

Options for the Development of Cycle Facilities in and around Exeter

At the Exeter Cycle Forum Meeting held on 16 June 2015 an exercise was undertaken to explore options for the development of the Exeter Cycle Network over the next 20 years.

Below are

- The brief for the Exercise
- The notes produced by each of the four teams (North, South, East and West), and
- Additional notes provided by those unable to attend the meeting.

The four teams each annotated a map showing the changes to the Network that they would favour.

Options for the Development of Cycle Facilities in and around Exeter

A number of individuals and organisations are becoming more and more concerned about the impact of the increasing population of Exeter. Many believe that the rapid increase in population is not being matched by appropriate levels of investment in infrastructure. For example Exeter Civic Society have stated

“There are concerns about the impact that new residential developments will have on our roads with an increase in traffic congestion in the City, especially those pinch points such as Countess Wear roundabout and Exe Bridges, where there doesn’t appear to be any obvious solution. Councils have done their best to reduce car journeys but there does need to be a significant step-change to ensure we can all move around the City more reasonably as Exeter’s population grows?” - Press Release Feb 2014

The Civic Society has conducted its own evaluation of a wide range of options and has concluded that the only option likely to have an impact in the short term is encouraging more cycling and walking.

Exeter has a population of about 120,000. In the Netherlands cities of this size invest €30 per person per year on cycling infrastructure. This equates to approximately £51M over a 20 year period. For a more modest £10 per person per year (*as promised by some UK politicians*) the sum would be £24M over 20 years.

“The Conservative Party aims to increase funding for cycling to £10 per person per year and to double levels of cycling by 2025” – David Cameron, April 2015.

The Exercise

At the meeting we will divide you into teams – and each team will design the Cycle Network you would like to see in Exeter in 2035 (20 years hence).

Funding

We are assuming that £20M will be made available over the 20 year period. *Note that this is a paper exercise and at present there is no commitment to anything like this sum!*

Costs

For this exercise we will assume the following costs

Construction Type	Cost	Details
Cycle Track in Urban Area	£ 0.5M / km	3 m wide surfaced shared use path
Cycle Track on Greenfield Site	£ 0.2M / km	3 m wide surfaced shared use path
Large Bridge (over Motorway, River Exe, Rail-line)	£ 4.0M	
Small Bridge (over Stream, Road)	£ 1.0M	
Pelican Crossing	£ 0.3M	Includes Island refuge

Your Task

Each team will be responsible for producing :-

- a map showing all the routes you plan together with associated infrastructure (bridges, crossings etc.),
- a list of your top 3 new routes,
- for your top 3 routes a list of reasons why this route is justified,

Team Name: South

Outline Route Description: Bonhay Road to St David's Station

Rationale: The road is busy and narrow with parked cars and a pinch point under the railway bridge. HGVs use the road often. The pavement is very narrow and cyclists use the footpath.

Why is this Route Important? Encourage cycle journeys to station and journeys by train.

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community? Links to existing cycle infrastructure.

Outline Route Description: Cowley Bridge to St David's between river and railway. Part of the route would be cantilevered off the flood wall under construction.

Rationale: Support cycle routes from Exeter to Crediton and Tiverton.

Why is this Route Important? Currently 2,000 people per day commute from Crediton into Exeter – many of these could/would cycle if there was a cycle route which was perceived to be safe.

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community? It would contribute to a reduction in motor vehicles in Exeter (and also in Crediton). The route would enable local people to access parts of the riverbank which are currently inaccessible.

Outline Route Description: Crossing points to enable pedestrians and cyclists to cross every arm of Countess Wear roundabout.

Rationale: To prevent need to divert to other crossing points further up or down the road.

Why is this Route Important? There are existing facilities surrounding the roundabout but few crossing points.

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community? Gives people on foot and on bikes priority over vehicles and connects communities/facilities on either side.

Additional Notes:

1. Route from river plus Topsham Road – Matford Lane junction – no direct route in at this point – could route through to bottom of Magdalen Road and join existing network near Law Courts. It's difficult to cross the road from Trews Wear to Matford Lane, etc.
2. Also continuing down Topsham Road leading uphill to roundabout at Southgate Hotel, very challenging to get up hill and across two lanes of traffic to turn right and onto Southernhay. Could look at improved route here – or the route above (from Matford Lane) would cut this hill off.
3. Removal of on road parking on Prince of Wales Road and Union Road to allow redesign of key corridor to University to enable more attractive route for cyclists (and potential for bus lane?). Removal of parking may also discourage car use in these residential areas.

Team Name: West

Outline Route Description: Heavitree Road & Pinhoe Road both One way with wide segregated cycle lanes.

Rationale: Reduce car entry to city. Reduce congestion. Park & Ride. Better buses. Direct A to B route for cyclists.

Why is this Route Important? Dangerous currently. Dissuade car use.

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community? Reduces pollution. Increases air quality. More people cycling to work and school.

Outline Route Description: Cowley Bridge to St David's Station over flood plain cycle route.

Rationale: Connection to Tiverton and Crediton.

Why is this Route Important? St Andrews Lane is a rat run.

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community? Link north to Exe Valley Trail and south to seaside.

Outline Route Description: Alphington old rail line route. Stoke Roundabout traffic lights. No parking Union Road.

Rationale:

Why is this Route Important? New developments in Alphington / South West

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community?

Team Name: North

NOTE: North's First Priority was Dutch Quality standards on all existing routes.

Outline Route Description: East West: Honiton Road, Heavitree Road, Western Way, Alphington Road -> Alphington.

Rationale: Unbroken direct route from edge of city to centre.

Why is this Route Important? People who travel distance must do it as smoothly as possible, not stop-starting.

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community? Discourages car use into city centre.

Outline Route Description: North – South and return Horseshoe: Pennsylvania/Mincinglake, Mount Pleasant, Polsloe, Barrack Road, Salmon Pool, Marsh Barton, Buddle Lane, Exwick Road.

Rationale: Need north-south route to link hospital as employer, University and good river route.

Why is this Route Important?

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community? Reduce stress on Exe Bridges by people using other bridges or Salmon Pool Lane.

Outline Route Description: Network from current patchwork network.

Rationale:

Why is this Route Important?

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community?

Team Name: East

Outline Route Description: Barrack Road to Mount Pleasant Roundabout with new junction at Five Ways, plus Toucan Crossing at Gras Lawn.

Rationale: Access to Valley Park, River Exe crossing point, RD&E and near to County Hall. North/South cross city route. Currently partly marked but ends/restarts -> needs complete route. Easier access from Alphington and new developments in the south of the city.

Why is this Route Important? -

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community?

This includes a new bridge over the railway into Marsh Barton parallel with the existing single lane bridge (alongside new rail station).

Outline Route Description: New cycle/walking bridge at Exe Bridges

Rationale: New development in south-west of Exeter will need access to city centre.

Why is this Route Important? Easier flow over Exe Bridges for new housing development.

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community?

Outline Route Description: Feeder routes from new developments into Alphington, linking into ST Thomas and Exe Bridges.

Rationale:

Why is this Route Important?

What Benefits does it have both to Neighbours and the Wider Cycling Community?

Additional Comments Received after Meeting

- The Quay is one of the most attractive and vibrant parts of the city, but is likely not discovered by many visitors. There are few signs from the High Street area down to it, the route is not attractive (who likes underpasses) and there is no cycling route back at all. This is the focal point of the Estuary Trail, but is not as accessible as it should be.
- Traffic speeds/driver attitude in Exeter - e.g. Cumberland Way, Prince Charles Road. On wider roads traffic travels faster, which is intimidating to new cyclists. These two example roads (currently) would have enough space for segregated cycle ways. But enforcement of the speed limits and zones within Exeter would improve the experience for cyclists and pedestrians alike.
- Issues on Sowton Industrial estate with speed and unobservant drivers. A cycle way along railway from Digby & Sowton to Honiton Road or Hill Barton Road would reduce conflict through this busy area and also encourage those who work there to cycle. More generally, use the (old and current) railway lines in Exeter to build paths alongside - elevated in cuttings if space an issue? There are relatively many railway lines in Exeter for a city of it's size.
- Lack of priority for cycle traffic becoming the norm even for new developments. In some cases routes that were at least direct are being chopped up and made more inconvenient. E.g. Cumberland Way/Tithebarn link road roundabout, the Pinn Lane crossing of Tithebarn Link road is offset. The good route from the Blue Bridge to Black Horse lane is being degraded by the building works, rather than the building works working around the cycle and pedestrian route. Also Airport Car Park.
- General consideration for cyclists (which also would benefit those with push chairs, in wheel chairs, disability scooters and of limited mobility) when doing works - ideally no diversions, or at least smooth, well signed and short if absolutely necessary. The Exhibition Way, Cumberland Way and Airport Car Parks are all examples where this did not occur at all, and vehicle traffic was prioritised at all cost.
- Improved signage of shared spaces (responsibility lies on all users) - or, even better, don't share, but provide separate facilities for cycles and pedestrians. Important through playing fields where children and animals add to the congestion on the paths. Commuting cyclists may want to move at speed - and may do so even if the conditions do not allow.
- Make a NETWORK, not just a couple of routes cobbled together. E3 and E4 are OK, but they are not new infrastructure - just (hopefully) quieter roads with some improved signage. There are lots of turns and junctions which slow progress. What is being prioritised - driver convenience, cyclist subjective safety?
- Think ahead - the amount of traffic in Exeter is rising - both commuting in from new communities and developments, and also from those within the city boundaries. These cannot be accommodated on the current road network - and so incentivise people from the outset to use non-personal motorised traffic. Train stations should be open when the first people move in; bus routes should be running when the first people move in; safe, direct and quick bicycle infrastructure should be ready when the first people move in (and not built over and degraded during ongoing works). If these are not there, then people have to use a car, and once they have bought the car, obtained a parking permit etc, why would they give it up?
- For the outlying villages, safe routes need to be provided - and also to avoid the contours that exist in Devon. There are back roads, but they are narrow, relatively hilly, and also have poor quality surfaces that limit speeds at night. The A- and B-roads have volumes of fast traffic (Tiverton, Cullompton, old A30 etc) but are flatter. Outside of the city boundaries, wide, segregated cycle paths next to the roads should be built - not shared use, as some cyclists who are likely to use these will want to travel at speed. These paths need to have priority at junctions.

I really do not think the problem lies with the infrastructure, even though it is inconsistent and badly thought out in many places; the problem is that the behaviour of a substantial proportion of wheeled road users of all sorts in Exeter is utterly appalling, and largely ignored (sometimes condoned or even encouraged) by police, IME. Until that is addressed, investment in 'infrastructure' is an utter waste of money; once that is addressed, less investment will be needed.

As someone that lives within biking distance of Tiverton Parkway, I could in principle use the train to get from home to a place of work in Exeter. However, there are some issues that prevent this from

being a viable means of commuting...

- Morning train service frequency. There is only 1 train an hour during the morning peak from Tivvy, arriving at St Davids at about 0815. Missing your 1-and-only train comes with a 1-hour penalty.
- Morning train accommodation. The above train is only a 2-coach train and rather full. There is a significant risk of not being able to get your bike on.
- Connections across town. The bike from St Davids to Digby is pretty hard work (and time consuming), especially if this is only a part of the journey. Changing trains at St Davids could help this, but the trains up the hill to Exeter Central are too rammed-full for bikes.
- The 2-bike solution. B&B for bikes at St Davids is pretty good, but is poor everywhere else. People need to be confident of bike security to explore this option.

Something I often think is severely lacking is facilities to lock bikes to in Exeter City Centre. Particularly at the Fore street end of the centre.

Just having more dotted all over the place would be good in my opinion.

The weaknesses and limitations of the present cycle network

- Away from the small number of properly engineered cycle paths (e.g. the popular- and heavily subscribed - routes up/down the Exe valley) many of the cycle routes in and around Exeter appear to have been 'created' simply by doubling up existing pavements for shared cycle + pedestrian use. In the majority of cases this is sub-optimal for cyclists, and definitely so for pedestrians. Both user communities end up with a bad experience.
- With that in mind - and notwithstanding space and funding constraints - it would be great to see more dedicated cycle paths. I'm sure that pedestrians and motorists would be as delighted as we would.
- A large number of junction points (with roads, footpaths, other cycle routes, etc) along the local cycle network seem to be quite poorly designed. By this I mean that their layout/configuration makes them hard to navigate, even at low speeds - especially so with cleated shoes . Also, many junctions suffer from poor visibility: it can be hard to spot pedestrians/vehicles until your right upon the junction. (I do appreciate though that this has a lot to do with local authorities having to 'crowbar' cycle ways onto an existing, Victorian-era public highway network!).
- In the past year I have had 2 minor spills. Ironically, both of these have been caused by fixed furniture on cycle paths, specifically those slightly staggered wooden gates which are intended to slow cyclists at key black spots. As I have discovered at the cost of slightly dented pride, these can be hazardous to cyclists, even at low speed (which I was doing on both occasions)!
- In general - and for many of the reasons described above - I find cycling on cycle paths and shared-use pavements considerably more hazardous than cycling on the road. In some places this forces me onto the roads, much to the annoyance of motorists, many of whom seem to think that the presence of a cycle path constitutes a legal obligation to use it. We just can't win!
- On the other hand, some roads that I would like to use are in such poor condition that it is currently too dangerous to cycle along them. In some cases to the point of being life-endangering. Clyst Road between Sandy Gate roundabout and Topsham is a prime example.

Which locations and routes are poorly served

- The cycle network up/down the Exe valley is clearly pretty good - it's a terrific all-round amenity for locals and visitors alike. I have been relatively fortunate in that my current commute from Exton, and my previous commute from Exmouth, allowed me to exploit it.
- However, I'll soon be moving to Broadclyst which, in common with other towns/villages away from the Exe valley, do not appear to be well served by good quality arterial cycle routes. (Happily the Broadclyst route does have the benefit of relatively smooth roads - I made sure to check those!)
- Although I don't use it as often as I perhaps should, St Davids station would seem to be quite poorly served as regards off-road cycle path provision. Yes, you can cycle up the river as far as the Mill bridge, but beyond that point it's mostly busy roads and narrow pavements. Given that it's Devon's main rail hub, this seems somewhat anomalous.

What routes and facilities you would like to see developed

- As hinted at above, off-road arterial cycle paths to many of the obvious commuter towns and villages around Exeter. I don't believe that the current common practice of shunting cyclists onto narrow pavements and putting up some blue shared-use signs is a viable or practicable long term solution.

There will be 6-700 new properties built in Clyst St Mary in the next few years. The access for bikes from here is pretty bad, apart from the route from the village to the roundabout by the services.

I'd like to see a cycle path connecting Clyst St. Mary to Clyst St. George, along the river Clyst (to avoid the hill!) and from Clyst St. Mary to Sowton village again along the river Clyst connecting onwards to the new science park. It would also be nice if there was a safe way of actually getting through the village apart from cycling up the extremely dangerous "The village" road. The cycle path on the pavement ends abruptly when one gets to Westpoint. It should continue further east than that too!

The most important route for me of those would be the one from Clyst St mary to Sowton village. If that existed e.g. on stilts like the Topsham to Ebford/Clyst St George route then that would make cycling to work serious option for me!

Concerning cycling, I find cycle lanes and routes poorly designed. Some lanes are on the pavement, then disappear, then reappear, and are generally very badly indicated. Some routes appear to deliberately take the steepest options: it would be a good idea to have cycle routes next to railway lines as these are generally straight and flat (it would make cycling from central Exeter to the Met Office much easier!). Finally, not everyone is fit to cycle. I will generally use a pool bike to attend meetings in Exeter, however I did get overtaken once by some teenagers walking while I was cycling uphill!

I cycle to work because over the last ten years, there has been a steady decline in the bus services serving the site - both reduced frequency and evening services. The cycle routes seem to be designed for leisure use, rather than getting from A to B safely and quickly, which commuting to work requires. Roads used by cyclists also need a good quality of road surface, with small potholes and bumpy bits (badly fixed potholes) fixed quickly as they are an additional danger for cyclists.

I now cycle to work because over the last ten years, there has been a steady decline in the bus services serving the site - both reduced frequency and no more evening services.

It seems impossible for shift workers to use public transport.

I often work late (with compensating TOIL to maintain work/life balance!) to meet commitments for international meetings, or to hold teleconferences with global colleagues both east and west. There are now no buses serving the site after about 19:00. Ten years ago, there were buses until 22:30.

Bus services need to be persistent and long lived if people are to rely on them and change their travel behaviour. The bus services in Exeter do not meet these criteria.

How to influence the stakeholders? When the H1 bus was cancelled, a Facebook "Friends of the H1 bus route" garnered three 'likes', so a challenge!

It is also unfortunate that road sweepers and gritters don't bother, or are unable to clean the part of the road which is cycle lane.

A number of people travel from greater distances than can be comfortably travelled on foot or by cycle. Likewise public transport requires a number of changes, can take much longer than the equivalent car journey and often a reasonable walk from the drop off point to the office. There is no guarantee that you will be able to take your bike on the train.

Providing secure cycle storage at the key station such as Digby and Sowton, Exeter Central/ St David's

may encourage people to travel the majority of the way by rail and then complete the journey by cycle. Reversing the situation on the return journey.

I cycle in from the Beacon Heath area and Blackboy Road is where I come into closest contact with vehicles. It's now 20mph zone but a lot of traffic are still not aware of the speed restriction, but that's another issue/matter.

Close the road to traffic permanently and pave it over for shared pedestrian and cycle use. There's currently only limited parking on the road and it would improve lifestyle, and become more German/Dutch like.

One weakness of the Exeter cycle network is the tendency of on pavement cycle paths to end abruptly with no safe means for the cyclist to rejoin the road. A really good example of this is the pavement based cycle lane which runs down from Hill Barton Road to Honiton Road past the entrance to the police station. The cycle path ends at a roundabout with no safe way to rejoin traffic. The problem doesn't exist when travelling the other direction as there is dropped curb allowing cyclists to pull of Honiton road onto the cycle path.

Extending from this - I know it's a big ask but it would be good to see a cycle path from this roundabout to the Met Office junction (and therefore to the cycle entrance to Sowton). This section of Honiton road is narrow and the pavements are also too narrow to accommodate shared usage. This would have been partially alleviate if the development next to the Premier Inn had been given permission to go ahead as the development included a link through to the shared path behind the Met Office.

One thing that concerns me is that there a couple of places where a very narrow cycle lane runs next to a row of parked cars. Examples would be

- Beacon Lane (between Mile Lane and Summer Lane)
- Pinhoe Road (between Thackeray Road and Whipton Village Road)
- Vaughan Road (from Pinhoe Road end to Whipton Barton Road)

I think it would be best to get rid of these cycle lanes as they encourage riding in the door zone. Ideally they could be replaced with some marking to indicate that you shouldn't ride that close to the parked cars.

A minor annoyance is that the short route from near the bottom of Southernhay, alongside the wall and onto South Street could do with a re-surface as it is exceptionally bumpy.

Provide bike lockers in areas (e.g. Newtown) where many properties are in multiple occupancy with no garden access (except through the house). Residents could hire said lockers in a similar way to having a residents permit.

My greatest bugbear about cycling facilities in Exeter is there is no priority or method of making stopped vehicles allow for cycle paths users when cycle paths cross side roads so making commuting a pain. It frequently makes me have to use the major roads so I can maintain a reasonable speed of travel.

I also sometimes have difficulties finding the access points to paths beside roads so I can use the paths when I am travelling slowly, especially up-hill.