

Chief Executive

THE CYCLISTS' CHAMPION

More cyclists and better cycling infrastructure isn't just good for individuals, it's good for society. **Paul Tuohy's** visit to the Netherlands underscored the need for change here



PAUL TUOHY
Chief Executive

Right: Amsterdamized, Flickr Creative Commons



The Netherlands' pro-bike planning means cycling is for everyone

CYCLING UK CARRIES a strapline that is more relevant than ever: *The cyclists' champion*. And boy, do we need one! I was on a trip to the Netherlands in October, and cycling there was like being on another planet. The infrastructure was brilliant. Of the thousands of people I saw getting about by bike, I saw one person wearing a helmet.

As I rode around Utrecht and Arnhem, I pondered the insane situation that we've got ourselves into in the UK. In the Netherlands, I could descend from my segregated cycle route to a secure cycle parking area under the station, safely leave my bike, and take my train.

This cycling nirvana was made a reality because the authorities had a vision and championed it to make it happen. They wanted a cleaner, more vibrant means of

“Places with the highest cycle use have the lowest risk”

transportation, so they set aside the budget and built it.

That's what's missing from the UK. Successive governments have seen cycling as a sideshow, an irritant to be ignored, rather than a stunningly cheap way to get about quickly and efficiently. It's a way to cut pollution and improve people's lives; even those that don't take part get cleaner air and quieter communities.

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Besides quality infrastructure, another major barrier to making cycling a safe and normal activity is the perception that it is far more dangerous than it really is. That isn't helped by the determination of some people in public life and the media to make us protect ourselves rather than facing up to the need for better conditions, so that we can all get about in a cleaner, safer, quieter less polluting way.

This hampers our ability to maximise the 'safety in numbers' effect. There is good evidence that the places with the highest cycle use have the lowest risk from cycling.

No doubt this is partly because safer cycling conditions attract more people to cycle, particularly women, older people, children, and people with disabilities. But it probably works the other way too: more people cycling increases the cycle-awareness of drivers, not least because more of them will themselves also be cyclists who know what it's like to be on the other side of the windscreen.

Championing cycling is something we've always done throughout our illustrious history as CTC. That's why Cycling UK is working to do all we can to encourage people to dust down their bikes and use them again, as part of the Big Bike Revival; there's an update from Scotland in this issue. You'll also catch up on the lobbying we're doing.

But improving our towns and cities with better infrastructure is central to our mission to encourage more people to cycle. We are now seeking to work more closely with Sustrans and Living Streets (the charity that promotes walking) to assist local and national governments throughout the UK to plan, invest and build for cycling.

MAKING CYCLING MAINSTREAM

As part of our Space for Cycling campaign, we want to make it easy for people to contribute their suggestions and priorities for improving local cycling conditions as easily as you can currently help local authorities get potholes fixed through our Fill That Hole app. This is a really practical way of creating change. More on that next issue.

I just wished though, when I was in the Netherlands, that I had our Ministers for Transport, or better still the Prime Minister, cycling with me. They need to experience the simplicity of towns and cities that had cried 'Enough!' and made the changes to champion cycling. We may be world beaters at the sport, but my personal ambition is to make the marginal gains needed for cycling to be mainstream in all parts of our society.

Time for a letter to the PM: 'Dear Theresa, I know this great tea-room in Amsterdam. Fancy a cuppa?'