

Stockport Community Cycling Club evidence for SMBC Communities and Transport Scrutiny Committee Cycling Review

Background

Stockport Community Cycling Club (SCCC) is a leisure cycling club based in Stockport formed by Jim Court more than 20 years ago.

We have more than 250 members, about half of them riding at least occasionally and half of these ride more regularly. We provide up to 3 rides per week of varying distance, at an easy pace. Our members range in age and ability, but many are over 50 and some are new or returning cyclists who are less confident. We want people to join us to enjoy cycling, friendship, fresh air, healthy exercise and the attractive scenery our area has to offer.

Our rides are predominantly based around Stockport, though we often stray into neighbouring boroughs and sometimes into Cheshire and Derbyshire. In urban areas we try to use tracks, trails, canals, quiet roads and separate cycle infrastructure where possible, to avoid stressful interactions with traffic. Our group rides, with typically 15 riders, and the range of routes we use, gives us a distinct perspective on what it is like to cycle in Stockport.

Evidence

The evidence presented below attempts to answer the questions posed by the committee with reference to our experiences as a local, community cycling club.

What is good about cycling in Stockport and what is bad about cycling in Stockport?

Stockport has many attractive, traffic free routes for cycling. SCCC frequently use NCN62 Transpennine Trail (TPT) along the Mersey and Tame, NCN55 Midshires Way along the Goyt and onto the Middlewood Way, the Peak Forest canal, the improving routes along the Lady Brook Valley and the A555 cycleway.

The problem with these routes is that many have poorly maintained unsealed surfaces that are dirty and unpleasant in wet weather, are often uneven or rough and are prone to erosion by flowing water. This problem is increasing as our climate changes and becomes wetter. Cycling should not be a dirty offroad adventure.

At present these leisure routes are not connected to form a coherent traffic separated network, though there has been gradual progress towards making some connections. Some of the routes still have awkward barriers to negotiate, which are particularly challenging and arduous for larger groups and less agile riders.

While the location of these routes is appropriate for leisure cycling, they do not form a tight enough network to be useful for most utility cycling journeys. Leisure cycling can happily follow convoluted routes dictated by the infrastructure, but for utility cycling, the network needs to provide the most convenient route for each journey.

Aside from these key routes, Stockport has many sections of quiet roads, alleys and paths through green spaces that can be used together to compose attractive cycle routes. However, making these connections often requires lots of local knowledge and/or route planning. There is not a self-evident network of routes that is obvious to inexperienced riders. Our new riders frequently express amazement at our 'hidden routes', even when they've lived in an area for years. Attractive cycling should not rely on exceptional local knowledge.

A problem with nominally quiet roads in Stockport is that many have a 30mph speed limit, so they remain hostile for active travel. There is huge inconsistency across the Borough. The 20mph limit needs to be the consistent default on all residential roads and high streets with shops, schools and other places people need to be. Without separate infrastructure, motor vehicles need to be benign and safe when sharing with active travellers; they must not dominate these spaces.

What do Stockport Council do well and what could it improve when building cycling infrastructure?

Stockport has delivered some impressive schemes in the Town Centre, such as the bridge connecting the station to the new interchange and helical ramp from Viaduct Park to the TPT, but as yet they are relatively disconnected from a safe, useful network.

Stockport has also provided some useful improvements: to main road cycle crossings such as on Councillor Lane, Didsbury Road, Cheadle Road, which generally link between quiet roads and/or park tracks; improvements to through park tracks such as in Bramhall, Brookfield, Woodbank, Maple Avenue, Torkington, Abney Hall and St Thomas's; and links between residential streets such as on Turncroft Lane and Harwood Road. These links open up quiet routes that are useful for leisure cycling, but maybe less convenient for utility cycling journeys. Unfortunately, some of them such as Padden Brook and Queens Road, retain barriers impeding their use.

A consistent feature of all these facilities is that they have been provided without needing to take road space from motor vehicles. There has been minimal space reallocation from motor vehicles, though space is often taken from pedestrians. This can leave insufficient room for safe walking and cycling. Generally walking, wheeling and active travel are not prioritised in traffic schemes, they are shoehorned round them.

A lot of Stockport cycling infrastructure, including crossings at junctions, has been provided using shared use paths and crossings. These are usually a poor solution, particularly when used by larger groups of riders. Multistage crossings with small refuges and poor visibility of signals makes these awkward, slow and less safe than dedicated cycle crossings, especially when shared with pedestrians.

We have yet to see a Cyclops junction in Stockport. As a group, we've used them in Salford, Trafford and Manchester and they work well.

There are plenty of recent examples of poorly implemented infrastructure in Stockport. The problems with the ramps on each side of every driveway on the Dean Lane section of the Bramhall Park to A6 cycleway have been well documented. These are very unpleasant to ride over. A great route partly spoiled by poor implementation.

New cycle paths have been obstructed by street furniture, for example on Carrwood Avenue, <https://maps.app.goo.gl/im5V75q5VK5asCnEA>. This would be unthinkable on a road.

Historically, Stockport has attempted to develop cycling routes that are an alternative to simply navigating along major roads. They follow a roughly parallel direction using quiet roads and links, as noted above. The failing of these routes is that they are frequently convoluted and unclear, with many junctions and sometimes dark, remote sections that are unsafe at night. They lengthen journeys and often negate the door to door accessibility that cycling can provide. To negotiate complex routes with a group, we often need people to mark junctions, in order not to lose riders. The parallel routes to avoid the A6 are a well cited example. These are unattractive and do not increase active travel numbers.

Stockport must start building cycling infrastructure along the major roads where it will provide safe, efficient routes for active travel. Cycling and wheeling invariably grows where this has been provided elsewhere in Greater Manchester. Inevitably, this will require street space to be reallocated from motor vehicles to active travel use.

There is overwhelming local, national and international evidence that using street space to provide good infrastructure for active travel changes the way that people move and helps address some of the negative impacts of overreliance on motor vehicles.

How to increase the number of people making journeys by bike?

Stockport needs a coherent network of infrastructure where people want to travel, not just where space allows. The exemplar will be a protected route along the A6 through Stockport, with separate space provided at junctions using Cyclops designs. The Council will only significantly increase the number of people travelling by bike in Stockport through provision of widespread, Streets for All compliant infrastructure.

Many SCCC members only cycle when they are guided and feel protected in a group. A measure of the success of Stockport's cycling and broader active travel provision will be when most of our members feel safe and confident to cycle by themselves for everyday journeys, not just when riding with the Club.

Stockport Community Cycling Club

15 Jan 2025