

A Cycle Plan For London?



Introduction

How did the redesign of Henlys Corner go so badly wrong with respect cyclists? After all, there was a 20 year discussion about it and it seems reasonable that someone must have considered their needs. Doesn't it?

I would argue that there is an underlying problem which is the lack of any coherent master plan for how cycling is supposed to work in London. If there was such a document, the designers could have looked at it and known at once how this redesign was supposed to work for local cyclists and as part of the overall provision for cycling in the city.

What I have presented here is my idea of such a plan. I do not suggest that there are not other plans possible. In fact, I am sure that people cleverer than I would be able to improve on it. I merely suggest that there should **be** a plan.

I began riding for transport in 1978 when I was 11. At that time I was living in New York and let me tell you, the traffic was brutal! Like Taxi Driver on a bike. In 1981 I moved to London and have continued to ride ever since. For the last 4 years I have worked delivering Cycle Training in North London which has afforded me some insight into people's perceptions about riding. Essentially, I spend all day talking to people about cycling.

In 1980, while I was still in NY, something happened which I have not been able to explain until now and I think it illustrates the way forward for London.

New York's mayors have almost absolute power. The chap at the time, Mayor Koch, decided to put in just a couple of fully segregated lanes. One was on 5th Ave. and I can't remember where the other one was but I believe they did cross each other. They went in almost overnight, using a sort of bolt down bit of curb. They weren't great really but they did have a dramatic effect. Within weeks we all noticed that there were very many more riders about, lots more. Suddenly people could make the long downtown leg of their journey away from the cars. What was mysterious was the massive increase in cyclists in bits of the city that were nowhere near the new lanes. Nothing had been changed there so why were people suddenly happy to ride about when only a few weeks previously they were nowhere to be seen? How did two really badly designed and distant lanes do that?

I believe that the answer is in seeing Mayor Koch's couple of lanes not as a bit of provision on two streets but as a gesture by the authorities that was taken by the general populace as signalling change. Until people see actual resources allocated to something in terms of money and space they will not take the request to change seriously. To a greater or lesser degree we are all compliant citizens who look to our leaders for guidance.



What would a 400% increase in this look like?



What would 400% more pavement cycling mean?

The time has come for London to send such a signal. We need a plan.

Contents

- **Aims**
- **Big Infrastructure**
- **Small Infrastructure**
- **Cycle Training**
- **Cycle Parking**
- **Standards**
- **Public Information**
- **Central Government**

Aims

Aspirations to increase cycling's modal share to 5% by 2025 (or similar) represent us massively suppressing cycling's potential. We should be much more ambitious. I believe we could achieve 30% within the next 5-10 years if we decide to.

There is often a discussion about safety as an aim of cycle provision but I think this is a false goal. Of course, cycling should be made as safe as can be but "cycle safety" is something that is mainly of interest to people who already cycle. It is important that whatever is done benefits as many Londoners as possible, not just existing cyclists. The wider benefits of mass cycling are well understood but to make the case for it to the general public requires that they can see the specific advantage to them as individuals even if they choose not to ride. Therefore, I have chosen a short, simple set of aims that help everyone and can be easily judged as successful or failures.

Kill the school run – some estimate this to be responsible for as much as 30% of car journeys. We all know that driving is much easier during the holidays. Getting the kids riding to school is something everyone can get behind.

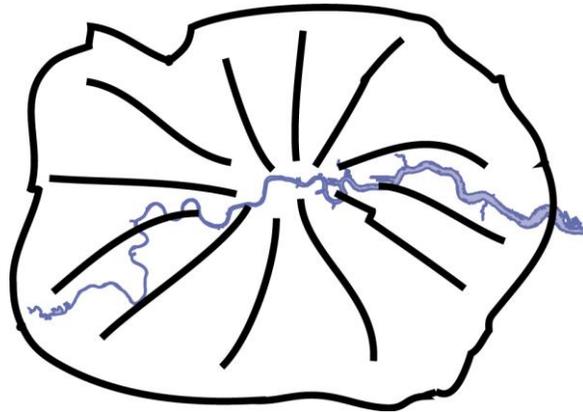
Capture short journeys – As a cycle trainer, I meet many people who say they would cycle more if the roads were made safer. With roughly 50% of trips under 2 miles, there really is a massive prize on offer here if only we can address their concerns.

Save money – Many Londoners are paying 15-30% of their incomes simply for the privilege of travelling to a low paid job. Helping them to cycle will return massive amounts of money to local economies and radically improve their prosperity.

Send a message – The role of compliance is often underestimated. Most people do as others do. The mass of people need some direction and guidance from their leaders. A unified and well implemented cycle plan sends a clear message that cycling is something London does. The current chaotic state of affairs, with haphazard and intermittent badly engineered provision, sends a message that cycling is not a mainstream mode of transport in the city. We need a clear gesture from on high to signal change.

Big Infrastructure

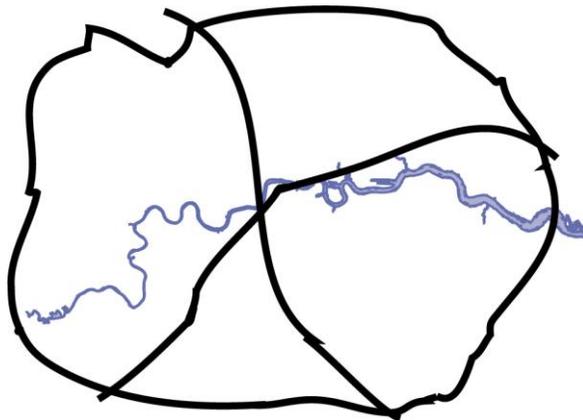
The main current proposal for cycling in London is The Cycle Super Highways which look something like this...



This fails to produce a usable network

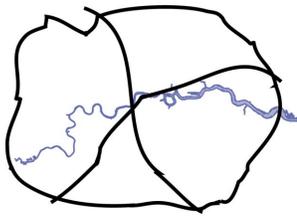
The Cycle Super Highways (CS) have been widely criticised on engineering (or lack of) grounds but their design is flawed at a much deeper level. They capture existing commuter trips but fail to potentiate new journeys because the routes do not intersect to form a network. Of course, it can not help that all users of these roads can clearly see that the design of the CS, on the ground, offers cyclists almost nothing they did not already have. As bus passengers watch riders getting squeezed by the bus they are on, can we really expect them to embrace modal shift?

A high quality segregated network, even a small one, would be far more effective at creating new users and signalling change to the wider population. There is talk of creating a few “exemplar facilities” in London but I would argue that spot treatments fail to create new journeys as they do not interconnect, despite offering local improvements. A minimum “exemplar facility” would be a simple network built to state of the art standards.

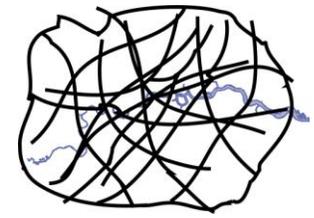
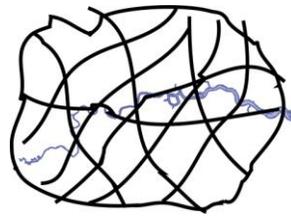
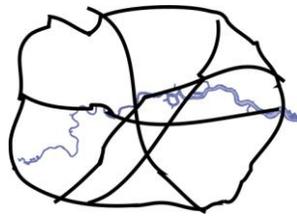


This creates new potential journeys

How dense the network should be is an open question...

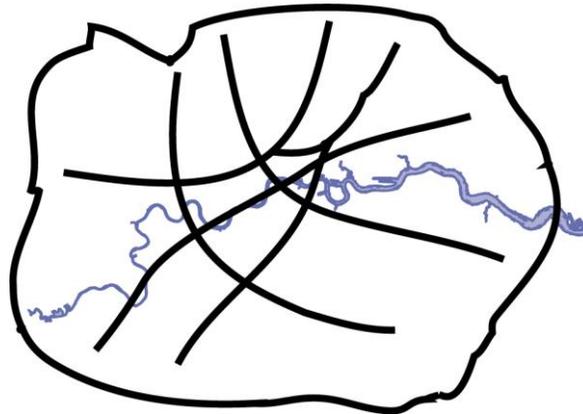


too few?



too many?

Based loosely on the CS mileage I am going to use this route density for the purposes of this document.



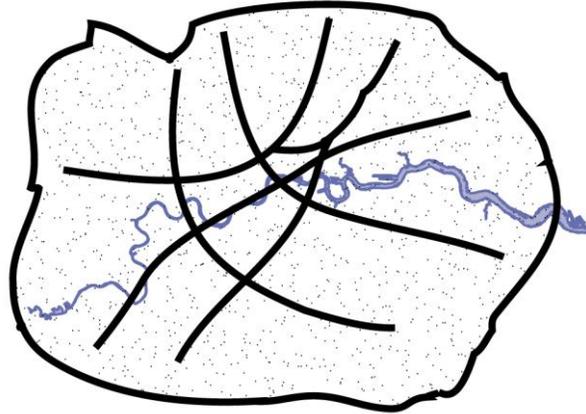
Obviously, my simple graphics are not map accurate. In terms of actual routing, I imagine that there would be a large number of often conflicting factors to resolve. My input would be, that it needs to be sited on the busiest and most direct routes that link low income housing to areas of employment and that it needs to follow the most cycled roads. Roads that have many cafés and shops would be good candidates too. In short, the aim is to assist and enhance what is happening rather than to provide alternative routes that no one wants to use.

What would it look like on the ground? - These would be segregated continuous routes on main roads that provide priority at junctions. They have their own light phases and are wide enough that they can be kept clean and riders can easily pass each other. Once on these routes, riders should not have to interact with motor traffic. In my mind, they are the width of a bus lane and employ “Green Wave” light sequencing, allowing continuous travel. They run behind the bus stops and parking bays, which will need moving. The main thing is that **there must be an acceptance that there is going to be some reallocation of space on these routes.** A good look at best practice from around the world is the starting point but I feel we should be looking to invent our own solutions to the engineering challenges presented by a scheme such as this. London should have the best “Super Highways” in the world and we have the design skill to produce them. **“These aren't just bike lanes, these are London's bike lanes!”**

How would it be paid for? - This red herring comes up during any discussion about building for cycling. A genuine request is always delivered with a bundle of cash. If we want to see real modal shift we need to allocate resources at or beyond the level of demand. Cycling is at least 3% of modal share in London so allocating 3% of the transport budget would represent merely meeting demand. Real encouragement would see that spend rise to 5% or more. These measures can be brought in cheaply. Chicago has managed to do great things at \$100,000/km. In fact, the more inexpensive implementations, though sometimes less pretty, are the way to go as they will be easier to move when the lanes need widening in the near future.... build based on an assumption of future growth!

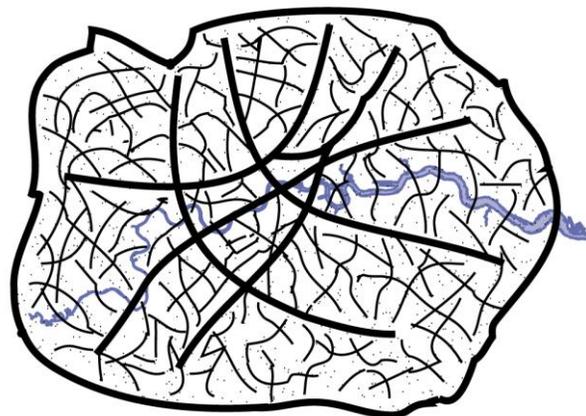
Small Infrastructure

What about the rest of the city? The schools are the key.



London's schools are evenly scattered around the city

In consultation with their parent community and the local authority, each school would propose a route either to the nearest of the new improved CS routes or to the nearest other school. This produces a secondary network of routes that grows directly from the desire lines proposed by local people and provides the interconnection between the main routes. This local engagement is vital so that everyone feels that it is something for **them** rather than something for “cyclists”. It ends up looking something like this:



What would it look like on the ground? - Not necessarily that different from how it looks now. These routes could be produced using any number of inexpensive and unobtrusive measures, although if the locals want a cycle lane or two, I see no reason not to let them have them. There are very many local streets in London that could easily accommodate a 2M cycle lane on both sides of the road. TfL should offer a range of measures that the local authority could choose from. These should include Filtered Permeability, Corridor Treatments, Shared Space and any other number of measures that can be implemented inexpensively. This doesn't have to be a massive building project. However, the ultimate test of these facilities will be whether or not we see more children riding to school. That is the primary aim. Over time it will become clear what is and what is not working. **There must be a commitment to making it work.**

How would it be paid for? - The LIP structure is already in place. The School Travel Plans feed into that via the local authority. It is simply a matter of allocation. These are not expensive measures but recalcitrant councils will need a push. If we really want the children cycling to school, we need to demonstrate to parents that we are serious about it. I am fully behind school cycle training but it will take a more comprehensive approach to produce a real step change. The effects on congestion of reducing the school run are there for all to see every holiday and half term. This would be a real benefit to ALL Londoners.

Cycle Training

National Standard Cycle Training (NSCT) provides a vital life skill and helps to combat some of the incorrect perceptions about cycling. Specifically, cyclists should not be on the road or if they are that they must “stay to the left”. It also improves the trainee’s road use and awareness of other users regardless of mode. When you train a rider you also make that person a better driver.

NSCT should be included in the National Curriculum – All children should receive cycle training as part of the package of road safety training they already get. The training would include a specific look at the local routes chosen by the school. I have no doubt that parents would ride in with their children at least on the first few trips. For many it would be their first time on a bike in years. In the context of the other measures listed here this will catalyze real change.

NSCT should be part of driver training – A single 2 hour on road session as part of driver training would have an almost instant positive effect as it would be mainly focussed on younger new drivers who are disproportionately more likely to be involved in accidents. Those who can’t ride a bike could still have a very useful roadside training.

Cycle Parking

Obviously, we will need enough parking, at the most popular destinations, for all these new riders but a rather overlooked area is domestic cycle parking. When I deliver Cycle Training at a school in a low income area, the children often have no bikes. We supply them and they love being able to ride! Here is a very common statement, “Sir, i’d love to have a bike but I live on the 6th floor and can’t carry it up the stairs and in any case there is no room in our flat. I used to lock it up downstairs but the bad boys stole it”. That must also be very true for their parents whose bikes would be heavier and more valuable. Providing secure storage on low income estates combined with local infrastructure improvements will allow people to save £1-4K per year in travel costs. If we make it easy, they will embrace the chance to save all that money. Transport poverty is a very real issue to many but they need to feel that it is safe, normal and possible to ride before they will go for it.

Standards

London’s transport systems are all well defined both visually and technically because they are constructed to set standards. A Tube station looks like a Tube station wherever you go in London. There needs to be a set of agreed standards that London’s cycle provision conforms to. At present we have a jumble of fragmentary artefacts left over from decades of partial implementations. Each borough does its own thing and overall there is no unified visual or technical syntax. I do not intend to suggest what the standards should be, merely that there should **be** standards instead of the “guidance” that we currently have. In this way, all will know what to expect as they move through the city. This also sends a strong signal to people that cycling is an integral part of the transport mix rather than something marginal.

Public Information

Ridiculous as it sounds, there is a strong perception amongst a large section of the public and some press that cyclists don't belong on the roads because they don't pay for them. This completely false "fact" underlies a great deal of hostility that cyclists have to deal with daily. This needs to be tackled head on in a series of public information films or through the press. It really does translate into bad and dangerous behaviour toward cyclists that goes well beyond name calling.

Aside from "setting the record straight", this would be an opportunity to publicise all the great work that was being done and to send a message that cycling is just as important as buses or taxis or any other part of the transport mix.

Central Government

The cost/benefit advantages of spending on cycling are well established beyond any reasonable doubt. But, the case is one of the hardest to make at a local level or even at the London wide level as the costs and the benefits exist in different organisations. The place where they are on the same ledger is at the Treasury. I read recently that London is 80% of the UK economy. It is reasonable to expect the Treasury to get involved in this process. The government should make the necessary funds available to roll out the measures listed above and work with the DfT on standards and the changes needed to Driver Training.

Someone may need to have a look at the Highways Act too, I expect. ;-)

We have a long way to go and it is going to take real commitment and visionary leadership to achieve these massive benefits for our city. One thing is certain. Oil is not going to get cheaper and we will see a rise in cyclist numbers as a direct result as well as for a host of other reasons. Let's grasp it as a golden opportunity as opposed to something that just happens to us which we then need to cope with.

- @londonneur