



LEEDS CIVIC TRUST

WYCA Connectivity Strategy

RESPONSE TO THE CYCLING AND WALKING CONSULTATION

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The promotion of cycling and walking is central to Leeds Civic Trust's transport vision published in 2018. The Vision is organised around six principles (the freedom to go, fair access for all, a sustainable system, improving health & well-being, planning & transport together and the right tool for the right job). Amongst other transport attributes, it envisages a city that is friendly to pedestrians and where cycling is a part of everyday life.
- 1.2 So we warmly welcome the attention given to these activities in WYCA's Connectivity Strategy. Our observations in this response are confined to that part of the cycling and walking strategy that relates to Leeds. The subject requires a familiarity with locale that precludes a more general response. We trust that responses will be forthcoming from those with local knowledge in the other areas covered by the strategy.

2 Focus

- 2.1 The Local Cycling and Walking Plan (LCWIP) refers to a separate scoping report which outlines the process undertaken to identify the initial areas of focus for phase 1 of development in Leeds. We think a summary of this report should have been included in the public document.
- 2.2 Nevertheless, ample justification is given for focussing initially on cycling and walking in North East Leeds. Limited public transport options, the absence of a core cycling route and the significance of the A61 & A58 bus corridors, plus additional housing growth, are good reasons for this focus. Also, as the supporting analysis shows, there is an established propensity to cycle in this area, with considerable future potential for commuter cycling in particular.
- 2.3 The identification of Harehills as a 'core walking area' requires little comment. As the report states: 'It has an important local shopping parade that is also one of the main transport corridors into the city. It is a densely populated area with high levels of walking and high density of trip generators, and the area is a priority for Public Health for increasing physical activity levels in line with the inclusive Growth Strategy'.
- 2.4 Consideration of walking and cycling together is one of the many strengths of this report. The proposals can act as a catalyst for long overdue road works, notably the reconfiguration of one major junction, and improvements at several others.

3 Priority Routes

- 3.1 We support the choice of two priority cycling routes (Regent Street to Chapel Allerton and Regent Street to Oakwood/Roundhay), based on what the report calls 'converging lines of desire'.
- 3.2 Things appear to be less straightforward when it comes to deciding between the two options given for each route. The report helpfully lists a number of design outcomes used in the appraisal of cycling routes. According to Department of Transport guidance on design outcomes, cycling and walking infrastructure should be coherent, direct, safe, comfortable and attractive.



- 3.3 The Trust feels that the application of the design outcomes in each case points to the same conclusion. It favours the option that follows the principal traffic routes more or less throughout their course (Option 2). But it is not a cut and dried case.
- 3.4 Matters are potentially complicated by the financial implications of the choices. The report's calculations show that, in one case, the principal traffic route option costs significantly more than the alternative, and in the other, somewhat less.
- 3.5 However, the costliest option comes with the added bonus of the reconfiguration of a major road junction. In any event, relatively small sums of money overall are involved in any of the options. So, we do not believe finance should be a factor in any final decision on which options are pursued.

4 Route Appraisal

- 4.1 The Trust notes that increasing the numbers of people that cycle to work is the principal driver of this aspect of the Infrastructure Plan. An increase in the number of cyclists using these routes for other social purposes would be a 'pleasant by-product' but it does not appear to be the main objective. Our evaluation of the 'core design outcomes' should be viewed in this light.
- 4.2 In respect of work-related travel, there is clearly a hierarchy in the listed 'design outcomes'. Directness and safety are paramount. We strongly agree with the statement in the report that *'in order to make cycling preferable to driving, routes for cyclists must be at least as direct – and preferably more direct – than that available for motor cars'*. We feel that the options for both routes that avoid main roads in the second sections of their course fail this test. These routes are arguably less coherent too.
- 4.3 But roads also have to be made safe for cycling, and it may seem that travelling by the 'back road' is the safer option. This is not necessarily the case. In densely populated areas, even where some roads are blocked off, there is a danger of being caught unawares by a vehicle shooting out from a side road. Back roads therefore only offer a certain amount of protection.
- 4.4 Nevertheless a cycle route in such an environment, especially one that is given some protection, simply because traffic volumes are much lower. It will not be less safe than one that takes the high road, where complete segregation of cyclists and motorists is difficult if not impossible to achieve.
- 4.5 Our support for cycling along these latter routes is therefore conditional on safety being maximised through segregation, be it by conventional bicycle lanes or Dutch-style physical barriers.
- 4.6 One advantage of cycle lanes over barriers is that they are able to cater for overtaking by cyclists travelling at different speeds. In view of the gradients of the routes, this is most likely to affect their uphill sections. Nevertheless, we think every effort should be made to achieve physical segregation for reasons of both safety and comfort.
- 4.7 Where bicycles and motor vehicles cannot be segregated, it is imperative that speed limits are imposed and observed. Here the core design outcome of safety and that of comfort come together at their most acute moment. The report correctly notes that: *'the presence of high speed, high volume motor traffic affects both the safety and the comfort of the user'*.
- 4.8 An issue that has not found its way into the report is on-road parking. This is a constant bugbear for cyclists and must be controlled, if not eliminated, on the 'mixed strategic' sections of all routes.
- 4.9 An appraisal of the attractiveness of route options – the fifth design outcome – demonstrates pronounced differences (although these options are not in competition with one other).



- 4.10 Cursory inspection of the section of the Regent Street to Chapel Allerton optional route running between Potternewton Lane and Barrack Road revealed little of interest for anyone proposing to cycle along it. There are no signs that this route is currently used by any cyclists, let alone those commuting to work. It is a dull backwater.
- 4.11 Whereas the cyclist passing through the equivalent section of the Regent Street to Oakwood route may find pleasure in the route's ambience and variety of interest. Furthermore, there is a direct linkage between cycling and walking strategies on the upper section of this route. A public space is planned as part of the Harehills walking project.
- 4.12 The presence of a bicycle sign in the region of Bankside Primary School indicates that the route is already used by cyclists. There will be cyclists that never feel comfortable with the sheer volume on traffic on Roundhay Road. They should not be deterred from taking the quieter route.
- 4.13 We have made clear our belief that coherence, directness and safety are the prime requirements of a cycling route which has work-related journeys as its core function, and that cycle ways along main roads are the overall best way of meeting this need. We believe that the routes in question also hold more than enough interest for people moving along them. Significant city landmarks lie along this route, notably several religious buildings.
- 4.14 One way people take to cycling is through seeing others doing it. Hence visibility might be added to the list of core design outcomes. It reinforces our preference in each case for Option 2. Cycling must be integrated into the main transport arteries of the city. It should not be viewed as a minority pursuit. Less lycra, more suits is the way to go.
- 4.15 Finally, one small request, please incorporate provision for charging facilities for battery-powered bikes on the ascending gradients of these routes.

5 A Missed Opportunity

- 5.1 It seems churlish to conclude our observations on an excellent report by lamenting a missed opportunity. But we regret the omission of a cycle route to St. James' Hospital from the First Phase of the LCWIP. The absence of converging lines of desire should not have precluded its inclusion. This methodology may not in fact capture all the information relevant to designing a cycle route.
- 5.2 The absence is made more surprising by the fact that the St. James' route was rated highest in projections of potential cycling demand. Such a route could build upon the LCC's 'mini-Holland' cycling plan for the Mabgate area. We therefore urge that the decision to exclude St. James' Hospital from Phase 1 be reconsidered.

6 General Remarks

- 6.1 We strongly welcome the approach taken in developing the LCWIP in this part of Leeds and would like to see it applied more generally across the city as a whole. We particularly support the use of the Propensity to Cycle Tool and the Cycling Potential Index as complementary tools to quantify potential demand. We suggest these be used as standard in future to evaluate all potential cycle schemes in the city.
- 6.2 As highlighted above the focus in this scheme was on cycling to work. While this may be the appropriate focus in this part of the city, in the outer suburbs cycling for leisure is likely to be relatively more important. Whilst this will not address problems of congestion, it will have a similar benefit for health. Also people taking up cycling as a leisure activity may then gain the confidence to cycle in other situations. Therefore, in planning the cycle infrastructure needed on a citywide basis, its value for leisure cycling as well as commuting should be taken into account.