

Transform Oxford – Cyclox’s position

It is exciting that a pedestrian-friendly vision for Oxford is at long last emerging. But Transform Oxford must not present barriers to the 20,000+ cyclists without whom Oxford’s transport network would collapse.

Transform Oxford’s “pedestrianisation” could entail limiting cyclists to a few dedicated cycle routes through the city centre and require cyclists to dismount in other “pedestrianised” roads. However, there is good reason to believe that cyclist–pedestrian segregation is unnecessary, and that cross-town bike highways might not be the best way forward. In Cambridge, and in other European cities where there are more cyclists than in Oxford, walkers and cyclists share most city centre streets and the sharing works well.

Most cyclist–pedestrian conflict (in fact most highway “conflict”) stems from the territorialism that drivers, cyclists and walkers feel when they are given “their” piece of road/footway. When others stray into “their” territory they get annoyed and problems can arise. But if you create a “shared space” environment in which no one mode has absolute right of way, then the territorialism is dissolved and all road users tend to proceed with due care for those around them. In Oxford itself the Transport and Road Research Laboratory carried out extensive real-time studies looking for conflict between cyclist and pedestrian and found none (TAL 09/93: Cycling in Pedestrian Areas www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roads/tpm/tal/cyclefacilities/cyclinginpedestrianareas or <http://tinyurl.com/djqr7g>). Transform Oxford offers the perfect opportunity for a bus-free city centre to become attractive spaces in which pedestrians and cyclists share a motor-free thoroughfare. Intelligent designs can eliminate pedestrian–cyclist conflict, leaving the city’s cheapest and greenest modes of transport to co-exist in peace.

In fact, maximising the routes that bikes can use (and share with pedestrians) would have the effect of diluting the concentration of bicycles if they were only allowed to use a few key routes. In other words, if cyclists can cycle along Queen Street, Broad Street/George Street and Magdalen St, there will be fewer of them concentrated on each route, providing a better experience for pedestrians as well as cyclists.

James Styring
Chair, Cyclox - the cycling campaign for Oxford
07792 375423 www.cyclox.org

19 February 2009