



Walk Ride GM & Walk Ride Stockport

Call For Evidence – Cycling Scrutiny Review

This written representation has been prepared by Walk Ride Stockport in collaboration with members of the borough's local groups, and other Walk Ride supporters who travel in the borough. Some Walk Ride local groups may also provide individual representation separately.

We have started by answering the questions set by the Scrutiny Committee. Further relevant information is then included as an appendix. This further information has informed our responses.

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A. About Walk Ride GM

Walk Ride GM's mission is to make walking, wheeling and cycling the natural choice for short journeys across Greater Manchester. Active travel is central to the Bee Network vision of an integrated and sustainable public transport system, which enables people to make more sustainable travel choices.

Under the umbrella of Walk Ride GM are borough-level campaign groups including Walk Ride Stockport. Within Stockport we also have five local groups. These are Walk Ride Gatley & Cheadles, Walk Ride Heaton, Walk Ride Marple, Walk Ride Romiley and Walk Ride SK3.

We are backed by communities who demand change. Walk Ride GM has a strong and growing community of over 5000 supporters across social media, email newsletters, and online groups. Those looking to engage more actively can join a vibrant Discord community where over 300 members work together to share knowledge and to campaign for a better city-region for walking, wheeling and cycling.

During the pandemic, and with the approval of SMBC, Walk Ride Stockport worked with Commonplace to survey opinions on areas for improvement within SMBC's walking, wheeling and cycling network. This exercise attracted 1279 location-specific comments, and 4871 agreements to those comments.

Walk Ride groups have previously issued a number of reports to inform SMBC committee meetings and consultation exercises, as follows:

- Walk Ride GM – representation to SMBC Communities & Transport Scrutiny Committee 24 January 2024¹
- Walk Ride GM – representation to SMBC Communities & Transport Scrutiny Committee 2 September 2024²
- Walk Ride GM – Modernisation of the A6³
- Walk Ride Stockport - Access Control Policy consultation response
- [Walk Ride SK3 – Edgeley Active Travel consultation response](#)
- Walk Ride Cheadle and Gatley - A34 MRN Corridor Improvement Plan consultation response
- Walk Ride Heaton – A6 Improving Journeys consultation response
- Walk Ride Heaton – Parallel A6 scheme consultation response
- Walk Ride Heaton – Active Neighbourhood consultation response and extensive support during the consultation and trial
- Walk Ride Heaton – Heaton Link and Heaton Norris Park Bridge schemes consultation responses

¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nZoHQ5uuxGNjDRtrmOTbs2kbCbcXe95u/view?usp=drive_link

² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EL2c70PBKv0ncSA6CERD8uD48bpuj7l/-view?usp=drive_link

³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zo4brgulwnMil3OI5eAfZHelWxc-_yYg/view?usp=drive_link

B. Call For Evidence Question Responses

Question 1

1a) What is good about cycling in Stockport?

Our members live in Stockport and most are regular cyclists. We have a fantastic variety of town centres, destinations and off-road routes within easy cycling distance of each other, as well as being within commuting distance of other regional centres in Tameside, Trafford and Manchester. We want these places to be connected by routes that work not only for confident adults, but for families, disabled people and for new and returning cyclists.

While many Walk Ride Stockport members are enthusiastic cyclists and find much to like in most bike rides, the data as shown in figure 1 below would suggest that conditions for cycling in Stockport are not improving. We are advocating for changes that will enable more people to cycle – not changes that merely make cycling a bit nicer for the minority of people who already cycle. National data suggests that people who cycle more frequently (at least three to five times a week) are more likely to cycle for travel than for leisure. Increasing the number of people using cycling as a means of transport is important in creating a modal shift away from private car use and thereby reducing congestion and lost productivity.

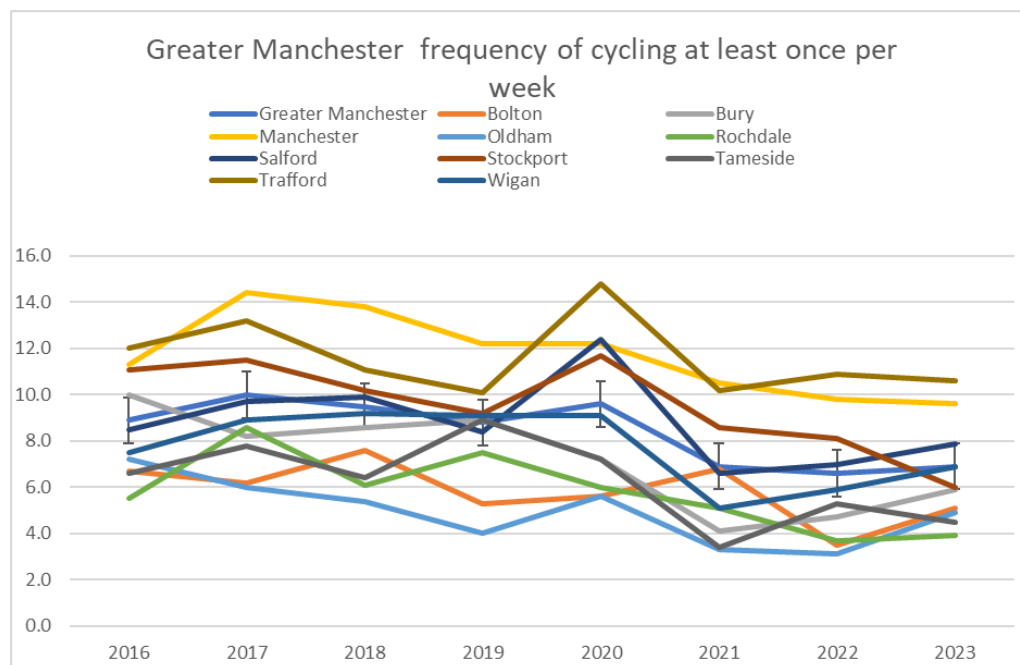


Figure 1 Source data from DfT Walking and Cycling Statistics 2024

Every area in Greater Manchester has shown a decrease in cycling since 2016, but the decrease in Stockport is the most marked (from 11% to 6%), and this decrease reaches statistical significance.

Until 2020, Stockport had arguably the best approach to cycling stakeholder engagement in Greater Manchester, with regular monthly meetings hosted by two knowledgeable dedicated cycling officers, and with meetings providing an informal opportunity to discuss scheme proposals prior to formal consultation. While the expansion to walking, wheeling and cycling is welcome, the reduction in meeting frequency and more top-down, presentation-based format is not conducive for true collaboration, which we maintain will only get worse as the forum moves to a six-monthly format. Note that Stockport is now greatly out of step with other GM councils in terms of the frequency of its forum.

1b) What do Stockport Council do well when building cycling infrastructure?

i. Off-road routes

Schemes like Nelstrop Road North and Ladybrook valley are all welcome improvements to Stockport's extensive network of greenways. More recent schemes have also ensured that they are (mostly) fully accessible with regard to access controls.

However, the focus on greenways demonstrates SMBC's approach to cycling as principally a leisure activity, failing to recognise that this approach will not lead to the increase in modal shift required by GM-level and national policy. This approach also does not acknowledge that greenways have a higher perceived level of risk than cycle routes along roads, which potentially discriminates against women wishing to cycle.

ii. Sparrow crossings

Stockport has been a pioneer in the use of Sparrow crossings both in Greater Manchester and nationally. While these crossings are to be celebrated, they work best when linking residential roads with low traffic, such as those created by Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes.

It should also be acknowledged that the widespread use of Sparrow crossings within Stockport is an implicit acknowledgement of SMBC's unwillingness to use the CYCLOPS junction, which is increasingly widespread both in neighbouring GM councils and across the UK. Finally, there have been a number of problems around

the positioning of buttons at crossings and lack of functioning detector loops, making these crossings less accessible for disabled people.

iii. Interchange Helix ramp

This is an exemplary scheme not just for Greater Manchester but for the UK, providing a fully accessible route between Viaduct Park and the Trans Pennine Trail. This is a good example not only of a high-quality engineering solution but also of a collaborative approach between campaigners, SMBC and TfGM, recognising the potential shortfalls of the previous approach which would have relied on a lift to travel between the Trans Pennine Trail and Viaduct Park.

Question 2

2a) What is bad about cycling in Stockport?

i. Need for a coherent strategy

Good transport is essential for a good quality of life. Cycling needs to be integrated with other forms of transport including public transport and walking. Active travel and use of public transport can create a modal shift from private car use. Reducing the use of private cars is essential if Stockport is to meet many of its current challenges: these include but are not limited to reducing congestion, increasing physical activity, connecting people to opportunities, achieving net zero and air pollution legal commitments, and has huge potential to improve health and wellbeing and reduce burden on health and social services.

With the need to build more housing, and to increase housing density, it will not be possible for households to have the same level of car ownership as currently. We need to support our residents to have good alternatives to car use, and to prevent forced car ownership leading to cost pressures especially in low-income households.

We feel that Highways schemes in Stockport have been designed in a way that treats cycling as a niche leisure activity, rather than as a key part of an equitably balanced transport network.

ii. Directness

Schemes being brought forward in recent years have often expected cyclists to follow convoluted side road systems with much longer journey times than the equivalent main road route. Indirect routes increase the number of junctions to be navigated, which increases the risk of road traffic collisions.⁴

⁴ 75% of cycle casualties take place within 20m of a junction
[pedal-cycle-factsheet-2017.pdf](#)

The borough's arterial routes are high-value limited road space – clearly there are competing space demands from pedestrians, cyclists, buses and motor vehicles, and compromises need to be made. Our experience over the years has been that SMBC Highways have consistently expected all the compromise to come from sustainable modes, so that motor traffic flows or even parking can be preserved.

We are asking for a default position for future schemes that journey times for sustainable modes of travel are prioritised over private motor vehicles in order to create a more equitably balanced network – which will often require difficult decisions to take space away from cars on major roads. However the evidence (e.g. from Paris, and from various London boroughs) shows that this is an effective way of changing driver behaviour. Although it can be initially unpopular, public opinion shifts once the changes have had time to bed in.

iii. Shared use or only nominally protected infrastructure

Active travel schemes in Stockport have, almost without exception, included many areas of shared use pavement and/or pavement-level cycle lanes with little real segregation from pedestrians. Protected cycle tracks rarely, if ever, continue with priority over side roads or through junctions. These approaches are strongly discouraged by national and regional guidance, which require that cyclists are treated as vehicles, separated both from pedestrians, and from motor traffic except on roads with low motor vehicle flows and low speeds.

iv. Lack of inclusive design approach

Physical barriers can prevent disabled people, and people using adapted bikes, from accessing cycle routes. Such barriers are a breach of Equality Act 2010 legislation, but we still see many in place in Stockport.

v. Gender breakdown on modal share

A recent study in Greater Manchester found 68% of women compared to 20% of men reported feeling unsafe going out alone after dark. Women are more likely to cite concerns about road danger and the lack of safe cycling infrastructure as a reason not to cycle. Protected cycle infrastructure in towns increases the rate of women's cycling, which in countries with low cycling rates is much lower than men's.

2b) What could Stockport Council improve when building cycling infrastructure?

i. Communication of network plan

We're not aware of any overarching plan for turning the borough's safe cycling routes into a joined-up network. Information is released scheme-by-scheme and there has been little attempt made to seek the public's views on which areas or routes should be prioritised. This is at odds with Trafford, Salford and Manchester, which have full indicative plans for their active travel networks and a number of targets for achieving modal shift.

ii. Streets for All

We're pleased that SMBC are working on several Streets for All schemes but would note that Streets for All is intended to be applied to every road and every highways scheme in Greater Manchester. It's a really good set of standards and we'd like to see every highways scheme in the borough start with an aspiration to embody the spirit as well as following the letter of the Streets for All design guide.

iii. Road space reallocation

The [Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2024: Health in Cities](#) states that: "*Road space reallocation away from private cars (including removal of on-road parking spaces) has been shown to be one of the most effective methods of increasing walking and cycling,*" and it quotes a recent study that shows commuting by walking or cycling reduces the risk of a range of diseases by 47%⁵.

It recommends that "city planners need to reallocate road space away from cars and towards other more efficient and less polluting forms of transport. The negative impact of car dependency on physical and mental health, air pollution, road traffic danger, inequalities, carbon emissions and productivity must be clearly communicated to the public, with open discussions on what alternative systems could look like and the benefits these will bring."

As stated in LTN 1/20, "Creating space for cycling may require the reallocation of space within the highway boundary. Wherever possible, this should be achieved by reallocating carriageway space, not reducing the level of service for pedestrians."

⁵ <https://bmjpublichealth.bmj.com/content/2/1/e001295>

iv. Implement 20mph policy

Contrary to discussions at a previous scrutiny committee meeting (25 September), evidence shows that the implementation of 20mph limits across Wales is hugely positive.

The Wales scheme (which followed extensive consultation, unanimous [research](#), and complies with the Wales legislation on health such as the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017) data so far shows huge improvement in KSI figures (including a reduction in child deaths), huge savings to the NHS due to fewer road traffic collisions, and even reduced car insurance premiums^{6 7}, along with leading to more walking and cycling, improvements in air quality, and lower noise levels⁸.

There will always be some people who fear change and oppose it loudly, but nobody in a position of authority would want to see these positive results reversed.

As stated in the LTN 1/20 standards, *“Reallocation of road space through narrowing the carriageway to provide cycle lanes, cycle parking or wider footways can also help reduce traffic speed.”*

v. Consultation as a meaningful activity

Within Stockport, there are some missed opportunities regarding methods of consultation. The public, and interested groups such as Walk Ride Stockport, are generally shown schemes only once they have developed to detailed design – too late for meaningful input, and sometimes delivered as a list of dozens of yes/no questions about each tiny part of a scheme. There appears to be a low appetite to involve people who walk and cycle before setting pen to paper – to ask what they actually want the scheme to achieve and benefit from their local knowledge. There is also a need to present scheme designs in a more accessible fashion, as is done elsewhere in Greater Manchester. Salford is especially good in this regard, presenting bespoke diagrams aimed at a general audience rather than complex CAD diagrams.

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/nov/18/wales-20mph-speed-limit-lives-money-policy>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cydv2rnm4ro>

⁸

https://pja.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Phil-Jones-Welsh-20mph-Task-Force-Group-Report_2020.pdf

Question 3

What have you seen elsewhere that you think could be done in Stockport or by Stockport Council which would help increase the number of people making journeys by bike?

CYCLOPS junctions

A transformative Greater Manchester innovation, used in almost every part of GM except Stockport.

A CYCLOPS junction was originally included in SMBC's A34 scheme, approved by area committee, then quietly dropped from the scheme and replaced with poor-quality shared use pavements, without the change being referred back to the committee.

On-carriageway cycleways

For cycling to become a viable form of transport, it needs safe, direct routes serving major trip attractors. This will inevitably require routes along main carriageways, rather than relying on circuitous back-roads routes and via greenways. Neighbouring councils are forging ahead with this approach, as can be seen in the below examples.

Best Practice Examples from Greater Manchester

As shown in Figure 1, over the past 5–10 years, councils across Greater Manchester have been bringing forward schemes that are now outperforming the national statistics on rates of people cycling. Trafford, which is the most demographically similar council area to Stockport, started from a similar baseline point in 2016, but its rates have not dropped like Stockport's.

The following sets out some of the delivery in neighbouring Greater Manchester councils:

Manchester City Council

i. Oxford Road Cycleway

The Oxford Road cycleway continues to demonstrate that protected cycleways lead to year-on-year growth in cycling figures. While the figures nationally and in Manchester have declined since 2016, the Oxford Road Cycleway has grown every year except during the Covid pandemic in 2020. 2024 saw overall 4% growth, with all-time monthly and yearly highs.

Anecdotally, the scheme has led to a much broader range of demographics than previously on this route, and compared with other, unprotected routes.

ii. Chorlton–Manchester Cycleway

The Chorlton–Manchester Cycleway delivers protected cycleways and CYCLOPS junctions, and is already transformational in terms of people changing their preferred mode of transport for short journeys (as [shown in our interview](#)). Similarly to the Oxford Road route, anecdotal evidence suggests that people using the route are across a much broader demographic range than previously on this route, and compared with other, unprotected routes.

Trafford Council

[This blog](#) sets out the improvements that are ongoing along the A56 in Trafford – a road not dissimilar to the A6 through Stockport. SMBC stated during consultation dialogue that the road width on the A6 is not sufficient to include bus lanes and cycleways. The approach to the A56 has been to look at the context of each section and provide protected space for cycling according to the available space and with reference to regional and national standards. In some cases, this means only providing shared foot/cycleway space for short sections – which is perfectly acceptable in the context of a continuous route whereby the rest of the route achieves the best outcomes for walking and cycling and it means progressing the route improvements at all. Trafford Council is getting the project done and should serve as a precedent for the A6.

Trafford Council recently published a Scrutiny Review on Car Dependency which seeks to provide ways to enable people to reduce their car use. This can be reviewed [here](#).

Trafford Council recently restarted its walking, wheeling and cycling forums and initial feedback on the new format has been very positive. We would urge officers to liaise with their counterparts in Trafford Council to discuss.

Other successful strategies from elsewhere

Evidence from a systematic literature review of what works to increase active travel⁹ came to the following conclusions:

- Multicomponent interventions had the highest impact on active travel levels.
- Interventions that only included social/behavioural/policy elements generally had little impact and had to be repeated/sustained for any impact to be maintained.

⁹ Roaf E, Larrington-Spencer H, Lawlor ER. Interventions to increase active travel: A systematic review. *Journal of Transport & Health*. 2024;38:101860.

- Increasing the walkability of an area increases walking rates, but small-scale cycling infrastructure improvements without other supportive measures often leads to route substitution rather than an increase in cycling rates.
- E-bike loans increased active travel and reduced car use, at least in the short term.
- In studies targeting children, 'walking buses' / 'cycle trains' (i.e. moving together as a group with adult supervision) showed positive impacts.

C. Walk Ride's Review of Recent Highways Schemes for Cycling: includes information relevant to 1b and 2b

Here, we present feedback on recent built-out and proposed schemes from the perspective of achieving modal shift (as promoted under Paragraph 3.424 of the Core Strategy). Our commentary uses some of the national standards of cohesion, directness, attractiveness, comfort, and safety as presented by the Cycling Level of Service Tool within the LTN 1/20 Cycling Infrastructure Design Guide.

A6 to Bramhall

As you have experienced on your study tour, while sections of this route provide a great resource for people of all ages and abilities to cycle on a direct route from Bramhall Park to the A6, it is let down by the harsh level changes throughout the Dean Lane section, [as shown from the side by this video clip](#), and [from the first-person perspective in this video clip](#). This impacts negatively on the comfort of people cycling along the route.

Overall, if the section along Dean Lane can be redesigned to provide level surfacing (for example, [using 'Dutch style' entrance kerbs](#)), then this scheme is a very welcome addition to the area.

A555

In the context of the A555 highways scheme, we consider the shared use walking/cycling path to be an appropriate measure in the context of a bypass road, as it complies with national and regional design standards.

A6

We have previously provided representation in relation to this proposed scheme (see page 2 above). In brief, the scheme rejects Stockport's road user hierarchy (SMBC Core Policy CS9) and national and regional design standards by proposing that people cycle along convoluted routes that are broadly parallel to the west and east of the A6.

As the proposed cycling routes would be far lengthier (as [shown in our video](#)) than providing protected lanes along the A6, it scores a 0 (zero) for directness. They are also winding and unintuitive in places, so scoring a 0 (zero) for cohesion.

There are sections of the proposed scheme that send people cycling along secluded paths with no passive surveillance (as [shown in our video](#)), presenting a major personal safety risk for users (notably, very likely to deter people who report a desire to). Therefore, for attractiveness this would score 0 (zero).

D. Consultation and Engagement: relevant to 1b and 2b

As the TfGM officer noted during the scrutiny meeting on 13 November, none of us were consulted on whether we want more traffic in the borough, and yet a succession of traffic flow 'improvement' schemes over the years have encouraged more car trips. Conversely, for the schemes with funding that aims towards sustainable transport, SMBC have recently provided inaccessible consultations such as that for the A6, which included 200+ questions.

So, we would urge SMBC to initiate a narrative befitting a council that has declared a climate emergency, and flip the question around to point out that, under the status quo 'balance' of road users, we will only see increasing levels of car use and traffic, with all its negative impacts. So equitable balance is needed and public views are there to help shape the nature of that progress; not whether the progress goes ahead at all. To quote the Chief Medical Officer: *"Those who oppose specific evidence-based solutions should feel a responsibility to say what they would do instead to preserve the health of their fellow citizens."*

We would reiterate our Walking and Cycling Forum representation – that attendees are a mobilised and active resource that we would urge officers to embrace in shaping schemes. Regarding the revised forum format going forward, Walk Ride broadly welcomes the proposed changes.

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Ends.