

David M. Hýtch (age 68)

In the past I have cycled (chiefly in the 1960s) through most of England and parts of Scotland. Over many decades I have walked in all of the National Parks and many of the AONBs as well as local footpaths. During my 30 year career as a teacher I took many groups walking and cycling.

As my physical abilities decline, I take an active part at a strategic level, as a member of Flintshire Local Access Forum, a member of the Coastal Access Steering Group (tasked with overseeing the development of the All Wales Coastal Path through Flintshire), a Sustrans Ranger, and a member of the Joint Advisory Committee of the local AONB (Clwydian Range & Dee Valley).

I am grateful for the opportunity to welcome, and in small measure to contribute to, this consultation.

It is obvious that the nation's travel (and recreational) habits have altered considerably over my lifetime, and that increasing reliance on the car, not only as the preferred but also as the default option, has brought in its wake many undesirable effects, in terms of pollution, use of energy, and healthy lifestyles. Issues of safety and time have precipitated the school run as the preferred means of travel to school for a high proportion of youngsters. The proposed Bill is a welcome initiative to seek to address this. Placing obligations on local authorities will hopefully mean a move in (what I would see as) a positive direction; but it will be a (much more difficult) matter of changing mindsets as well.

Questions

1. Yes – I note 'enabling' – clearly there cannot be compulsion, but facilitation. The *sine qua non* is to provide a usable network, safe not just for committed cyclists/walkers, but for the many who would not consider walking or cycling purely on safety grounds. The Welsh Government should use the levers at its disposal to try to effect behaviour change.

2. Placing obligations on local authorities will certainly have the effect of raising the profile of the issue. A plethora of priorities and a lack of funding mean that non-statutory aspirations remain a largely unfulfilled wish list, even where there is a will. Flintshire's default position is always to favour the motorist (and, to be fair, the majority of constituents would no doubt take the same view). Crossings and refuges on cycle/walkways are only considered if they do not impede motorists. Indeed a recently installed crossing (over the A494 just below County Hall, linking a short section of cycleway) has been removed after residents' protest, as a hazard to cars. Most recently, the unprecedented snowfall has seen the roads cleared fairly efficiently, but not the pavements, meaning that pedestrians currently have to walk along the highway. Cycleways are already built into road improvements: the problem is that they don't go anywhere e.g. the recently built A55 exit at Broughton (A5104) has a cycleway round the double roundabout, but it leads nowhere in any direction. A patchwork approach, based on the 'easy wins' principle, characterises Flintshire's approach to cycleway development, partly in view of legal/landowner issues, but principally through shortage of funding. Some sections have been, and are being, created in conjunction with the

(funded) development of the All Wales Coastal Path, as part of an overall plan to align National Cycle Network Route 5 along the Dee estuary (its current route over Halkyn Mountain is too challenging and dangerous for all but the fittest and most committed) but they are (except for the excellent Talacre – Gronant section) isolated: a cycleway is only useful if it leads from A to B, as the section from Connah’s Quay to Chester does, with access to the Deeside Industrial Park and, currently, to the Wirral – excellent developments.

3. Not sure.

4. By definition a Bill means legal (enforceable) powers, and placing obligations on local authorities is the best way to achieve this. More needs to be done to change the mindset, however: this could include a campaign to encourage walking and cycling, as well as further measures to make it safer to do so, such as 20 m.p.h. limits in residential areas and around schools, and (urgent) control measures to restrict access by parental cars to school entrances.

5. Inevitably, funding is a major stumbling block, as is the issue of land ownership – perhaps compulsory purchase could be used more extensively, as it is for highways (in a very different cost envelope, of course). Establishing some key principles – the obvious one would be to seek to redevelop disused railways, which are flat and off-road, and extensive across Wales – would be a big help. Implementing environmentally friendly policies has been a bugbear for successive governments, and will require considerable political skill: everyone wants to be green until it becomes inconvenient – witness the fuel protests (shamefully originating here) that beset the Labour UK government early in its tenure.

6. Clearly lack of funding is a major obstacle. Worse, the cost will initially be devoted to essentially bureaucratic matters (mapping) as opposed to changes on the ground. What is needed to change the mindset is practical manifestation of usable routes: if they are seen to be useable and useful, people will take advantage of them. This is easy where there are established norms (cf. Cambridge); there need to be well-designed and well-publicised routes that are useful for commuting to work/school – leisure routes, however desirable (and they are) will never compete in terms of volume of use. There are potential savings in the bigger picture – fuel, health care – but not directly offsetting costs.

7. Not sure.

8. The key issue will be managing behavioural change. The Bill should serve to kickstart the process, but the slow pace of developments on the ground – developments along NCN5 west of Conwy are extremely welcome, but have taken many years to achieve – means that behavioural change lags far behind.

David M. Hÿtch

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