

Statement from Bristol Greenway Network Campaign to West of England Partnership Joint Scrutiny Committee 12/12/08

Every day, thousands of Bristolians fail to consider the bicycle for their everyday transport because of fear of traffic and trepidation at the thought of pedalling up Bristol's hills. Yet there exists a series of level, direct, and traffic-free routes that connect many of Bristol's neighbourhoods. These are the currently neglected strips of land that run along our urban rail network- that with proper planning and funding that have the potential of being transformed into a 21st century walking and cycling expressway network.

The Bristol Greenway Network Campaign (BGNC) is a coalition of Bristol residents with a vision of a future where a network of continuous greenways connect different neighbourhoods of the City. This new non-motorised transport network would take advantage of spare railway land, waterways, and other urban corridors to link green spaces, residential and employment areas and public transport, allowing people to choose to get around in ways that benefit their health and the environment. The Bristol Bath Railway Path is a living example of what we are proposing- it is a linear park and open space, as well as a valuable transport corridor providing efficient travel options for millions every year, who use it for commuting and recreation.

Our first campaign is to establish a greenway along the disused railway lines between Lawrence Hill station and Filton Abbey Wood, providing a safe, level crossing of the M32 between Easton, St. Werburgh's, and Lockleaze with a branch to Redland along the Severn Beach line. This has been referred to as the "Cycle Expressway" but would in fact be open to walkers, runners, wheelchair users, as well as cyclists. The Bristol City Council is currently conducting a feasibility study that should be available in early 2009.

Imagine being able to cycle or walk from Redland, across the famous Gloucester Rd. arches, through Montpellier, St. Werburgh's, gliding safely across the M32, through Easton and it's incredible new Eastside Roots Community Garden Centre, and linking directly with the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, without leaving a flat paved pathway, safely separated from the passenger rail line by a fence. Imagine that the Bristol-Bath pathway wasn't just the solitary jewel that it is now, but a section of a complete traffic-free cycle path network for Bristol. Such a network would enable safe, enjoyable, and direct cycling and walking journeys to popular destinations such as UWE's Frenchay campus, Gloucester Rd., and Temple Meads.

A greenway network is a relatively inexpensive transport investment, and would unleash latent demand for cycling, achieving modal shift away from the motor car. This could be part of the strategy for resolving the region's problems that are associated with high levels of car dependence, including carbon emissions, obesity, air and noise pollution, and road deaths and injuries.

The concept of bicycles, pedestrians and trains safely sharing the same corridor is well established, with examples as near as the Bitton section of the Bristol-Bath path and the section of pathway through the St. Werburgh's allotments. Opening up the rail line for non-motorised traffic would not only maximise use of a valuable transport resource already in public ownership, it could also improve accessibility to and boost ridership on our urban rail network, all while relieving stress on our overcrowded roadway network. Of course any use of Network Rail land would have to balance the needs of the railway with those of cyclists and walkers. We are very supportive of improved rail services, and we see our projects as enhancing the future development of the railway rather than competing with it.

We acknowledge that Network Rail (NR) has long range plans to replace 4 tracks along the main line between Dr. Days Junction and Narrowways Junction. However, this could take another 20 years. The fact that NR has recently granted a lease to the Eastside Roots project for use of the corridor at Stapleton Rd. station, and installed a communications tower in the middle of the corridor indicate that any plan to reinstate rail service is far in the future indeed. Why not make use of this valuable corridor in the interim for non-motorised transport, with a lease that reverts back to NR when additional rail capacity is needed?

We believe that the current proposals for Bristol as a cycling city don't go nearly far enough - that it would be a serious oversight to ignore these valuable rights-of-way while carbon neutral travellers continue to suffer dangerous, polluted, and gridlocked conditions on our roadways (or even worse suffer poor health from inactivity). We believe that Bristol's citizens deserve their own dedicated and well-designed pathways through our city. Now, with £22 million available to make Bristol a Cycling City we can be proud of, let's not waste this opportunity with more badly designed cycle projects.

We urge the West of England partnership to keep an open mind about the use of spare railway land for development of a greenway network, assessing how to use these valuable corridors in such a way that benefits Bristol's quality of life and transport choices.

Sincerely,

Joshua Hart
BGNC