



# Understanding and influencing your local authority (pt 1)



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# Overview:

- Types of Local Authority
- How is it run?
- Party politics
- Departments, divisions, individuals
- Cycling Forums
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Forging Alliances



# What kind of authority? What roles?

- **Highway authorities (County Councils).**
  - Build and maintain highways, incl Rights of Way. (Also produce minerals and waste plans - relevant for HGV safety).
- **Planning authorities (District Councils, some City Councils).**
  - Decide when/where to permit new development, in accordance with local/national planning policies.
- **Unitary authorities** (Metropolitan/London boros: some towns and former counties/districts e.g. Leicester, the Berkshire districts, Cornwall).
  - Have both Highway and planning responsibilities
- **Transport authorities** (Counties)
  - Run buses (and other PT?)
- **Integrated transport authorities** (TfL, metropolitan transport bodies)
  - Adopt integrated transport strategies, run buses / other PT for Met areas



# What kind of authority? Who runs it, and how

- **What model?**
  - Leader with cabinet
  - Elected Mayor with cabinet
  - Alternative arrangements (District Councils only)
- **Who really runs it?**
  - Councillor-led?
  - Officer-led?

(N.B. This comes down to personalities, not structure!)



# Party politics?

- One party solidly in control?
- One party overall control but marginal?
- No overall control – coalition, minority administration
- Are Districts within the County (or Met area) on the same side politically?
- Are MPs within the area on the same side as the local authority/ies?

The answer may affect your strategy



# Who does what?

- **Departmental structure**

- Transport and environment, transport and planning / regeneration? Or
- Highways and transport, or County Surveyors' dept (with planning etc somewhere else?)

- -----→ **Divisional structure**

- Transport policy / transport planning / highway/traffic engineering / road safety (engineering/education) / travel behaviour / public transport / dev't control / h'way maintenance / RoW (sometimes in leisure dep't)
- **Public health director**: have just moved from NHS into LAs, and have revenue funding: for gyms/swimming pools or for promoting active travel?

- -----→ **Individual roles**

- Cycle (and walking?) officer: policy/planning, or engineering, or both?
- road safety officers: engineering, education/awareness, cycle training
- Travel awareness/behaviour (schools, businesses, awareness campaigns)



# Cycling officers

- May be very committed, but often very junior / inexperienced.
- If so, try to support them, avoid undermining them. They gain strength in the LA if they are seen to be doing well, not failing.
- Let them know if other colleagues/depts are doing unhelpful things or missing opportunities.
- Cycling officer should be a source of expertise and programme co-ordination, not expected to “cycle-wash” every bad scheme developed by colleagues.
- Some LAs argue against having a cycling officer, arguing (usually disingenuously) that cycling should be everyone’s responsibility.



# Cycling / stakeholder engagement forums

- **Cycling forums**

- Preferably chaired by Transport portfolio holder or (more likely) Cllr who has their ear (i.e. comes from same party).
- Input into forming / updating LTP, LSTF, LTB major scheme bids, development plan, any major highway / transport schemes and new developments.

- **Other stakeholder forums (e.g. LTB)**

- Try to get represented, or else to find an ally who is on them.
- Opportunities to forge alliances.

- **Joint Health & Wellbeing Boards**

- Worthwhile if you have someone with a health background, else try to find an ally who is on the JHWB to make the case for cycling / active travel.

- **Local Access Forum**

- Input into Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). See CTC briefings on Local Access Forums and RoWIPs



# Local transport bodies (LTBs) and Local enterprise partnerships (LEPs)

- **Local Enterprise Partnerships**

- Responsible for Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs), i.e. they now hold the purse-strings for significant infrastructure funding, including what used to be the Local Transport Plan (LTP) major schemes funding stream.
- Can be coalitions of LAs or single LAs.
- Determine sub-regional economic strategy.
- Can have a mix of public, business and LA members. No requirement for public involvement or democratic accountability.

- **Local Transport Bodies**

- Advise LEPs on regional transport spending priorities.
- Can be coalitions of LAs or single LAs. Often same as LEP but not necessarily.
- Must work together to divide up DfT's regional major scheme allocations.
- Can have a mix of public, business and LA members, but Cllrs must have overall control.
- Labour has pledged to abolish them.



# Forging alliances

- Environmental / sustainable transport groups: Living Streets, Sustrans, FoE, CPRE
- Disability access groups. Have extra legal provisions as well (e.g ramped access)
- Amenity groups: Neighbourhood forums, Civic Trust
- PT operators
- Businesses / business associations (incl Business Improvement Districts)
- Schools, colleges
- Access groups: Ramblers, British Horse Society



# Consultations

- Are they real or token consultations?
- If token, what will you do if (when) you're ignored?  
Publicity? Ombudsman complaint? Legal challenge?  
Or get on with something more useful?
- If you think a legal challenge may follow, prepare your arguments carefully (see part 2).
- Otherwise, think about publicity at the outset (ditto).
- **BUT: if the plans are good, you may wish to mobilise people to positively respond / defend the plans**



# Overall tips

- Make sure you understand people's roles/responsibilities, what power they have (or don't have).
- Have a clear sense of what you want. Communicate positively, don't just criticise. Visualisations have worked well for Bristol, Nottingham, London.
- Use the media to enlist support for your positive proposals / alternative to theirs. Don't just object. If possible, be visual.
- Look for allies both within and outside the Council. The Council isn't a single entity that's out to get you – many individuals with a range of views.
- **Cultivate cycle officer.** Try to strengthen their power, not undermine it by criticising them for wider LA failings.
- Make sure it's fun, and celebrate successes (however small). That way, more people will join you!

For more info see <https://www.ctc.org.uk/local-campaigners/ctc-local-campaigners-information-kit/working-local-government>



# Key policies / programmes to try and influence (1)

- **Local Transport Strategy**
  - Used to be 5-year terms. Now divided into long-term strategy (c15 years) and delivery plan (c3 years), updated as and when LA sees fit. Increasingly irrelevant.
- **Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)**
  - Set up by current Government, pledged to continue. LAs will receive capital for sustainable transport from Single Capital Pot (i.e. no requirement to spend it on sustainable transport) but DfT will match it with revenue funding if they do.
- **Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs)**
  - Drawn up by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), informed by Local Transport Boards. Mostly roads (see recent CPRE/CBT report and forthcoming CBT/Sustrans report). Why not area-wide active travel programmes, including cycle network dev't, cycle-friendly improvements to key junctions and major roads, and public realm improvements in town centres?



# Key policies / programmes to try and influence (2)

- **Development plans**
  - Historically these sought (in theory) to guide development to sustainable locations (e.g. near where people lived, good walk/cycle/PT accessibility), limit car parking, promote cycle parking. Also set policies on securing developer contributions (now the Community Infrastructure Levy, CIL). But Pickles’s “presumption of [supposedly] sustainable development” makes it hard for LAs to adopt good development plans even if they want to. He’s also trying to abolish parking controls / standards.
  - Process has also become far more complex and harder for public to engage.
  - Have a go if you’re brave!
- **Rights of Way Improvement Plans**
  - Opportunities to create coherent networks of bridleways / byways (i.e. RoWs that cyclists can use), to ensure they are well maintained, signed and promoted.

**See CTC’s briefings on national planning policy and rights of way improvement plans:**

[www.ctc.org.uk/campaignsbriefings](http://www.ctc.org.uk/campaignsbriefings)



# Publicity

- Communicate what you want (positive, visionary), not just what you object to. See CTC briefing on using the media in our local campaigners' toolkit: [www.ctc.org.uk/local-campaigners/ctc-local-campaigners-information-kit](http://www.ctc.org.uk/local-campaigners/ctc-local-campaigners-information-kit).
- Can you produce your own alternative designs?
- Involve allies where possible – don't battle single-handed.
- Don't be afraid to embarrass Cllrs / Snr officials who are obstructing you. Keep up the pressure, but don't back them into a corner – make sure there's a way they can let you 'win' without themselves appearing to 'lose'.
- Always celebrate success, giving Cllrs / officers credit to where credit is due (and occasionally where it isn't!)



# Ombudsman complaints or Legal challenges

- Legal challenges are time-consuming, costly and risky.
- Usually about process: e.g. failure to consult, failure to consider things they ought to have considered (Gvt or LA's own policies), or taking into consideration things that they ought not to have done (e.g. personal benefits/disbenefits for Cllrs!).  
(See [www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/fair\\_future/resource/right\\_to\\_challenge\\_24295.html](http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/fair_future/resource/right_to_challenge_24295.html)).
- Expect to spend £10K min, more like c£30-£50K if you loose
- Cyclists' Defence Fund may be able to help in strategically significant cases ([www.cyclistsdefencefund.org.uk](http://www.cyclistsdefencefund.org.uk)).
- However, an ombudsman complaint (also on process) is usually a better bet – cost-free! (See <http://www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint/>).



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