

12 Recreational Cycling

Key Principle

Using a bike for leisure or recreation is often one's first experience of cycling, whether as a child playing, a teenager gaining independent mobility, or an adult getting (re)introduced to the pleasures of this activity. Cycling is a very versatile form of recreation: open to young and old; it can be done in groups or alone; specially adapted machines enable people with disabilities to participate. People who have an enjoyable experience cycling for pleasure are more likely than those with no experience of cycling to consider using a bike as a means of transport.

Background

This section covers cycling as a means of recreation in its own right, rather than using a bike as a means of travel to reach a destination to engage in a different leisure activity, e.g. cycling to a pub or swimming pool. Recreational cycling in this context refers to activity where a bike ride is the main purpose of the trip. It could, however, encompass other leisure activities compatible with bike riding, such as picnicking, nature photography, bird watching, etc. This section does not address organised cycle rides which are covered under the section on [Promotional events](#). In addition, specific route guidance is covered in more detail under [Route maps and signage](#).

This section relates to recreational bike riding that people, whether as individuals, couples, families, groups of friends, clubs etc, can organise and undertake themselves – i.e. they are not organised or led by a third party. Such types of cycling can be divided into the following categories:

- Leisure rides
- Touring
- Mountain biking
- BMX
- Play
- Training for racing disciplines

The following looks in more detail at how each of these categories might contribute to encouraging cycle use as a healthy and sustainable means of travel and what local authorities, together with other agencies, might thus do to support these cycling activities.

Leisure rides

What is it?

A leisure ride can start ideally from home, or from a place participants drive to if they consider a home-start for the ride undesirable. The ride may take anything from an hour up to a whole day depending on the time available and ability of the rider. There is no particular need for special facilities, although a pleasant route would almost certainly be a prerequisite for a leisure bike ride. What constitutes

'pleasant' will vary between different types of cyclists, with more cautious and inexperienced riders preferring traffic-free and / or very lightly-trafficked routes. More confident riders may be happy to negotiate some busier roads to gain access to attractive quieter sections. More experienced cyclists may actively seek out demanding terrain such as hills or technically challenging off-road routes, but if novice cyclists are guided towards such routes this can be off-putting for them.

Why encourage it?

Most likely means by which non-cyclists, including habitual car drivers, will first engage in independent cycling activity. Is therefore an important step to becoming a utility cyclist.

What can local authorities, and other organisations, do to facilitate leisure rides?

- Identify, safeguard and develop attractive leisure cycle routes, particularly in urban areas where the opportunities for such riding are limited. Examples of land-uses typically found in an urban setting likely to lend themselves to this include disused rail corridors, large parks, canal towpaths and river banks.
- Provide maps and leaflets outlining the opportunities for leisure cycling in the area. For each route consider including information on distance, time likely to be needed, physical effort required and refreshment opportunities. (See also 'Route maps and signage' section.)
- Provide signage that is consistent as well as easy to interpret and understand. (See also 'Route maps and signage' section.)
- Consider opportunities to provide picnic and rest sites, as well as viewing points along a route.
- Provide and sign links to toilets where they exist.
- Consider the installation of artwork, e.g. sculptures, particularly for routes that are not inherently visually interesting or attractive.
- Where appropriate, provide interpretation for points of interest along the route, e.g. on the local natural and / or industrial history of the area.
- Provide frequent, user-friendly (if possible barrier-free) access to leisure cycle routes, particularly from neighbouring residential areas, as well as obvious neighbouring trip generators, e.g. schools, shops, parks, etc.
- Create links to public transport nodes where appropriate.

Case study

Morecambe to Lancaster Cycle Route: A 5km link between Morecambe Promenade and central Lancaster, incorporating a stunning purpose-built bridge, funded by the Millennium Commission, across the River Lune. For much of its length, the route utilises a disused railway trackbed. It has numerous barrier-free access points linking it to adjacent residential neighbourhoods, shopping facilities, schools and employment centres. There are also connections to both Lancaster and Morecambe rail stations. This corridor is Lancashire's busiest cycle route, used for recreation as well as for utility journeying to work, education, etc. Its popularity as a leisure route was reinforced in 2007 when cycling on

Morecambe Promenade, with its impressive views across Lune Bay to the Lake District fells, was finally given official approval.

Cycle touring

What is it?

Touring generally refers to cycle rides of a whole day, or longer, in duration and is usually undertaken by reasonably experienced cyclists. Touring rides can start from home, but may involve travel to a remote start by car or public transport. The latter is more likely for longer cycle tours taken as a short break or holiday.

Why encourage it?

Cycle touring has a place in promoting cycling in that it offers participants a chance to assess the potential of a bike as a replacement for other forms of travel as a means to access and explore an area. Luggage can be carried more comfortably by bicycle than by foot, quite significant distances can be covered, and it is more flexible than public transport. Areas which struggle to attract mainstream tourists because they are remote and have poor transport connections may find that these very qualities are attractive to cyclists looking for quiet roads and bridleways. Encouraging cyclists to visit the area can help support the local economy by creating opportunities for accommodation provision and patronage of local shops, public houses, cafes and post offices. Unlike visitors by car, cycle tourists tend to carry very little with them and therefore tend to spend more on items such as food during their visits.

What can local authorities, and other organisations, do to facilitate cycle touring?

- Develop maps showing cycle touring opportunities in the area. (See also 'Route maps and signage' section.)
- Provide supporting information of relevance to cyclist tourists, such as the most cycle-friendly routes to visitor attractions, particularly those offering refreshment opportunities.
- Encourage tourist destinations to provide information of relevance to cycle tourists, e.g. the location of cycle parking, any reduction in admittance fee for those arriving by means of transport other than the car, etc.
- Consider developing a network of cycle-friendly accommodation providers, with guidance on how to achieve this status, e.g. through the provision of secure cycle storage, clothes drying facilities, basic cycle tool kit, pick up/drop off in an emergency, etc. Simple hostel and bunkhouse style accommodation, often provided through farm diversification, can be attractive to touring cyclists as it offers a low-cost and slightly more comfortable alternative to camping and enables them to travel without carrying heavy equipment such as tents and cooking utensils.
- Generate information about accessing and exploring an area by a combination of bike and public transport, including 'luggage transfer' services that convey luggage between overnight accommodation stops.
- Work with tourist attractions to offer reduced price admission policies for people travelling on foot or by bike.

Case study

B4 Network: The B4 network service in Cumbria – covering buses, boats, bikes and boots – aims to serve the needs of both visitors and local people travelling to and within the Coniston / Grizedale / Hawkshead area by providing attractive, integrated, alternative means of travel. A new boat-bus-boat service, called the Cross-Lakes Shuttle, was established, linking the two lakes of Windermere and Coniston Water, and servicing the honey pot sites of Hawkshead, Grizedale and Tarn Hows. The Cross-Lakes Shuttle was given an integrated timetable, to ensure each 'link' connected with the next one, together with through-ticketing. Cycle racks were introduced on the boats and minibuses that provide the Shuttle service, with free bike carriage. A number of strategic traffic-free links for cyclists and walkers were identified, designed and constructed, creating a safer and more attractive network of paths linking shuttle boat and bus stops with tourist attractions, towns and villages in the B4 network area.

Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve: Containing North West England's largest reed bed, this RSPB Reserve is located in the Arnside and Silverdale AONB. Maintaining the rich variety of wildlife in and around the site depends on minimal disturbance from motor traffic. Capitalising on the sympathies of its typical visitors, together with good sustainable transport opportunities in the area, Leighton Moss has implemented a travel plan, an unusual step for a tourism attraction. A central element of this plan is the structuring of admission prices to reward visitors who use sustainable modes. All those arriving by public transport or cycle forgo the admission charges (£4.50 for adults) all together.

Mountain biking

What is it?

The advent of mountain bikes (MTBs) has helped fuel a renaissance in the popularity of cycling in recent years. Sales of mountain bikes outstrip all other types of cycle put together – although many are used primarily on-road. Non-competition mountain biking involves exploring the off-road trails and bridleways on which cycling is permitted.

A number of purpose-built MTB trails, e.g. 7Stanes in Scotland, the North Face Trail in the Lake District's Grizedale Forest Park, and Coed-y-Brenin in Wales, have been developed to cater for this expanding leisure pursuit. There are colour-coded routes in these locations to suit a variety of abilities, from short easy access trails using forest roads to long physically and technically challenging routes. In many other areas local authorities have developed circular routes using the public rights of way network and produced leaflets to illustrate these.

Why encourage it?

It is the most popular form of cycling, and has thus done the most to attract newcomers to this form of physical activity and transport in the past decade. Many people prefer to start cycling in an off-road environment, away from motorised traffic and, of all types of bikes, MTBs offer the best opportunities for this. At popular sites, cafes, cycle sales and hire businesses offer employment opportunities, and the trails act as a focus for short-break holidays. It is estimated that the 7 Stanes Mountain Bike trails in Scotland have generated £3.56m to the economy and support 57 full time jobs.

What can local authorities, and other organisations, do to facilitate mountain biking?

- Provide information on the opportunities that currently exist to engage in mountain biking, such as a map of the bridleways and trails on which cycling is permitted in the area.
- Identify and, if possible, fill any obvious gaps in the local mountain bike network through, for example, the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- Consider developing a code of conduct for trail users, setting out the rights and responsibilities of those who may legitimately use them (typically walkers, cyclists and horse riders). Such a code can also serve to encourage consideration for other trail users, and advise on how to go about reporting any problems.
- Explore the need and scope for (additional) purpose-built mountain biking routes, or creation of green corridors to enable their use for off-road cycling. Mountain biking does not require the same quality of service from its routes as utility cycling. The latter demands, for example, a smooth surface, adequate lighting, minimal changes of direction and detours. On the contrary, recreational mountain bike routes involve 'technical challenges' in the form of uneven surfaces, and sharp changes of direction and gradient, etc. Also, they do not necessarily have to go anywhere, or serve a destination, but can be created in an area of woodland or parkland. To this extent MTB route infrastructure can be easier to implement than that for utility cycling, although the skills and knowledge of experienced mountain bikers are essential in designing attractive and challenging trails.
- Offer advice on the potential for minimising car use for mountain biking – as this form of cycling tends to be quite car-dependent, with participants driving out to access MTB routes and areas. Such advice might include sharing car trips, exploring off-road routes closer to home and riding out on the road as a 'warm up' activity.

Case study

The North Face Trail: A 10-mile purpose-built mountain bike circuit through the popular and picturesque Grizedale Forest in the Lake District. The trail offers something for keen family mountain bikers as well as enthusiasts. A £167,000 investment, the circuit was made possible by The North Face Mountain Bike Trail Partnership, comprising The North Face, Rural Regeneration Cumbria and The Forestry Commission. Bike hire is available from the Grizedale Forest visitor centre complex, together with bike washing facilities, refreshment opportunities and a picnicking area.

BMX

What is it?

BMX (Bicycle MotoX [Cross]) is a form of cycling on specially designed bicycles that usually have small wheels, a single gear, low saddle height, and axel pegs for standing on. This leisure activity includes races on earthen tracks (BMX racing) as well as the performances of tricks (BMX freestyle).

Why encourage it?

Providing for BMX is a good way of encouraging children to get involved in cycling, and sustaining their enthusiasm during teenage years when interest invariably wanes. BMX riding is, however, predominantly of appeal to males rather than females, although one of the current women's British Olympic squad started as a BMX rider. Freestyle BMX demonstrations can make for an impressive show, and another opportunity to put cycling in front of the public. BMX and skate parks can create a focus for youths to congregate, and if carefully located this can help to reduce disturbance in residential areas. A BMX track may also offer a focus for meeting to undertake other cycling activities such as cycle training, cyclo-cross or formal coaching sessions such as Go-Ride activities which require an off-road setting.

What can local authorities, and other organisations, do to facilitate BMX?

- Provide purpose built areas for riders to practice and exercise their BMX skills, such as bike-parks.
- Provide introduction and skills courses for BMX riding.
- Include BMX stunt displays in local shows and festivals (whether related to cycling or not).

Case Study

Elmbridge Borough Council in Surrey has developed a number of BMX / skateboard parks, working with local communities on their location and design. The facilities offer opportunities for young novices and more experienced enthusiasts alike.

Parc Bryn Bach: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has created a National Standard BMX track at Parc Bryn Bach – 400 acres of woodlands, lakes and pasture in the Heart of the South Wales Valleys. The Sports Council of Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government also helped fund the project. The BMX track has been designed and built in collaboration with the BMX Co-Coordinator for the Welsh Cycling Union to ensure it meets the BMX requirements of everyone, from beginners right through to experienced and professional riders. The track provides an opportunity for both local people and tourists to enjoy the thrill and excitement of BMX on a high-quality, purpose-built track in a beautiful setting, with a range of supporting facilities nearby.

Bike play

What is it?

Bike Play is a generic term for children 'messaging about' on bikes in an unstructured and unsupervised manner (i.e. not cycling for a specific journey purpose). However, this interpretation should not detract from the value of this type of cycling activity, which provides an opportunity for children to acquire bike handling skills and enthusiasm for the pleasures of cycling. Unsupervised play is an important aspect of children's social development and helps them to gain independence.

Why encourage it?

It provides children with an opportunity to acquire important bike handling skills, such as balance and coordination, and become acquainted with the performance

functions of a bike, e.g. how the brakes, gears and steering work. Creating streets, open space and other areas where children can play safely and independently is an important component of social, housing and transport policies and planning guidance, supporting other activities such as walking and cycling to school and for other local journeys.

What can local authorities, and other organisations, do to facilitate bike play?

- Resist, or lift, blanket bans on cycling in parks. Where restrictions are in place these should not generally be applied to children under 10 years of age.
- Support the provision of home zones and other low-speed environments where children can play safely on streets.
- In addition to Bikeability, organise skills training courses for children, with an emphasis on fun and games, e.g. the Go-Ride sessions coordinated by British Cycling. (See also the [Cycle training](#) section.)

Case study

Go Ride: This is a cycling programme for young people run by the governing body of the sport, [British Cycling](#). A national network of Go-Ride cycling clubs have trained coaches who run a wide range of cycling activities for under-eighteens of all abilities. These include a variety of fun games, that teach cycling skills and which children can take part in on any type of bike. Go-Ride also introduces young people to a range of cycling disciplines such as mountain biking, BMX and track riding. Salt Ayre circuit in the Cycling Demonstration Town of Lancaster provides an off-road venue for local club, Lune RCC to introduce young people to cycling through Go-Ride activities.

Training for cycle racing disciplines

There are a good range of cycle racing disciplines, including time-trialling, road racing, track racing, cyclo-cross, mountain bike racing, to name but a few. Cycling sport enthusiasts will, in addition to participating in events, spend a good deal of time training on all-purpose roads and off-highway tracks and trails. This area of cycle use is, however, not covered in much further detail in this section on how recreational cycling can promote the use of bikes, as participants will already be keen cyclists.

Case study

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games: A key legacy of the London 2012 Games will be major new facilities for cyclists, with the construction of an Olympic [VeloPark](#). This will include a 1,500 seat velodrome and an international standard BMX track. After the Games, a cycle circuit and mountain bike track will be reinstated within the VeloPark, which will become the only integrated centre in the UK offering first class facilities for all the disciplines of cycling. It will be open to elite and grassroots cyclists alike.

Publications and references

There are now many resources relating to the promotion of recreational cycling, too numerous to list individually in the context, but including – generically – cycle route leaflets and guide books for the various types of recreational cycling outlined above, as well as technical ('how to') guides relating to specialist

disciplines, such as mountain biking and BMX. Below are links to the larger organisations in the UK whose key functions include the promotion of recreational cycling.

CTC

With 70 000 members the [CTC](#) (Cyclists Touring Club) is the UK's largest and oldest cycling organisation. Despite its name, the Club supports all type of cycling activity, while focussing primarily on the non-competitive elements. The CTC can usually be found at the forefront of national campaigns to create improved conditions for recreational and utility cycling. Through its network of members and local 'District Associations' the CTC organises leisure rides, cycling holidays, together with cycle training.

Sustrans

[Sustrans](#) is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity, with the aim of creating opportunities for people to choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment. The organisation is probably best known for securing £43.5 million from the National Lottery to work with local authorities and other agencies to complete the National Cycle Network – a 10,000 mile on- and off-road cycle route network across the UK which has made a significant contribution to promoting recreational cycling.

British Cycling

[British Cycling](#) is the main body covering most elements of competition cycling: road and track racing, mountain biking, BMX, cyclo-cross, etc. Its importance to the promotion of recreational cycling is that it coordinates, through its Go-Ride programme, important skills training for young people. The spectacle of cycling sport also helps enthuse people to give this activity a go themselves, whether at competition level or not. British Cycling is becoming increasingly involved in other initiatives to encourage greater participation in cycling such as its support for 'Everyday Cycling' an initiative to publicise local opportunities to ride, and the organisation of a number of mass-participation events.