

Getting the British back on bicyclesâ€™”The effects of urban traffic-free paths on everyday cycling.

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Getting the British back on bicyclesâ€™”The effects of urban traffic-free paths on everyday cycling

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Abstract

The UK National Cycle Network (NCN) developed by the transport organisation, Sustrans, is a significant policy intervention aimed at encouraging cycling. Around half of the population is purported to live within one mile of the 20,000 km Network. Traffic-free paths (separated from the public highway away from motor traffic) form about one third of the Network but account for around 80% of trips. The importance of NCN urban traffic-free paths in encouraging people to cycle is often assumed but despite large aggregate datasets characterising users, there is no research on the effects on the local communities which they serve. This paper presents research which aimed to identify the contribution of a typical section of NCN urban traffic-free path in encouraging cycling for everyday travel amongst a community living adjacent to this type of intervention.

First, the paper outlines the characteristics of the NCN, the philosophy behind the development of urban traffic-free paths and the barriers to cycling which such interventions seek to overcome. Then findings of a controlled cross-sectional survey of two neighbourhoods in a medium size town in the English Midlands (which are demographically similar except that one is located adjacent to a section of NCN urban traffic-free cycle path intervention) are discussed.

In conclusion the paper reveals that provision of NCN urban traffic-free cycle paths alone may be insufficient in encouraging a shift from car to cycling for everyday travel purposes. The data from the study corroborates evidence that suggests that a wider coordinated multi-faceted approach to promoting cycling is required which combines social marketing with physical measures including; wider speed restrictions in urban areas, investment in high quality segregated cycle facilities on major roads, and general land use and transport policies that "advantage cycling" and reduce the convenience of the car.

Highlights

° Provision of Sustrans style urban traffic-free cycle paths alone may be insufficient in encouraging a shift from car to cycling for everyday travel purposes. ° Traffic-free paths away from the public highway are successful in encouraging cycling within a specific recreational context (often "together" and family oriented). ° However, there is no evidence to suggest that recreational use of traffic-free paths is translating into everyday cycling.



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Keywords

Cycling; National cycle network; Traffic-free paths

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