three-folded little document has a large space for a photo of your bike, plus many facts about it: frame size etc, also facts about you. Obtainable free from BCC or West Midlands Police. But of course this is no substitute for securely locking your bike!

The Forum concluded by splitting the audience into three loose 'workshops' that we could drift to and from, and a concluding Q and A session. When asked how Birmingham was proposing to achieve its intended Low-Carbon Strategy, given its continued emphasis on car travel, the Forum chair (Cllr Dave Radcliffe) advised the questioner to "write to their Councillor and MP".

Graham Hankins

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Selly Oak New Road

Push Bikes and others have adversely commented on the cycling arrangements on the Selly Oak New Road (see October 2011 Birmingham Cydist). Poor 'joined-up' paths, obstructive sign posts, dangerous roundabouts and junctions. We have asked that Birmingham City Council Cabinet Member for Transportation, Councillor Tim Huxtable visit the site and hear first hand our comments and suggestions. Eager to be helpful, in November he replied "As soon as I can find space in my diary." A reminder was sent in December but we're still waiting!

Poor signing practice continues

The pictures below show an array of new signs and a proliferation of separate posts at Arden Road, Gannon demanding 'Cyclists Dismount' (five in total) and cycle routes signs followed by 'End of Route' sign (just above the car).



The Department for Transport's Local Transport Note 2/08 Cycle Infrastructure Design provides comprehensive guidance on designing for cyclists. There are some pertinent points made on the use of these of these traffic signs:

The CYCLISTS DISMOUNT sign to diagram 966 is another overused sign. On a well designed cycle facility, it is very rarely appropriate. The sign is possibly the least favoured among cyclists – each time it is used, it represents a discontinuity in the journey, which is highly disruptive.

The END marking to diagram 1058 and the END OF ROUTE sign to diagram 965 can be used where a cycle lane, track or route terminates. However, in practice they are often provided unnecessarily, possibly because of an assumption that their use is mandatory – it is not. In most cases, cycle lanes can simply stop. For short breaks, such as where a cycle lane is interrupted by a controlled crossing or a bus stop indicating that the lane has ended is never appropriate.



The Department of Transport published a Traffic Signs Policy Paper in October 2011. One of the main objectives is to reduce the clutter of unnecessary signs which can be unsightly as well as expensive. Unfortunately Birmingham City Council seem neither willing to reduce sign clutter nor to have the necessary knowledge of signing for cyclists.

Cycle to Work scheme for Birmingham City Council staff

Birmingham City Council has just introduced the Cycle to Work scheme for its employees. Introduced by the Government in 1999, this tax-free benefit allows employers to loan bicycles to their staff on the condition that the bicycles are mainly used to get to and from work or for work-related purposes. The employee 'buys' the bike at the end of the loan period for a nominal sum. The typical saving on a new bike plus equipment for an average taxpayer is between 38-45%.

Push Bikes is especially pleased to hear this news, as introduction of the scheme is something we have been lobbying for, for many years. Does your employer offer the Cycle to Work scheme to staff? We'd be interested to hear.

Solihull Road Safety Improvements

New measures are being introduced across the borough to increase drivers' awareness of 30mph speed limit areas. The measures include bright new signs, red circles with 30mph painted on the road and dragon's teeth markings, which change the look of the road and make it appear narrower. Sites which will be treated include roads in Hockley Heath, Shirley, Tidbury Green, Cheswick Green, Monkspath, Bentley Heath, Chelmsley Wood, Smiths Wood, and Castle Bromwich.

Do you live in Solihull? Do you believe that these measures are effective in reducing vehicle speeds?

www.cycleinjury.co.uk

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Signs make no sense for cyclists



Give us a clue: Cyclist John Pitcock who is confused by the no cycling signs on the Rea Valley Cycle Route off Kitchener Road, in Bournbrook.
Picture: Iain Findlay

No cycling in the cycle lane? Now that's wheely confusing

By Chris Henwood
STAFF REPORTER

CONFUSING 'no cycling' signs have been bizarrely erected by the city council along a Birmingham section of the National Cycle Network.

Cyclists have been left scratching their heads at the directions to forbid them from cycling placed above notices advising them that the road-way has been especially designated Route 5 of the network created by transport charity Sustrans.

The baffling signs appear in sev-

eral places along the run, as cyclists come out of Selly Park's Pebble Mill Playing Fields and on to Kitchener Road.

Sustrans has called for them to be taken down.

And keen cyclist John Pitcock, aged 64, of Hazelwell Crescent, Stirchley, said the signs were useless.

"The signs are just wrong and it looks silly having a National Cycle Route sign with a No Cycling sign right next to it," said the retired Braille transcriber and grandfather-of-one.

"I don't think it'll cause an accident, but people will ignore the signs which is bad in itself."

But Birmingham City Council said they were intended to ensure cyclists use the road and not the pavement as a previous section of the route travels through playing fields on paths which cyclists share with pedestrians.

The local authority said they erected the signs after they had received complaints from residents. Yvonne Gilligan, Sustrans' director in the West Midlands, said: "It seems clear the signs need replacing

to tell legitimate users of National Cycle Network that they are to continue on the road. We would suggest a simple sign saying Cyclist Rejoin Carriageway."

Kevin Clinton, head of road safety at RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents), also spoke out against the signs.

He said: "To be effective, signage needs to be clear and consistent. These two signs could easily confuse cyclists because they appear to be giving conflicting messages."

But Birmingham City Council said other approved alternative signs were not available.

A spokesman added: "Although the signs may look contradictory, the reality is that cyclists know what they need to do on this stretch of the route. The signs were introduced at the request of the local residents and they also understand how the arrangement works. We have had no reports of cyclists being confused by the signs in this area," he said.

© Birmingham Mail, 2011

Another example of unnecessary and confusing signing: a cycling ban on the National Cycle Network Route 5 in South Birmingham, a story that received some local press coverage last autumn. Although not mentioned in the article (above), Push Bikes understands that the red circle 'cycling prohibited' signs were installed as a response to residents' complaints about cycling on the pavement. However on the sections of Route 5 where the signs have been erected, such as Kitchener Road, the cycle route is actually on the road. The prohibition of cycling actually covers the whole of the highway i.e. both footway (pavement) and carriageway. Sustrans suggest using the 'Cyclists Rejoin Carriageway' sign plate, but Birmingham City Council claim there is no viable signing solution.

Connect2 Pye Hayes route update

The latest section of Connect2 route is now open between Pye Hayes Park and the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal at Egerton Road. The route is mostly off road though joins some residential roads in the Pye Hayes estate. For those travelling from the north this section is now the shortest route for getting to the canal and on into Birmingham. For further information see:

<http://blog.connect2birmingham.org/>

Memories of cycling in North Vietnam

Cycling with Red Spokes Adventure Tours was a fabulous once in a lifetime experience, with spectacular countryside from rice fields to the towering mountains. *Written by Eddie Brocklesby*

We rode long good roads, through free-roaming water buffalos, pigs, friendly dogs, children, chickens and ducks. Everyone was waving, fascinated by this group of mad westerners who were paying to cycle up hills on posh mountain bikes! Short chunks of un-made up road made the biking more challenging. The well earned long mountain descents were fantastic at the end of the day, once in a glorious sunset, the red colours reflected in the paddy fields in the valley far below.

Markets, street vendors, colourful tribes and, overwhelmingly, the people made the trip so memorable. This is a young country with 65% of Vietnamese under the age of 30. They were to be seen walking quite long journeys along the road to school.

Toddlers encouraged to wave and welcome strangers, many carried atop their Dads. Others perched precariously, on scooters with Mum; the sense of kinship and family belonging so marked.

The Red Spokes organisation was superb. The ages, nationality and cycling experience of our group were widely varied. We had our own well travelled, informed English guide; his skills and the motorised backup were much appreciated. We also had an enthusiastic knowledgeable Vietnamese guide, Phong. He showed us the rice growing stages, coffee plantations and the heart of 'PG tip' land where the price paid per kilo of tips staggered us. His love of his country, its heritage, and his informed appreciation of the diversity of the hill tribes



You always receive a warm friendly welcome from children in the villages of Laos and Vietnam.

was such a bonus. 'We eat or use everything – nothing gets left'.

We stayed in local hotels where the bar at the end of the day was usually the first port of call. Food was nutritious throughout. Noodle soup for breakfast, ideal for carb loading. Accompanying fresh baguettes were evidence of the French occupation. Healthy picnic meals emerged from our backup van for elevenses and lunches. Suppers were great, reflecting local specialisms.

Never in a developing country have I felt more challenged by the disparate wealth issues. We delivered 200 chairs to a village school supported by Red Spokes – next time the head said she would love a new water tank!! Vietnam has an effective education system, and although the children love school few from agricultural areas move on beyond primary education.

See North Vietnam by bike before commercial tourism kicks in – to travel by car,

coach or even scooter would be to miss the sense of intimacy and shared fun. The people were fascinated by our madness, but they respected, accepted and welcomed us – we were after all linked with the country that spawned Man U and Chelsea, and that's what really counts in a globalised economy.

For further information on cycling tours, contact:

Red Spokes Adventure Tours

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Web: www.redspokes.co.uk

Email: office@redspokes.co.uk

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National News

The Times, Cities Fit for Cycling Campaign

This month the Times newspaper launched Cities Fit for Cycling, a major campaign to improve cycle safety in the UK, after one of its reporters was seriously injured in a crash last year. At the heart of the initiative is an eight-point manifesto, which includes: action to make lorries safer; the redesign of dangerous junctions; the building of a 'world-class' cycle infrastructure; and making cycling part of the driving test. You can also pledge your support if you wish.

One edition stated: "Liverpool, Birmingham, Leicester, Bristol, Newcastle, Manchester, Glasgow, Leeds, Sheffield and Belfast city councils all threw their weight behind calls to reform urban areas".

Push Bikes' Rides

Please see the website for the full list and latest updates: <http://www.pushbikes.org.uk/rides>.

You can join the rides mailing list by emailing: pbrides@pushbikes.org.uk. It's a good idea to email pbrides@ to let us know you're coming in case you're delayed or plans change.

Proper lighting is essential for the evening rides, many of which are via unlit country lanes.

Rides are open to all cyclists. Riders are responsible for their own safety, should ensure that their bike is roadworthy and are responsible for the security of their bike and personal belongings.

Rides average 10-12mph but we won't leave anyone behind.

SCOTTS CYCLES

Official Suppliers of

**Dawes, DiamondBack BMX
Electric Powabike, Probike
Custom builds available**

Member of Association of Cycle Traders



wheel building service available

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YOUR LOCAL CYCLE SPECIALISTS FOR SALES,
REPAIRS & SERVICE OF ALL MAKES OF CYCLES

1345 STRATFORD RD HALL GREEN

(OPPOSITE WAITROSE SUPERMARKET)

0121 777 2532

COMPARE OUR PRICES!!

ALSO AT: 132 NEW RD, RUBERY, 0121 453 3148

Discount 10% on cash, 5% on credit card, (except bikes) on production of Push Bikes membership card

Standing Order Mandate

To (your bank) _____

Address (inc. Post Code) _____

Please pay The Co-operative Bank, Birmingham Branch
Sorting Code 08-90-01

for the credit of Push Bikes account number 5001 1748

the sum of (amount in figures) £ _____

(amount in words) _____

Commencing (date*) _____ / now* and thereafter every year
on (date dd/mm) __/__/__ until you receive further notice from me/us*
in writing

quoting reference _____ and debit my/our* account accordingly.

Name of account to be debited _____

Sort code _____

Account number _____

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Please cancel any previous standing order in favour of Push Bikes
under the reference given above.

Send to: Push Bikes, 54-57 Allison Street, BIRMINGHAM, B5 5TH

*Delete as applicable.

www.pushbikes.org.uk

We are based in the Friends of the Earth building:

'The Warehouse'
54-57 Allison Street
Digbeth
BIRMINGHAM
B5 5TH

Telephone: 0121 632 6909

E-mail: secretary@pushbikes.org.uk

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

We hold meetings on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 19:30 including: 21 February, 20 March and 17 April.

Sprocket Cycles

**Child and adult bike sales,
accessories, repairs and spares.**

**10% discount for Push Bikes'
members**

Now open 10-4 Wed - Sat.

**54 Allison St. Birmingham B5 5TH
Tel. 0121 633 0730**

Membership Application Form

I/we* wish to join Push Bikes February 2012

Name(s) _____

Address (inc. Post Code) _____

Home Telephone _____

Mobile Telephone _____

Work Telephone _____

E-mail address _____

I/we* enclose one year's subscription:

Individual, waged (£11)

Individual, unwaged (£5.50)

Joint/Family (£14.00)

Voluntary donation (optional)

TOTAL£.....

Signature _____ Date _____

I heard about Push Bikes from _____

I/we* would like to help by: (✓)

- () Letter writing () Helping on PushBikes' stall () Organising activities for Bike Week
() Reviewing plans () Writing articles for Newsletter () Setting up a Bicycle User Group
() Leading rides () Assisting with Newsletter () Newsletter/leaflets distribution
() Newsletter stuffing () Other _____

Push Bikes' Rides

Wednesday Evening Rides:

Wednesday 15 February, Hopwood House

Hopwood, Alvechurch
Leader: Simon.

Wednesday 22 February, Jewellery Quarter

A tour with three venues - can you keep up?

To join the emailing list, please email:
pbrides@pushbikes.org.uk

When a ride isn't listed on a Wednesday, we arrange this closer to the day and put details on the website and email those on the rides mailing list.

All Wednesday rides meet at the Midlands Arts Centre, Cannon Hill Park, near the boating lake, at 7.30, for a 7.45pm start. Occasionally we start from the Hippodrome if we're heading north.

Sunday Rides:

Sunday 26 February, Bromsgrove

A 25 - 30 mile circuit, with one or two hills, to Bromsgrove where lunch will be taken. Meet at Kings Norton Railway Station car park at 10.30am.

Members' Discounts From:

Bike Shop	Location	Exceptions
Scott's Cycles (see advert p.11)	Hall Green	bikes
Bike Pro	Rubery	bikes
iCycle	King's Heath	none
Red Kite Cycles	Harborne	none
Sprocket Cycles	Shirley	bikes
On Your Bike	City Centre	none
	Digbeth	bikes

You will need your Push Bikes' membership card to claim the discount

