

RESPONSE TO NETWORK WEST MIDLANDS CYCLING CHARTER CONSULTATION

Richard Burden, MP for Birmingham Northfield

As the MP for Birmingham Northfield I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to Network West Midlands Cycling Consultation.

This response expresses support for the Charter's key principles and goals, and proposes additional action to support greater cycling participation in the region – including through ambitious targets, local engagement and participation, better infrastructure, education and awareness and funding opportunities.

The whole of the UK – but, given the current low level of trips made by bike, particularly the West Midlands – needs to mainstream cycling into transport policy to make it safer and more accessible. This must be achieved within a wider road safety context which addresses the needs of different types of road users, and ensures that this shared space is safe for all.

Vision

1. I welcome the ambition of the Charter to boost cycling the West Midlands, which will improve health and wellbeing, reduce the amount of trips people make by car and support people struggling with the high costs of transport. This vision is particularly welcome in Birmingham, which has recently been voted as the worst city in the country for cycling, with only 1% of commuters making trips by bike.ⁱ
2. When nearly a quarter of all car journeys made in the UK are less than a mile, greater levels of cycling will have a major impact on reducing congestion, cutting our carbon emissions, improving active and healthy lifestyles and increasing mobility and access to employment opportunities. The social and economic benefits that increased cycling will bring to Birmingham – which has both high levels of long term unemployment and a high prevalence of obesity and related diseases - is significant.
3. A fundamental cultural shift is required to shift patterns of travel in the West Midlands. The Charter notes important examples of progress made in this regard, ranging from city wide action in the *Bike North Birmingham* programme and recent *Cycle City* £24 million funding in the city, to the Northfield EcoCentre and Town Centre Partnership's bid for *Cycle South Brum* in ITV's People's Millions Finals. The momentum building for cycling in the West Midlands now must be capitalised on to drive sustainable change in people's transport choices.
4. While I welcome the goal to increase cycling levels in the area, I would press the Charter to set more ambitious targets for participation. A Parliamentary inquiry into cycling – which was supported by leading cyclist organisations, campaigners and the Times, concluded that the Government should set national targets to increase cycle use from less than 2% of journeys in 2011, to 10% in 2025, and 25% by 2050.ⁱⁱ

5. West Midlands's Charter aims to raising the levels of cycling to 5% of all trips by 2023, and 10% by 2033. Although I appreciate that that the West Midlands will be starting from a lower baseline than the national average, does not seem unreasonable to set participation targets closer to the levels proposed by the *Get Britain Cycling* Report. In a comparable example, Liverpool City Council are currently consulting on their draft Cycle Strategy 2013-2026, which proposes a target of 10% of all trips by 2025 from a 1.1% baseline.ⁱⁱⁱ

Leadership and Profile

6. Committed leadership and political will is crucial for driving lasting change in transport habits. Securing a high-profile local cycling champion to front the campaign would undoubtedly be important, but local leadership will also be crucial. Encouraging the health, business and third sectors – as well as elected officials, politicians and other bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships – to promote cycling at a local level will be crucial for shifting attitudes.
7. Local schemes – such as the recent bid for *Cycle South Brum* to provide both facilities and training for cycling in Northfield – also underline the importance of securing strong civil society support and engagement in the Charter from an early stage. This is particularly important in a context of limited resources.

The Cycling Network

8. We need significant changes in cycling infrastructure in the West Midlands if we are to change people's transport habits in the long term – and the Charter is right to put a high quality and coherent cycling network as central to the strategy.
9. In line with the Draft Charter's proposals for planning and future road construction, Labour has made a commitment to ensure that all new transport schemes undergo a Cycle Safety Assessment prior to approval, in the same way that economic and equality assessments are currently made. 'Cycle-proofing' new transport schemes is crucially important and the detailed action plan should set out how the region will define future guidelines and design standards.
10. I welcome the Charter's aim to improve integration between cycling and public transport to enable door to door travel. Labour has committed to make provision of cycling facilities on trains a requirement for all future rail contracts. The Charter should consider setting out action on procurement policy to improve cycling integration across the policy the region's public transport network.
11. The extension of 20mph speed limits in urban areas can both reduce the risk of accidents and promote 'active travel', especially cycling. But proper consideration of context, and safety assessments to determine how to most effectively reduce collisions, should also be a priority. While 20mph zones are useful components in safer road strategies, and particularly for high risk areas such as schools, they are not a 'silver bullet' for road safety. Better enforcement, education and awareness of safe and sustainable speeds are also crucial. Please see [my response](#) to the City Council's consultation on 20mph zones.

Promoting and Encouraging Cycling

12. In order to successfully encourage greater levels of cycling and improve road safety and awareness more generally training must be available to young and less confident cyclists. I propose that the Charter devote particular priority to young people of around 14-15, where there is a chance to shape both their transport choices as adults – and their road safety awareness as they approach driving age.
13. I fully support the aim to make affordable or free training available to everyone, but appreciate that the provision of free training – through the *Bikeability* scheme – requires central government commitment. I would urge the Councils and Centro to press this point in their representations to Government, who have cut long term funding certainty for the scheme.

Funding

14. Funding will be crucial to delivering the vision and goals of the Charter. Serious change will be required if we are to catch up with countries like Holland, who spend £10-£20 per person on cycling.
15. The current Government's commitment to a one off sum of £114 million until 2016 for cycling does not provide the long term funding security required to secure a step-change in cycling. Labour has committed to allocate a proportion of the roads budget to provide long term funding for cycling infrastructure, in the same way that budgets for road and rail are set.
16. I appreciate that decisions on funding are well beyond the scope of the Charter, but would again encourage the Councils and Centro to make stable funding for active travel a key ask in their representations to government on devolved transport issues.
17. The detailed Action Plan for the Charter should also set out how current funding mechanisms and opportunities – such as the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and Single Growth Fund – can be used to support cycling and active travel.
18. Clear guidance (which prioritises active travel, sustainable development and public health) should also be given to the Local Transport Bodies to ensure that decision making on transport projects is fully aligned to the Charter's goals and vision.

ⁱ Birmingham City Council, Local Sustainable Transport Fund: Small Project – Application for Funding, April 2011

ⁱⁱ All Party Parliamentary Group on Cycling, Get Britain Cycling Report, April 2013

ⁱⁱⁱ Liverpool City Council, Get Liverpool Cycling – Liverpool's Cycling Strategy 2013-2026, August 2013