

05 Cycle route information, maps and signage

Key Principle

Cyclists can use most of the road network, and local authorities should ensure that all roads are safe for all legitimate users. However, it is generally recognised that quieter roads and off-road cycle routes are more attractive and pleasant for cycling, especially if they are not too indirect. It can be helpful to produce a map of the cycle network to provide information on routes that are considered safe and pleasant for cycling. Some authorities also offer 'journey planners' that will prepare a personalised route itinerary. It is important to show all streets (i.e. even those not included in the cycle route network), and in urban areas maps should show all street names, because these are essential when using the map to navigate through an area.

Signs and other waymarking features are also important, particularly where the route for cyclists is different from the motor vehicle route, and because the 'scale' of the network for pedestrians and cyclists is typically at a much finer grain than that for motor vehicles, with more emphasis on local trips. On-street maps and signs may also be an opportunity to provide interpretation boards and promotional messages to encourage local people to travel by bicycle.

Background

Well-designed and presented local cycle route maps can be an inexpensive tool to promote cycle use. Maps should be designed to provide all the information people need to make every-day local cycling trips to destinations such as the town centre, main areas of employment, schools, shops and leisure facilities.

Cycle network maps should include on and off-highway routes. Confirmation and agreement on the rights to use off-road routes should be sought before they are included on the map.

Cyclists with skills equivalent to Level 3 of the National Cycle Training Standard will be competent to use most roads, but a good cycle network map may provide some form of 'cyclability' information indicating the level of skill required or any particular hazards, such as a link or junction which requires more advanced cycling skills. For example, maps may use colour to distinguish between quiet roads suitable for all cyclists and sections without dedicated cycle facilities which may carry heavy or fast-moving traffic. Maps may also show steep hills and alternatives to avoid them. This enables both novice and experienced cyclists to make informed route choices. Highlighting 'hazard sites' with exclamation symbols is not recommended because it raises undue concerns about the safety of cycling.

Although some local authorities have concerns about liability issues related to the development and distribution of council-sponsored cycle route maps, especially with respect to showing parts of the highway network as 'suitable' for cycling, the provision of a cycle route map should not lead to any additional exposure to liability or litigation. Authorities can adopt a simple, cost-effective, documented system for subjectively grading the cycle-friendliness of the local network, especially as a recorded basis for recommending links as 'advisory routes' over others. Such a grading system should be informed by experienced local cyclists or planning/engineering staff who regularly cycle. They are more likely to be able to recognise the magnitude and likelihood of any risks and be realistic about route choices in response to physical features such as hills.

Types of map and route information

The most common type of map is a folded paper map. These may be as large as A1 sheets, folded to conventional map size and as small as A3, folded to credit card size. Many may also be downloaded from local authority websites in pdf format. The most common style shows cycle facilities and recommended routes, whilst more recently maps have appeared that show all roads graded for 'cyclability' (as for Kettering).

There are a few examples of online route finders for cyclists (e.g. Bristol, Cambridge and Transport for London's LCN+).

People travelling by bike need to access the same destinations as other road users. Information often shown on cycle maps includes: bike shops, railway stations, bus stations, local landmarks, libraries, toilets, post offices and council offices.

Cycle facilities such as toucan crossings, cycle parking, cycle lanes and paths, bridleways, one-way streets and contra-flows, may be shown on a cycle map, particularly where they offer a way to overcome a physical barrier such as a busy road crossing. Care needs to be taken to avoid too many different symbols as this can become confusing, for example the type of crossing is irrelevant to users so long as it is safe and appropriate.

The reverse side of cycle route maps often includes advice on practicalities such as bike checks and tools, clothing and carrying luggage, as well as safety tips. The presentation needs to be carefully considered to avoid exaggerating the risk of cycling in a way that might discourage cycle use.

Some local authorities combine information for cyclists, pedestrians and public transport on one map or as separate maps on the same sheet. This is not generally an approach which would be recommended by Cycling England as it can lead to cluttered and complicated maps that are difficult to understand.

As well as maps of the entire cycle or highway network in an authority area, some authorities produce maps of individual routes. This is more typical of longer leisure routes. Sustrans produce linear maps of the routes that are part of the National Cycle Network.

Case studies

London Cycle Guides - Transport for London (TfL)

The London Cycle Guides are based on the familiar A-Z format and printed in colour. There are 13 double-sided maps which together cover the whole of London, and a large-scale map of central London. They show cycle routes and quieter roads recommended by members of the London Cycling Campaign, as well as traffic-free routes. They also have useful cycling tips and station parking information. The guides are free and can be ordered online or by phone. They are also available from some tube stations, tourist information centres, bus garages, health and sports centres, doctors' surgeries and bike shops.

Kettering Cycle Map - Kettering Borough Council

A map developed with sponsorship from Kettering Borough Council and partners by CycleCity guides using the Cheltenham map principles, i.e. showing all of the road system colour-coded for cycle friendliness, indicating the level of skill needed to ride them (e.g. green means that "well trained school children should

cope”, whilst pink are only “suitable for highly skilled commuting cyclists”, etc). It also covers bridleways in the rural hinterland. Under the editorial control of local cyclists, it is amongst the most innovative and useful in the country.

Worcester Walking and Cycling Map - Worcestershire County Council

The map has the 'Choose how you move' branding of Worcester's Sustainable Travel Town initiative and seeks to promote cycling, walking and public transport. For cyclists and walkers there is a detailed map of the city, highlighting and differentiating nine different types of cycle route/path, toucan crossings, cycle parking and one-way streets. Details of pedestrian facilities are also included, along with potential destinations, such as churches, schools, pubs and hotels. The sheet also includes a separate map of bus services in Worcester and a larger scale city centre map.

Cambridge Cycling Campaign: online map and journey planner

The Cambridge Cycling Campaign website is compiled by local cyclists and lets you view / add Cambridge cycling-related photos and plan journeys. The website includes a Photo Map with over 10,000 photos of cycling infrastructure in Cambridge, linked to the online map. There are galleries of photos with a common theme. The Cycle Journey Planner finds journeys based on the network known to it and gives the user a choice of fastest, shortest, or quietest route.

Signage

These notes are concerned with cycle route waymarking, but not traffic signs relating to cyclists, which are covered by Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 (TSRGD) and the Traffic Signs Manual.

Cycle routes need to be clearly signed to encourage use (indeed, the existence of attractive signs may help to promote cycling) and because they may take cyclists along back streets and routes not open to motor traffic. Cycle route signs should be sufficient that, once on a particular cycle route, a cyclist does not need to refer to a map to stay on the route.

At the same time cycle route signage should not be too intrusive or create unnecessary clutter that detracts from the local environment. Cyclists travel more slowly than motorists and do not generally need large signs, placed at high level. The exception is at heavily trafficked sites where small signs may be obscured by other vehicles or where cyclists need advanced warning to take up an appropriate position in the carriageway to make a turn. Off-road routes may be marked with simple wooden posts and colour coded waymarkers which can be less visually intrusive.

The need for signs may be reduced by creating a smooth physical interface between different elements of a route, for example, by using dropped kerbs and following desire lines, to create a coherent network where the route is obvious and continuous rather than a series of fragmented 'facilities'.

The cycle route network may need to be signed at a much more local level than the road network, to emphasise the relevance of the network for short local journeys. Some authorities have experimented with journey times on signs rather than distances, and this can help to promote the advantage of cycling by illustrating how quickly a destination can be reached.

Waymarking signs are generally used to indicate destination, direction and distance. Some routes are identified by a name such as: the C2C in Northern England or the Crab & Winkle cycle route from Canterbury to Whitstable, and their route signs may have distinctive logos. Some parts of the National Cycle Network, such as NCN6 in the Sherwood Forest area of Nottinghamshire also include a local identity. Elsewhere, NCN routes are designated by standard blue signs with the route number on them in red.

Many routes aimed at leisure cyclists have signs at key access points with maps and local geographical and historical information, such as the Tissington Trail in the Peak District.

Publications and references

[Kettering Cycle Map](#) - Kettering Borough Council

[Worcester Walking and Cycling Map](#) - Worcestershire County Council

[Online map and journey planner](#) - Cambridge Cycling Campaign

[Maps and Journey Planner](#) - London Cycle Network

[Cycle Infrastructure Design](#) - DfT

[Advice to Somerset county Council: Cycle Route Maps](#) - Cycling England local authority professional support team