

## Cycling petition

Speech at city council meeting on 02.06.2010



Thank you for having me here this evening, it's greatly appreciated. And it is a wonderful opportunity for me to talk to you about cycling – a matter very close to my heart. It is a decent activity and deserves some due respect and recognition from everyone.

I wouldn't stand here tonight if it weren't for all those hundreds of brave Newcastle cyclists who also – just like me – want cycling to be safer in Newcastle city centre. I will not forget those, and would very much warmly include those, who would like to cycle but currently feel it's not safe enough to do so.

Our petition simply reads 'I support the petition to Newcastle City Council to provide safe cycling routes through the city centre'. The petition received an overwhelming response of 803 supporters in only four weeks.

Could I ask the question – by show of hands – who has cycled here today? *A handful of arms went up.* I think we can improve on that.

The petition and associated survey clearly demonstrate that a strong cycling community already exists despite the adverse cycling conditions in Newcastle city centre. The petition also shows that there is excellent potential to build on this and increase the numbers of cyclists, if more and safer provision of cycling facilities could be made available in the city centre. This would help to achieve Newcastle City Council's vision which describes Newcastle as a 'vibrant, inclusive, safe, sustainable and modern European city'.

The communication lines, roles, responsibilities and duties are unclear to the public.

People are passed from 'pillar to post' when trying to communicate with the council on the subject of cycling.

Cycling ticks many boxes: health, transport, sustainability, climate change and community. Cycling is a community oriented activity, where you do get that all important eye contact (especially comparative to driving a car). That it appears on so many agendas is perversely one of the impediments to change. With suitable organised oversight however the shared benefits could be realised and in particular could lead to funding opportunities for improvements.

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We are therefore calling for...

- Implementation of the strategies and policies that already in place.
- Education of public servants (transportation, planners, engineers, project managers) and provision of a clear framework for cycling with clear lines of responsibilities and communications.
- Reaffirmation of the role of the cycling officer and councillors' cycling champion.
- Reaffirmation of the cycling forum as to its purpose and level of responsibility, the forum would benefit heavily from a 'constitution statement' which must be ratified by the executive managers/board.
- Newcastle requires an adopted and relevant cycling strategy immediately.
- Identification of a strategic cycling network, preferably continuous and segregated from motorised traffic where possible, and firm integration of this network into the city planning context. Traffic monitoring and a further cycling survey could be considered to establish where areas of conflicts are, route preferences and find a truly integrated solution. Integrated transport. Implementation and construction of the network. Consideration to retrofitting cycling facilities at New Eldon Square, now.
- The petition and survey show that cyclists would like to be more involved, and feel they have not been considered or consulted sufficiently. Council officers making cycling decisions should be cycling themselves to understand the benefits and dangers of cycling.

Could I please ask everyone whether you have received a copy of the handout please? It contains some further more detailed information and also the website link to the full petition report which you may find of interest to read.

Thanks again for having me here tonight and thanks also to all those brave Newcastle cyclists out there. Thank you.

*Formal hand-over of petition to Lord Mayor followed.*