



Portsmouth Cycle Forum Annual General Meeting

Chairman's report for 2011-12

Portsmouth Cycle Forum is for anyone who cycles – or wants to cycle – in and around the Portsmouth area. Cycling is fun and contributes to health and well-being of this premier Waterfront City.

Campaigns

At election time last May the Forum participated in the election hustings organised by Portsmouth Climate Action Network. We also sent a questionnaire about cycling to each of the candidates. The responses ranged from total support to quiet refusal to reply.

We failed to persuade the City Council into re-marking the parking bays on Clarence Esplanade to comply with current DfT standards and we have yet to receive a sensible explanation why this was not done. No parking spaces would have been lost, but motorists leaving the bays would be travelling with the flow of the traffic, not against it. We have not yet found out why the Road Safety Audit omits minor accidents and the serious injury accident of July 2009 when a cyclist hit a car which was reversing blind from a parking space into the main carriageway. The RSA did not even mention cycling!

We commented at length on the proposals to reinstate a second southbound lane on Eastern Road “to reduce congestion”. A consultation exercise was carried-out yet the results of it were never published and works at Velder Avenue commenced days after the consultation period ended. The main problem was the proposal to remove the traffic island by Swordsands Road which provides a crossing point from the populated west side to the cycle lane on the east. The diversion for pedestrians and cyclists would be a journey of 500 metres to the next nearest crossing point. We asked whether it was really necessary to add the second carriageway when the problems with queuing traffic are caused by the Kirpal Road traffic lights.

In November we arranged a site meeting of interested parties to look at problems for cyclists James Callaghan Drive on the top of Portsdown Hill. This road is narrow yet busy providing access to DSTL, Fort Nelson and other sites. Penny Mordaunt MP attended together with the Cllr Jason Fazackarley, PCC Cabinet Member for Traffic and Transportation together with the opposition spokesman Cllr Luke Stubbs. All agreed that “something must be done”. There is a chance that a small section of an off-road path between Forts Nelson and Southwick straddling the border between Portsmouth and Fareham might be built as a first step.

Planning

The Forum looks at major planning applications. We ask PCC to make a fair, full and open assessment of cyclist needs, to ensure that good quality facilities for cyclists and pedestrians are included. Often a new development will affect an existing route used by cyclists, an example being the £6million Trafalgar Gate link road which sliced through one of the busiest cycle routes in the Western transport corridor.

We commented on the planning applications for Tipner and secured a condition that, in the event of the need to close the main north-south cycle route (National Cycle Network route 2) for building or land remediation then the developers must provide a signed alternative route. The usual practice in Portsmouth is for a “Footpath Closed” sign to be erected - nothing more. We also persuaded planners to decide on the exact location of the junction with NCN2 and Twyford Avenue at the detail planning stage when the developers have decided on the nature of the development. The section of Twyford Avenue leading to the Mountbatten Centre (and beyond) will become a much busier road when the development is complete.

Hilary spent much time on the proposed development at Dame Judith's Professional Centre in Cosham which now has approval for 45 homes. It was supposed to be a Home Zone with all the attendant features of sustainable living but will be just like any other housing development. The developers waxed lyrical about the high quality cycle infrastructure in the vicinity – right next to the busy Southampton Road and the cycle unfriendly roundabout at the London Road / Spur Road junction neither of which will see any improvements as a result of the development.

The cycle facilities at the new roundabout at Winston Churchill Avenue caused us concern as the designers cleverly routed the main shared use path right alongside a bus stop. Common-sense prevailed and there is now a bypass route (although not particularly clearly marked). The “bus priority” traffic lights on the bus and cycle lane are a wonder of the scheme especially as these lights are always red to buses and cycles - some priority! We pointed-out that the wrong signage had been used on the bus and cycle lane and this was speedily corrected. The spectacular Somerstown Hub is another scheme which will cut across an existing east-west cycle route used by hundreds of students and others each day. We have been assured that the route will be maintained but there’s no denying there will be a conflict between those entering the hub and those travelling past.

A scheme which we missed was the redevelopment of the southern side of the St Mary’s Hospital site. Until the demolition team moved-in, there was a quiet and direct route between Rodney Road and Miltoncross School and used by many of the students there. Suddenly and without warning the route was closed. We worked with pupils and Governors at the school to try to get it reopened. We are assured that when the works are finished a route through the site will be reinstated.

Infrastructure

We spend a lot of time chasing-up cycle infrastructure issues. Mike Dobson leads our infrastructure team and he has reported issues at our open meetings. Some of the more niggling problems are caused by traffic lights and a notable example is the new set outside Trafalgar Gate on Flathouse Road. We have spent many minutes waiting for the cycle filter to change to green where many give-up and proceed with caution - much to the annoyance of the MOD Police. The current longest wait is 12 minutes. Can anyone better that? Of course we have reported the problems to the City Council but they have failed so far to acknowledge that there is a problem. New lights at Copnor Road have an advanced stop line which, if you use it, is positioned in front of the traffic signal. We await remedial action. A temporary arrangement of traffic lights at Milton Road / Velder Avenue junction has seen the pedestrian and cycle crossings closed for several weeks. This is contrary to DfT guidance (Traffic Advisory Leaflet15/99) which states that very effort should be maintained to keep facilities open for pedestrians and cyclists during road works.

A serious injury accident involving a cyclist and an HGV occurred in July at the junction of London Road and Northern Parade. The cyclist was in the correct position, using the bus and cycle lane yet the HGV swung left across the lane. It appears to be a case of SMIDSY (Sorry Mate I Didn’t See You). Our preferred remedial action would be to ban left turns here (the number of vehicles turning here are few) yet there are fears of “displacement” by councillors and officers.

There have been some successes, however and we’re delighted that the footpath along the south side of Burrfields Road is now shared-use path and a mix of shared-use and on-carriageway cycle markings have been provided on the northern side as well. We are also looking forward to the introduction of contraflow cycling along Charlotte Street (behind the Cascades) which will create a useful link between Commercial Road and Portsea.

Other happenings include the approval by PCC in principle to permit Private Hire Vehicles to use bus lanes. There are 800 plus PHVs (mostly Aquacars) in the city and this decision will have an effect on the free running of bus lanes which are shared with bicycles. There is presently no money to implement the proposal.

Speed cameras were switched off in April last year with no sign of their being used again and little evidence of any speed control measures in the city. We supported a watered-down scheme for speed reduction and traffic calming in Gladys Avenue (we asked for the whole of this road to have a 20mph limit). We supported the London Road, North End environmental improvements scheme despite the loss of the bus and cycle lane. We also supported the closing of a section of Palmerston Road to vehicles on the proviso that cycling was still permitted.

Community Cycle Centre

Last year we reported that the Healthy Pompey bicycle recycling project at Southsea Fire Station had closed as the funding had come to an end and that the Forum was planning to restart it at the Stacey Centre in Copnor. Fast forward one year and we have a thriving project which meets each Saturday from 10am. The

first shipping container has been joined by a second acquired from a local Scout troop to accommodate the large numbers of bicycles and reclaimed parts. There is never a shortage of volunteers who turn up come rain or shine to get their hands dirty dismantling, restoring, repairing and cleaning bikes of all shapes and sizes which find new homes in exchange for a small donation to cover our costs. We have been overwhelmed with the support from the local community who have donated many old bikes. The steering group is led by Chris and assisted by Jayne, Peter, Roger and myself. We'd like to take the opportunity to thank the Stacey Centre for allowing us to use their facilities. Chris has also joined the management committee there which will keep him even busier in the months to come. The Community Cycle Centre has the scope to grow into many areas and we're in the process of creating a business plan and deciding on the most suitable legal structure to facilitate any expansion.

CTC, Cyclenation and Sustrans

Portsmouth Cycle Forum is an affiliated CTC club which provides us with the necessary 3rd-party liability insurance to attend public events, organise cycle rides and public meetings. They represent cyclists at a national level and offer advice and guidance to clubs and members. Individuals may join the CTC as an affiliate through the Forum for the sum of £15 per annum. Affiliates enjoy the benefits of liability insurance and access to the CTC's legal team. Full membership is necessary if you wish to vote at CTC meetings and to participate in certain rides and competitions. Hilary and Jon continue to be the CTC Right to Ride representatives for Portsmouth and Kathy has recently joined their ranks representing the Borough of Gosport.

Cyclenation is a federation of cycle campaign groups and we are also members of this organisation. Cyclenation are the organisers of Bike Week which takes place this year between 16 and 24 June. Any organisation registering an event gets immediate insurance cover for that event so we encourage other groups to consider taking part. Four members of the Forum attended the CTC/Cyclenation conference in Sheffield last October where the theme was Cycle Campaigning and Localism – Threats and Opportunities. The highlight for me of the weekend was the Sunday cycle ride where Stagecoach provided a tram to take us to the outskirts of this expansive city from where we returned by pedal power.

Roger is our local Sustrans ranger and he has put in many hours of work to way-mark the National Cycle Network routes which pass through our city (NCN2 and 22). This has involved designing and specifying hundreds of small stickers and a few signs to attach to existing signs and lamp columns. This has been done with the approval and cooperation of PCC and Colas. Although not completed, Roger is beginning to look at way-marking beyond the city's boundaries!

Meetings, Rides and Events

We continue our bi-monthly meetings at the Guildhall which are always lively and interesting events where we review and discuss the work of the Forum. In the past year we have welcomed speakers on topics including from Air Quality management, The Somerstown Hub, The St Jude's School bike train, the Velo City conference in Seville, the Local sustainable Transport Fund, The Eastern Road Congestion Relief scheme, the Building Cycling Cultures conference in Leicester, the Local Transport Plan, The CTC Cyclenation conference in Sheffield, The new traffic signs regulations – quite a list!

Jayne created a programme of family bike rides throughout the year which have been well supported. The current Winter Rides Programme runs until the end of April and we'd welcome suggestions for new routes for the summer. Gill and Pam have started a Wednesday morning series of rides which take place on the first and third Wednesdays of each month starting at 10.30 by the fountain in Victoria Park. Rides are tailored to those who turn up and usually include a coffee and cake stop! Members of the Forum joined the Chartered Institute of Highway Engineers on their cycle ride in Gosport in July. They are planning to return in April to ride along the route of the new Bus Rapid Transit system.

We have had stalls at events including the St Mary's May Fayre, The Summer fair & Picnic at Victoria Park, Portsmouth Lifeboat Open day. These are always valuable and interesting occasions when we get to meet people of all ages and talk about all things cycling. During Bike Week we organised our ever-successful Fish & Chip ride this time to Portchester via Mother Kelley's on Southampton Road. Members supported the

other events of Bike Week including the Bike to Work Day event in the Guildhall Square and the rides organised by PCC and Friends of the Earth.

Membership

Our membership has remained at similar levels to last year and the committee has recognised that we need to do something to grow the numbers of those joining and participating in the Forum. Owen and Jayne have started work on this with a membership plan, member benefits (including discounts at bike shops) and a new membership leaflet. Joe continues to be our membership secretary, keeping records of our members and sending out communications to them.

Finances

Our finances remain healthy and Roger will be reporting our financial status separately. We decided from the outset that the finances for the Community Cycle Centre should be separate from those of the Forum and a separate account was set up. To get the CCC started, the Forum lent it £200 which has now been repaid. Roger's workload as treasurer has more than doubled in the past year and we thank him very much for keeping our money in order.

The Committee

From reading this report you will see that a great deal of work takes place behind the scenes and this due entirely to the hard-working committee and officers of the Forum. My thanks go to Hilary, Jayne, Kathy, Jon, Mike, Chris, Joe, Roger and Owen without who this Forum would not function. In order to spread the workload the committee is proposing to increase its numbers by two and this will be the subject of an amendment to the constitution at the AGM.

The Future

I have read several annual reports of late and most make reference to the country's financial woes so this report should be no different. Last year's Local Transport Plan saw no money whatsoever allocated to the development of cycle infrastructure in the city and just a small amount on soft measures. By contrast, traffic lights received a whopping £2million injection of public money. This year's plan shows some measures for improving way-finding in the city and these depend on the success of a Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid. If we get them they should help visitors and residents to find their way around by bicycle.

We will continue to scrutinise and comment on local and national Government activities in the difficult task of changing the car-centric views and policies. It took the enlightened cities of Europe 40-50 years to achieve their cycling goals and so we have a lot of catching-up to do!

Conclusion

Once again, my thanks go to all those members who have worked tirelessly for the Forum in organising the numerous events throughout the year. It is only when we look at what has been achieved, that we realise how much has been undertaken. I hope you all continue to enjoy your membership, whether active or passive, and do encourage some friends to join by bringing them to meetings and events.

John Holland
Chairman
Portsmouth Cycle Forum
8 March 2012