

Department for Transport
Draft cycling and walking
investment strategy consultation

Response by Thompsons Solicitors

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Thompsons represents thousands of cyclists and pedestrians each year who are injured in road accidents. If we are to continue to increase the amount of people cycling and stop the decrease of those walking, the government must make sure that speed limits and cycling infrastructure are put in place.

Box 1

In 2013, we represented a mother of two who was knocked from her bicycle by a 4x4 in Cumbria. The woman suffered a serious brain injury and spent two and a half months in hospital. She was hit by the car on her way to work. The driver of the 4x4 was found to be at fault and Thompsons recovered £1.7 million in compensation, including costs for her recovery and rehabilitation.

I. The Government would be interested to hear views on the approach and actions set out in section 8 of this strategy

If the prime objective of this consultation is to halt the decrease in people walking and continue the increase in cycling participation, there is no point reinventing the wheel and there are many measures which have been tried in certain parts of the country and could be rolled-out wider. 20mph zones have proven to be effective in cities such as London, Brighton and Bristol at reducing speeds of motor vehicles. Segregated cycle lanes and increased cycle route signage are also useful tools for ensuring safer and more effective cycling conditions.

One of the biggest deterrents to people walking and cycling is safety. The speeds which some motor vehicles travel at means that people are scared to travel on foot or by bicycle. This is particularly prevalent in cities where everyone is travelling in a confined space and in close proximity. Schemes such as 20mph zones have reduced the speed of motor vehicles and led to safer walking and cycling conditions. While this has reduced speeds so far in Islington, this has only been by 1mph which suggests more could be done to enforce the policy. The zones have led to a reduction in incidents on Brighton's roads, as referred to below.

However, while safety is a prominent issue, the perception of safety to cyclists and pedestrians also plays an important role. While there is a large degree of media coverage on serious injuries and fatalities suffered by cyclists, figures in Manchester have shown that the amount of these have actually been falling consistently in recent years.¹ This goes to show that while more needs to be done to improve the safety of those cycling and walking, improving the perception of it could also help boost the number of people participating.

Box 2

In Islington, the average speed of traffic before the introduction of a 20mph zone was 28mph. Following the introduction, this has only reduced to 27mph.

In Brighton, there have been reductions in the amount of incidents and casualties since implementing 20mph zones. The data is only recorded over the first year; however there were 54 fewer incidents in that year than the average for the three years previously. This included the amount of serious injuries falling from 53 to 43.

¹ What do they know

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/186098/response/466334/attach/4/Cycle%20StatsAug13.pdf>

While it is clear that any collision at 20mph will cause less damage to the cyclist or pedestrian than one at 30mph, one of the biggest problems is enforcement.

While the consultation document states that any reduction in speed helps those cycling or walking, the Islington example, where the average speed has dropped by only 1mph, seems to show that police enforcement is not having the desired effect. In a climate of restricted police budgets and stretched departments, it becomes increasingly difficult for the police to put resources into restricting the speed of traffic. This shows that 20mph zones are helpful for improving cycling and pedestrian safety and proper enforcement across the country would only increase the benefits.²

We welcome recent developments in London to improve cycling infrastructure, in particular the construction of segregated cycle lanes along 12 miles of London's roads. The segregated lanes are a vast improvement on the original 'Cycle Superhighways' which were not segregated and did not give a large amount of security to cyclists on busy roads.

Box 3

Figures show that the first six months of the segregated 'Cycle Superhighway' at Vauxhall saw an increase of 73% in cycling along the stretch of road.

This goes to show the fact that improved cycling infrastructure encourages increased numbers cycling. However, it is important that this trend continues.

One of the main problems is the geographic disparity in financial support for cycling and pedestrian improvements. London has seen vast amounts of money spent on cycle lanes and awareness campaigns, whilst other cities have seen comparatively little.

Box 4

According to the consultation document, the 'Cycle Ambition Cities' programme, announced in 2013, pledged £191 million to eight cities outside London to improve cycling infrastructure. In contrast, in 2013, the Mayor of London was able to commit to spend £931 million on cycling for the following decade.

² Brighton & Hove City Council – Safer Streets, Better Places <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/parking-and-travel/travel-transport-and-road-safety/safer-streets-better-places>

There needs to be a coherent and integrated approach to improving cycling across the country not 'pockets' of improvement.

National co-ordination may be complicated by the proposal to devolve control over these issues to local government and devolved mayors. There should be measures put in place to ensure that, devolved or not, local areas spend a certain percentage of their transport budget on cycling infrastructure to ensure that conditions are improved across the country, not just in those cities with the largest budgets.

While there have been ambitious targets set by the government in this document for improving the numbers cycling and walking, it is imperative that there are shorter-term measurable goals also set to judge progress in the meantime.

The consultation document states that there will be short-term goals set later this year. We believe it is vital there is a consultation period for these targets. It would not be acceptable to take views on the long-term, ambitious goals and then there is no opportunity to comment on the viability and ambition of the goals, however (and whenever) they are set.

We agree that one of the simplest and most important measures to improve cycling is better signage of cycle routes. While many towns and cities may have safe cycle routes which do not encounter main roads, if these are not well signposted with signage that cannot be tampered with, their presence will be a well-kept secret. Simple regular signs, which show where to travel for safer cycling, are essential.

A cost effective measure to improve safety for cyclists especially in London, where there were seven deaths of cyclists by HGVs in 2015, would be an initiative to improve education for large vehicle drivers and cyclists.

Box 5

In 2013, we represented the family of a man who was killed by a lorry when cycling home in Mile End, London. While the driver was frustratingly found not guilty of death by dangerous driving, the case shows the danger of cyclists and HGVs travelling in close proximity. Around 20% of cyclist fatalities in London involve an HGV.

In cities in particular, lorries and cyclists travel side-by-side all day long. It is vital that lorry drivers are aware of how difficult it is for cyclists to travel around large vehicles while remaining safe, and that cyclists are aware of the blind spots which lorries have, how best to cycle safely near them and the difficulties lorry drivers have in seeing them. A simple course of experience of the other's perspective has been shown to be effective and would hopefully decrease the amount of incidents involving both.

There are many suggestions made by the campaigning group 'RoadPeace' which could be implemented reasonably easily and possibly make the roads safer for pedestrians and cyclists. These include fitting all HGVs with Class V and Class VI proximity mirrors which could be enforced through legislation, operators should be encouraged or required to introduce sensors and alarms and all HGVs should be fitted with side over run guards to protect cyclists from being dragged under the vehicle. These simple measures on the part of the HGV operators could make a difference to safety on the road.

2. The Government would be interested to hear views on the potential roles of national government departments, local government, other public bodies, businesses and the voluntary sector in delivering the strategy and what arrangements could best support partnership working between them.

The key aspects of the relationship between government and outside bodies are funding and communication.

The government must be committed to granting adequate funding to projects which can be demonstrated as improving cycling infrastructure and improving safety for cyclists and pedestrians, against national criteria. As previously mentioned, a policy whereby each local area must spend a certain percentage of its transport budget on improving cycling and walking would ensure that all towns and cities see improvements.

Another measure which could be implemented would be a provision that on all building or road developments over a certain scale, to be determined, a proportion of the money has to be spent (as a pre requisite to planning permission being granted) on improving cycling and walking safety in the area. This could be bike parking or improved signage. Both these ideas are policies which could be introduced by central government and implemented by local authorities.

It is vital that where local areas improve the safety of cyclists and pedestrians, these examples of good practice are shared among other authorities. This could be implemented by, say, the Local Government Association.

References

Box 2 – Brighton & Hove City Council – Safer Streets, Better Places

<http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/parking-and-travel/travel-transport-and-road-safety/safer-streets-better-places>

Box 3 – Transport for London

<https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/news-articles/cyclists-get-new-cycle-superhighway>

Box 4 – Greater London Authority

<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/cycling-spending>