**This is a written response from newcycling.org to the urban congestion inquiry** [**http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/transport-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/urban-congestion-16-17/commons-written-submission-form/**](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/transport-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/urban-congestion-16-17/commons-written-submission-form/)

**We are a constituted organisation entirely run by volunteers. We formed in 2010 to address economic, social and spatial inequalities in the transport system and to lobby Newcastle council for decent cycling infrastructure. Our organisation has 1,600 local members. We submit this response on behalf of our membership.**

**Our response**

* **We agree that traffic congestion is a serious problem that must be solved**
* **However the current way congestion is addressed, institutionally and technically, is not right**
* **A lot of things are done in the name of congestion relief. One is road building. Seeking congestion relief through increasing road capacity for motor vehicles however defeats the original objective. It will almost certainly increase motor traffic and causes new congestion, as numerous studies have shown - more notably perhaps Cairns et al (1998), Duranton & Turner (2011), SACTRA (1994).**
* **Alternatives to driving are often not available**
* **We need new practices including national standards for cycle infrastructure design**

Unfortunately we see “road building” under the banner of congestion relief applied in Newcastle time and time again. The most recent plans we have seen to that effect are for the so called Northern Access Corridor. It might be worthy of note that the council’s rhetoric also is routinely coupled with the headings of “air quality” and “road safety” improvements too. Just like “road building” these can be equally conflated issues only addressed in short-term ways and ultimately counterproductive. Another conflation is between road building and jobs and economic growth. Projections rarely live up to their expectations. Often monitoring and evaluation does not even happen.

We are missing the bullseye for a sustainable future and a fairer transport mix by a very long shot.

The right approach would be if the transport authority would design for motor traffic reduction, particularly private cars. That way the city, citizens and the transport system stay viable in the long term, competitive in the market, tackling cleaner air and noise issues and the mounting public health epidemic. The list of positive returns for that transition are endless. Yet discussing with the council these paybacks or discussing the steps that are needed for a transport transition has proved near impossible. Old practices are strong, often automatically executed and hard to challenge. Consultations are held for box-ticking reasons not for public engagement or to foster public debate.

A new approach would necessitate having a fresh look at urban space, so that in future it can be used truly efficiently. One of the sorely missing parts in Newcastle’s transport mix is cycling. Cycling is an eminently conceivable mode for short journeys, but only if the right infrastructure exists. Building cycleways to enable short journeys done by bike has vast potential, but requires a paradigm shift away from the practice of providing exclusively for the private car. The practices and tools that need modernising are transport planning, traffic modelling, and highway engineering, and perhaps to a lesser extent the subsidiary practice of road safety.

To reduce congestion we must reduce car use. We can reduce car use by making alternatives available. Part of this is done through prudent network planning (including a coherent cycle network consistent of good quality infrastructure), putting together a car parking strategy (both spatial and fiscal) and bus route consolidation. This is fully in council’s responsibilities, only that the practices being used are outdated. This means council plans are often heading in the wrong direction, into perpetual gridlock rather than planning for car reduction.

Census 2011 tells us that Newcastle’s households are 42% car free (see newcycling, 2013). Cycling potential is colossal: 41% of car commutes are under five kilometres, totalling 20,000 residents (see Leyendecker, 2015). Many of those commutes could be cycled with the right infrastructure in place. Cycling improves space efficiency.

**What we need for Newcastle**

Without clear national steer progression into a new direction will be nearly impossible. National direction is needed for national cross-cutting policy based on urban wellbeing, health and liveability (air, noise, and environment) as well as **new practices** to facilitate the transition. Given the potential that the expansion of cycling offers in Newcastle (and other cities too, no doubt) we would immensely benefit from national **cycle infrastructure design standards** and a national effort to skill up and train council officers, and politicians, on sustainable transport planning and motor traffic reduction measures.

Committee of newcycling

On 24 November 2016

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