


CYCLE COMMITMENT

NEWS ANALYSIS BY CTC'S CAMPAIGNS DEPARTMENT

Active Travel

That's the name of a new Government strategy, published jointly by the Departments for Transport and Health. Cherry Allan comments

 CTC's been saying it for ages: the links between cycling and health are too strong to ignore. So it's reassuring to see that the terms 'active' and 'travel' have settled down so nicely together in the Government's strategic thinking. They've been flirting with each other seriously for some time but finally tied the knot in the Active Travel Strategy (England only), published by the Departments for Transport and of Health combined.

The Government originally intended to produce a National Cycle Plan separately from the Active Travel Strategy. In the event, however, they must have concluded that there was no parting the Strategy from the Plan – so the result is a single publication that goes

'Does the risk of cycling outweigh the health benefits?' it asks. 'No.'

as far as to declare a 'Decade of Cycling.'

This is validation for campaigners like CTC and a credit to the receptive Government officials responsible for the document. We all agree that cycling and walking is healthy stuff, the sort of activity that most people can fit into their existing daily routines for travel, and is easier to accommodate than add-on exercise.

Cycling has declined to less than 2% of trips in Britain nowadays. Car-centric habits, poor road design and unenlightened decision makers are just a few of the things it blames. So what's the Strategy going to do about it?

Safety

We're delighted to see it firmly dismiss the hoary claim that cycling is too dangerous to



Cycling levels in the Netherlands are high because the government created the right environment for cycling

encourage: 'Does the safety risk of cycling outweigh the health benefits?' it asks. 'The answer is, quite clearly, no: the actual risk of cycling is tiny.' It isn't complacent about road safety, though. It backs the role of cycle training, a better road environment, including more 20mph schemes and also says: 'fewer cars and more pedestrians and cyclists can make the roads safer for all users.' CTC finds this especially welcome, given that one of our high-profile campaigns last year was to spread the 'safety in numbers' message (www.ctc.org.uk/safetyinnumbers).

Satisfaction

We're also pleased that the Strategy commits to something else we've been pressing for: collecting evidence on how satisfied people are with the provision for walking and cycling where they live. Without knowing what does and doesn't work, there won't be much to go on.

Environment

The document appreciates the contribution that more cycling and walking would make towards our Climate Change Act goals: 'With 21% of domestic greenhouse gas emissions coming from transport, of which 58% come from the private car,' it says, 'road transport has a major contribution to make.'

Economy

The Strategy is clear on just how financially prudent it is to promote cycling and walking. Citing a recent Cabinet Office Strategy Unit report on Urban Transport, it points out that the costs to society due to excess delays, road casualties, poor air quality and physical inactivity are all of a similar magnitude:

around £10bn each. CTC believes that, for several decades, urban transport planning has been dominated by attempts to tackle congestion through increased road capacity, at the expense of the other three problems. So we are pleased the Strategy recommends walking and cycling as a solution to all four.

Delivery

The Strategy identifies an array of delivery channels, including Local Transport Plans, the health sector, businesses, schools, colleges and, in order to tackle the built environment, developers and planners. All this is illustrated by a variety of projects to date, not least Cycling England's Cycling Towns and Cities. It also identifies the value of working with third sector organisations like CTC.

But...

As the Strategy acknowledges, cycling success in the Netherlands – levels are at 26% – didn't happen by magic. And it wasn't because the weather is better there either (it isn't). It was the result of a conscious decision to create the right environment for cycling.

While this strategy signals, we hope, the most conscious decision yet from the Government to do the same, new decisions need new funding. This will depend on the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review – due after the next election.

Consequently, CTC wants to ensure robust cross-party support for the Strategy's goals in the next parliament, via our Vote Bike campaign (see page 46). Without any money to give them a good start and some new initiatives to stop them from running out of steam, 'active' and 'travel' might find life together too hard. And we don't want that.

For more information, see www.ctc.org.uk/activetravelstrategy