**Cycling UK Comments to the Lancaster Northern Relief Road Review**

**Summary**

Lancaster has experienced a considerable reduction in levels of cycling over the past decade, and whilst some of this decline may be due to the construction of the Lancaster Northern Relief Road it is unlikely that this is the only factor. Cycling UK believes that gradual changes to the road network in and around Lancaster city centre have also progressively made Lancaster more dangerous, and therefore considerably more undesirable, for cycling. This has resulted in considerably lower levels of cycling in Lancaster compared to a decade ago. There are also several issues identified in the Lancaster Northern Relief Road that the council should aim to avoid in future projects. Several recommendations are made for the future to avoid similar problems from being repeated.

Cycling UK recommends that Lancashire County Council adopts a road danger reduction approach rather than the conventional “road safety” based approach, which seeks to achieve safer roads for all users by reducing the sources of danger on the roads.

Cycling UK recommends that where an entirely new junction is built, or an existing junction completely remodelled, key routes for walking and cycling are laid as tunnels under the junction prior to its construction, rather than providing multiple stage crossings at the same level as the motorised traffic.

Cycling UK recommends that where practical cycleways along roads with high traffic speeds (> 60 km/h) should be located with some space between them and the traffic lanes to improve the user experience.

Cycling UK recommends that any staff involved in the design of major active travel projects should be required to ride existing routes so that they can identify problem areas and avoid similar ones in future projects.

Cycling UK recommends that future Park and Ride schemes are fully integrated into the local transport system, with appropriate facilities for a variety of modes of transport into the city centre.

**Levels of Cycling in Lancaster**

A 20% reduction in the numbers of cyclists using Millenium Bridge by 2019, and a 67% reduction in the number of cyclists using Millenium Bridge by 2023 is a clear demonstration that the changes have made driving for short journeys that could be cycled much more convenient, and that as time has gone on cycling in and around Lancaster has become more undesirable, leading to an increasing decline over time. Lancashire County Council and Lancaster City Council both noted in 2020 that levels of cycling in Lancaster were declining,[[1]](#footnote-1) and that the numbers of cyclists being injured in Lancaster were increasing. For the UK overall there has been a small overall increase in the distances cycled, and cycling trips has remained relatively stable over the last 20 years.[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, the opening of the Northern Relief Road was a step change to traffic conditions in Lancaster, and there have not been any other major changes to the transport network in Lancaster since that time. Whilst it is not unreasonable to believe that the initial 20% reduction in cycle traffic at this location may provide an approximate representation of how many journeys that were previously cycled are now being driven it is difficult to understand why the following 5 years would result so much of an additional decline in cycling levels. This does not appear to be as a result of the opening of the Northern Relief Road.

The focus on this one monitoring location is considered to be appropriate because this is by far the busiest location monitored for cyclists even after the huge decline cycle traffic since 2013. The next busiest locations are Skerton Road and Skerton Bridge, both of which have less than 20% of the number of cyclists recorded at the Millennium Bridge site, and both of these sites have also seen a considerable decline in cycling numbers. It is noted that pedestrian counts at this location have also declined considerably. However most of the other locations have observed an increase in pedestrian traffic, especially Skerton Bridge, and this location has also seen a reduction in motor traffic. It is possible that the reduction in motor traffic now makes this route less unsuitable for pedestrians, and that the increase in pedestrian traffic is related to existing pedestrian traffic that was using Millennium Bridge but is now using less inconvenient routes. Although by 2023 a reduction in cycling levels had been noted at all locations, the relative decline was smallest at Skerton Bridge

Millennium Bridge is a pedestrian and cycle only route that allows the river to be crossed without interacting with traffic, although it is necessary to at least cross the one way system to reach Lancaster city centre. However, because this is a key access route for pedestrians and cyclists into the city centre, as well as its proximity to the centre of Lancaster, counts of pedestrians and cyclists at this location are likely to provide a good indication of level in the city centre overall. Whilst Cycling UK have some concerns that the especially rapid decline in cycling levels may not be due solely to the opening of the Northern Relief Road, the fact that the data was included in the summary presentation by Lancashire County Council indicates that it is a relevant issue to raise.

Given that such a significant decline in active travel within a city centre location has significant implications for public health, through both reduced levels of physical activity for the individuals that do not cycle, or cycle less, as well as the increase in air pollution that results from additional car journeys, this finding indicates that there is a significant additional burden on local healthcare services as a result of these changes. Preliminary Cycling UK estimates based on the Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT)[[3]](#footnote-3) for walking and cycling by WHO indicate that the decline in cycling levels could have resulted in additional pressures on local healthcare services to a value of approximately £5 million, in addition to increased CO2 emissions and air pollution.

Whilst the motor vehicle monitoring data appears to suggest that there has been little change to the traffic situation in central Lancaster the construction of the Northern Relief Road appears to have been the only significant change to the roads locally. It therefore seems reasonable to consider that whatever has happened to the traffic in Lancaster city centre itself, either as a result of the implementation of this scheme or other factors, has had a considerable effect on the suitability of the road conditions for cycling in Lancaster city centre, and this has continued to worsen over time. Whilst there has been a reduction in the numbers of pedestrians using the Millennium Bridge this has been modest compared to the effect on numbers of cyclists, and has been compensated for by increases in pedestrian traffic elsewhere. This suggests that the cause of the dramatic reduction in cycle traffic is related to the road conditions, which are experienced to a much greater extent by people cycling than walking.

It is also noted that during the period covered by the monitoring Lancashire County Council have introduced some cycle lanes that did not meet the recommended minimum standards at the time (e.g. South Road), and have made changes that affect cycle lanes on King Steet and Thurnam Street by removing hatched buffer strips between the cycle lanes and the main carriageways. These modifications mean that the adjacent traffic lane is both closer to people riding bikes, and wider than it was previously (or would have been if guidelines had been followed) which may both increase traffic speeds and the likelihood of vehicles passing people cycling too closely. Cycling UK is concerned that these changes may have been made in the name of “Road Safety” to deter people from cycling along convenient main road routes in the city centre in the hope that if fewer people cycle these routes there will be fewer injuries to people cycling. This is not inconsistent with the monitoring data shown by Lancashire County Council.

Notably, there have been similar measures involving short sections of advisory cycle lanes on Skerton Road in the last year. This is especially concerning because cycling monitoring locations on Skerton Road and Skerton Bridge had shown the least reduction in cycling levels of all of the monitoring locations in Lancaster based on both the 2018 and 2023 data. Whilst these measures may be introduced under the banner of “road safety” none of the changes noted comply with any of the current guidance for the provision for cycling on roads, and especially on roads with such high speeds and volumes of traffic, despite a claimed commitment by Lancashire County Council to the current cycle infrastructure design guidance (LTN 1/20).[[4]](#footnote-4) Indeed current guidance for cycling describes these kinds of interventions as “**suitable for few people and will exclude most potential users and/or have safety concerns**”. It may be no coincidence that focusing solely on infrastructure that will **exclude most potential users** in and around Lancaster has resulted in such a considerable decline in cycling levels.

Regardless of the cause of these changes to cycling levels it is clear that the current approach towards identifying possible implications of changes to the roads for cycling, and evaluating their suitability and potential consequences for cycling is not appropriate. Cycling UK therefore recommends that rather than continuing to follow the principles of “Road Safety” Lancashire County Council should adopt an approach based on Road Danger Reduction[[5]](#footnote-5), which seeks to reduce the causes of potential harm rather than to simply minimise the numbers of casualties. Consideration could be given to trialling this approach within Lancaster if there are concerns about its suitability more widely within Lancashire.

**Recommendation**

**Cycling UK recommends that Lancashire County Council adopts a road danger reduction based approach rather than the conventional “road safety” based approach, which seeks to achieve safer roads for all users by reducing the sources of danger on the roads.**

**Walking and Cycling at Junctions on the Lancaster Northern Relief Road**

As noted by Dynamo, the junctions on the Lancaster Northern Relief Road appear to have been designed specifically to be as inconvenient as possible for both walking and cycling, and crossing any of them requires multiple stages and takes a significant amount of time.

Cycling UK therefore recommends that where entire junctions are remodelled that a number of key potential walking and cycling routes are identified and tunnels are laid before the rest of the construction is undertaken to provide a direct and traffic free route across the entire junction without any need to wait at crossing points. This would mean that cyclists and pedestrians could use the junctions conveniently and without delay or any interaction with motor vehicles. This approach obviously requires that the key routes are identified prior to construction starting, and that all possible routes across the junction can be catered for.

**Recommendation**

**Cycling UK recommends that where an entirely new junction is built, or an existing junction completely remodelled, key routes for walking and cycling are laid as tunnels under the junction prior to its construction, rather than providing multiple stage crossings at the same level as the motorised traffic.**

**Experience of Cycling on the Lancaster Northern Relief Road Cycleway**

The cycleway adjacent to the new road is unpleasant to ride due to its close proximity to very fast traffic, although for the vast majority of the route there is more than enough space within the overall workings for the cycleway to have been positioned a much greater distance from the roadway. This would make the experience of using the route much less unpleasant. This would also reduce the likelihood of vehicles being parked on the cycleway, and reduce the amount of debris reaching the cycleway from the road.

Recommendation

**Cycling UK recommends that where practical cycleways along roads with high traffic speeds (> 60 km/h) should be located with some space between them and the traffic lanes to improve the user experience.**

**Usefulness of the Lancaster Northern Relief Road Cycleway**

The cycleway on the Lancaster Northern Relief Road is little used because, as noted by Dynamo, the junctions are both time consuming and inconvenient to use, and the route is not especially well connected with the limited surrounding network (such as it exists). Consequently, the route has seen extremely little use for either walking or cycling. Potential users wishing to park at the Park and Ride car park and cycle either towards Lancaster or Morecambe are faced with an extremely inconvenient crossing to access either of the cycle routes, and users wishing to cycle to Morecambe are faced with difficulty in reaching Morecambe road at the far end of the route. Similar problems are also encountered for users wishing to continue towards Heysham.

Cycling UK recommends that proper consideration is given to how new cycle routes are integrated into both existing and potential future cycling networks so that the usability of routes is maximised. Designers should identify start and destination locations for journeys that might use the potential routes and be familiar with the issues that people will encounter when using the routes. It is also important that the appropriate lessons are learnt from past failures so that mistakes are not repeated. We recommend that staff involved in the design of any significant active travel projects should be required to ride existing cycle routes, especially ones with problems such as safety issues or lack of directness, so that they can appreciate the importance of providing facilities that serve the needs of their users. For example the route between the Park and Ride car park and Northgate, and the one way system in Lancaster, are both existing routes that present a variety of different challenges to potential users. If Lancashire County Council officers have direct experience of these routes then they will also be better placed to make practical recommendations for their improvement.

Current cycling infrastructure design guidance provides useful information about how to consider the issues of convenience and directness in the planning of cycle routes. It also provides a Cycling level of Service Tool that may also be of use in evaluating existing routes to identify important problems with them such that the same mistakes are not repeated on future routes.

**Recommendation**

**Cycling UK recommends that any staff involved in the design of any significant active travel projects should be required to ride existing routes so that they can identify problem areas and avoid similar ones in future projects.**

Park and Ride Scheme

The Park and Ride Scheme appears to be little used, presumably due to the additional convenience and modest cost of driving into the city centre and parking closer to the destination. This is compounded by the extremely inconvenient nature of the junction for cyclists, meaning that parking at the Park and Ride and continuing the journey by bike is unlikely to be a practical option for many people, despite the close proximity to a good quality and direct cycle route into the city centre, and a similar route towards Morecambe and Heysham. Park and ride schemes should be fully integrated into the local transport system, with appropriate facilities (e.g. secure cycle parking, and convenient access routes) for a variety of modes of transport into the city centre, and particularly that routes in such close proximity to good quality cycle routes should have convenient and high quality links to those routes to facilitate their use. The failure to recognise this at the Lancaster Park and Ride is a clear example of a missed opportunity by Lancashire County Council to maximise the transport options available to people travelling into Lancaster.

**Recommendation**

**Cycling UK recommends that future Park and Ride schemes are fully integrated into the local transport system, with appropriate facilities for a variety of modes of transport into the city centre.**

1. https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/920691/2517-id-001-08-movement-strategy\_compressed.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2022/national-travel-survey-2022-active-travel#:~:text=There%20has%20been%20a%20general,(54%20miles%20per%20person). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://heatwalkingcycling.org/#homepage [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycle-infrastructure-design-ltn-120 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://rdrf.org.uk/road-danger-reduction/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)