



SAFER CYCLING IN DURHAM

contact@trustpathways.com

Durham County Council
County Hall
Durham
DH1 5UQ

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Dear Sir or Madam,

North Road bus station consultation

I write on behalf of the Trust Pathways, an organisation set up to encourage collaboration on creating safe cycle networks in Durham City and the surrounding area. Members of our group have attended the exhibition and examined the plans, and indeed commented at the time of the previous consultation in 2014.

Since the last consultation exercise in May 2014, various initiatives have changed the context for designing for cycling in Durham City:

- A two-day course on cycle infrastructure design delivered to officers by Phil Jones Associates.
- A review of Durham City Strategic Cycle Routes by Transport Initiatives completed.
- Adoption of the Active Travel (Wales) Act design guidance and audit methodology by the County Council's sustainable transport team.
- Publication of the Government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy giving a new impetus to providing for non-motorised transport.
- Durham City Sustainable Transport Strategy produced in conjunction with the consultants JMP.

Despite all of these initiatives, the only change that seems to have been made to the designs, as far as cycling provision is concerned, is a reduction of the length of the taper on the left-turning bus lane on the eastbound A690 approaching the junction with North Road, which was highlighted as a safety concern. There has been no engagement with cycling groups, not even the Council's own Durham City Cycle Forum, since the previous proposals were discussed.

As in 2014, the only cycle route marked on the plans is the diversion of the NCN14 which currently passes along Atherton Street and over the mouth of the bus station, and which has been rerouted to the pavement on the NW side of the A690 under the viaduct. If the Council thinks that this is the only cycle flow which needs to be considered and accommodated, this is lamentable.

Suggestions

- Fundamentally, the Council should be identifying the likely cycle flows through the area, and assessing the quality of the provision resulting from the plans according to the Active Travel (Wales) Act audit methodology which the Council has adopted. The resulting assessments should be published, shared with cycling groups, and then used to determine where improvements are needed and what measures may be taken. This activity should be scheduled with plenty of time allowed to modify the final engineering drawings prior to a planning application being brought forward.
- The origins and destinations to be considered should include:
 - Aykley Heads, St Leonard's School and Western Hill via North Road
 - The railway station
 - The east of the city via Milburngate Bridge
 - The city centre via Framwellgate Bridge and the North Road shops
 - The terraced streets of Mitchell Street, Atherton Street, etc.
 - Flass Street and Waddington Street
 - The west of the city, and the University, via the A690 and Margery Lane.
 - The bus station itself, for people needing to journey by cycle and then bus.
- Each possible pair of these should be considered in each direction, and the cycle routes assessed.
- Given the volume of traffic on the A690, protected space for cycling is imperative, and this should be separate from pedestrians. This is recommended in the Active Travel (Wales) Act design guidance and acknowledged in the *JMP Issues and Opportunities* report of November 2015.
- The Council should consider reallocating road space by reducing lane widths from the standard 3.65m to 3m. Lane widths between 3.2m and 3.9m are considered dangerous for cyclists because of the temptation for motorists to overtake in lane. The space gained might be sufficient to provide protected separate space for cycling. The measure would also help regulate speeds: there is a strong case for a 20mph limit, as found on the A6 in the centre of Salford, to make the road safer for cycling and walking.

The remainder of this response goes into the problems with the plans in detail, but in essence it should be up to the Council to audit the routes through the site, and engage with cycling groups to identify changes to address any shortcomings. The vision for the wider cycle network must be recognised and the junction redesigned from scratch if necessary to facilitate the vision.

National Cycle Network route (NCN 14)

The proposals show this route coming down the A690 from the Sutton Street junction via the existing pavement by the railway viaduct, and then crossing in three stages (at crossings shared with pedestrians) to gain the south side of the A690, rejoining the existing NCN route past the footbridge and along Castle Chare. Problems with this proposal:

- Pavements with use shared between pedestrians and cyclists are unpopular with cyclists and pedestrians alike. Elderly people feel particularly vulnerable in this

environment. As this would be the only footway along this stretch of the A690 it would be preferable to segregate pedestrians and cyclists.

- Segregating pedestrians and cyclists is particularly important on a route which has a pronounced downhill gradient. Cyclists would be aiming to gain momentum going down-hill. Combine this with the blind exits that emerge from steps the other side of the viaduct in one or two places and you have a real problem with perceptions of safety.
- At the new junction replacing the roundabout, the route is shown crossing to Castle Chare in three stages. An important principle of promoting cycling is to ensure that all cycle routes are at least as convenient as the main road alternative. At these traffic lights, the road traffic waits for a green light once, and then proceeds all the way through the junction. Potentially having to wait three times to continue along NCN 14 is a profound disincentive to cyclists.
- Between two of the stages a staggered route is shown, typical of the kind of provision which relies on guard rails to control pedestrians in a car-priority environment. These are hard to negotiate by bike. Routes for pedestrians and cyclists should be designed to be straight and direct, with users not having to wait several times to complete a crossing of the road.

We are aware that the County Council has aspirations to re-route the NCN route via Lowes Barn Bank, Prebends Bridge and the Bailey, but there will remain the need for a good network towards Crossgate Moor and Langley Park, so the issues with the current route will, in any case, need to be addressed.

Atherton Street

At present, cyclists coming from the east may choose to pass under Hopper House or past the back of the bus station and join Atherton Street to cycle up the hill towards the A690 junction at the end of Margery Lane. This offers a useful quiet alternative to the A690 for people cycling to the University science site. Atherton Street joins Allergate and from the end of Allergate up the A690 there is an on-road cycle lane as far as the traffic lights.

In the proposals, Atherton Street is cut at the bottom end of the terraced housing, with no through route being available. This removes a safe route up the hill for cyclists. The proposed shared-use pavement on the viaduct side of the A690 does not address the need, as it would involve multiple crossings of the main road to complete the journey.

North Road

At present cyclists can travel two-way along North Road from the roundabout as far as Neville Street, and then one-way from there to the junction with Milburngate. This gives convenient access to shops. It is not clear from the plans whether cycling will be allowed in the newly pedestrianised area in front of North Road Methodist Church. The visualisations displayed in the exhibition were completely devoid of cyclists, even on the roads or marked cycle routes.

We would urge that cycling be allowed in this area, because the alternative, of cyclists using the new route round the back of North Road Methodist Church, would be less direct and less safe. There should be a track of between 2.5m and 3m, with a shallow kerb to assist blind and partially-sighted pedestrians in identifying the cycle route.

Access to the railway station

At present, motor vehicles coming down the A690 from Neville's Cross travelling towards the

railway station (or further up North Road towards County Hall) will usually continue on the A690 as far as the present roundabout and turn left up North Road there. In the plans, this movement appears to be prohibited, except to buses. This will mean a great deal more traffic passing via Sutton Street, which is currently relatively quiet for a city-centre street. Sutton Street is used a lot in both directions by cyclists, however, as it avoids the roundabout and part of the hill. So this change will make the key route to the railway station less safe for cyclists.

For a cyclist approaching from Milburngate Bridge, whether via the main road or via NCN 14 along Castle Chare, there is little or no assistance if the destination is the railway station. On the main road the cyclist has to move into the right hand lane approaching the lights, which is hard to do in heavy traffic after travelling slowly uphill. On the route via Castle Chare, the cyclist may proceed on the pavement under the footbridge, and then cross two stages of pedestrian crossing, presumably starting to cross the third but leaving it to rejoin the road. Cycle routes should be at least as direct and convenient as the motor vehicle route, and this fails that test.

Before the A690 was driven through, Castle Chare used to connect to the station approach road part way up, and there is now the footbridge on roughly the same alignment. Would it be feasible to provide a shared pedestrian and cycle bridge instead? How useful this would be would depend on the design of the rest of the network, but grade separation of cycles from the road network is often used in the Netherlands to improve facilities and should be borne in mind in this design, particularly as the topography could actually be of assistance in this case.

Other issues

Cyclists will be vulnerable cycling across the entry mouth of the new bus station, which is very wide, and at the new junction further along the A690 where buses can exit the bus station or enter the new route through to North Road. There is a very long distance shown between the stop line heading south-west at that junction and the mouth of the new road. This would present grave problems of signal timing for any cyclist passing this light towards the end of the phase.

With poor quality cycle provision as currently exemplified by the plans, many cyclists will continue to use the main road, so the argument that “the cyclists should be on the pavement on the NW side of the A690” does not deal with the safety issue.

Yours faithfully,

Matthew Phillips