



***Road
Danger
Reduction
Forum***

***D*angerous Cyclists**

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Background

Over recent years there has been an apparent increase in complaints about anti-social cyclist behaviour. Media coverage has in particular highlighted concerns raised by pedestrians about the perceived threat posed to them by cyclists riding on pavements, leisure paths and illegally across pedestrian crossings or red traffic signals. The Road Danger Reduction Forum seeks to promote equity and accessibility for non-motorised road users. Therefore we are concerned at this seemingly growing conflict between walkers and cyclists, who should be united in their quest to challenge the much more significant threat posed to them by motor vehicles. This paper seeks to analyse the situation and offer some solutions.

Dangerous Cyclists

The extent of misbehaviour by cyclists is difficult to assess accurately because of the lack of evidence. This in itself betrays part of the problem. The low priority given to cycling and walking by central and local government in recent years explains why there is such a dearth of data on the experience of both these modes. This may now be changing, but any new data will indeed be new and thus not comparable with past records.

The Scale of the Problem

In the past few decades the increased threat posed by the rise in motor vehicle traffic has been a major contributory factor in the corresponding decline in walking and cycling. This increased threat on the road is a reason why many cyclists feel safer on the pavement. That some of these should then cycle without regard for the safety of pedestrians is more a symptom of the general malaise in road user behaviour more normally associated with motorists.

With the increase in off-road cycling there is a tendency for leisure cyclists to transport their bicycles ever greater distances by car in pursuit of peaceful

cycling territory. This in some cases reflects the lack of safe on-road cycle routes at a local level. That some of these cyclists may also choose to cycle in the same manner that they drive their cars may also be a factor in the increased perception of “dangerous cyclists”.

The “threat” offered by cyclists must, however, be taken in context. What we do know for certain is that the involvement of cyclists in collisions with pedestrians is only a tiny proportion of all collisions involving pedestrians. Using the most detailed data available, it appears that approximately 0.3% of serious injuries and 0.2% of deaths suffered by pedestrians involve cyclists.

Cyclists form a very small part of the overall traffic mix and partly as a result of this pedestrians are literally hundreds of times more likely to be hurt or killed in a collision with a motor vehicle than a bicycle.

Many collisions between cyclists and pedestrians involve greater fault on the part of the pedestrian. Indeed, people who both drive and cycle may notice that pedestrians tend to be more heedless of cyclists than of motorists. While this may be due to the fact that cycles are quieter, it is also true that pedestrians (correctly) judge the threat posed to them by cyclists to be less and thus may act accordingly.

Furthermore, some of the cyclists involved are children, who cannot fairly be expected to behave with the care of adult motorists and whose behaviour should be seen alongside other play activity on the pavement, such as roller skating or skateboarding. None of this means that there is no problem, even if the threat posed is more often one of nuisance rather than significant danger. It does, however, mean that we should not be diverted away from the vast majority of dangerous acts towards pedestrians, which do not involve cyclists.

Some Solutions

After separating the prejudice from the reality the Road Danger Reduction Forum concludes that “dangerous cyclists” do exist. Danger re-

Training

duction requires those who pose the most threat to modify their behaviour so as not to endanger the more vulnerable. In conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians this means that in a majority of cases, cyclists will bear the greater duty to take care, particularly on off-road paths.

Appropriate cyclist training stresses that pedestrians, particularly the disabled, visually impaired, the elderly and small children can be intimidated by inconsiderate cycling behaviour. In particular, pedestrian crossings and red traffic signals should be respected. Pavement cycling is wrong because :-

- It is a nuisance to pedestrians
- It surrenders the use of cyclists' rightful place on the carriageway, and
- It may increase the danger to cyclists, who may not be anticipated by motorists when they ride off the footway.

The RDRF fully supports local authorities offering professional cyclist training for children and adults as this is a means to promote responsible and increased cycling.

The most pertinent solution to cyclist and pedestrian conflict lies in making the roads perceptibly safer for cyclists. This will require action on a number of fronts. The car culture must be challenged. The view that car ownership gives one the right to drive wherever, whenever and however one wishes has developed in the absence of any encouragement to recognise how such "rights" adversely affect others. This false belief is bolstered by the inadequate enforcement of traffic law and the lenient treatment of errant motorists by the courts. That the selfish attitudes of motorists should also be visible among cyclists, whilst inexcusable, is hardly surprising.

Changing attitudes should begin during training, where a greater emphasis on responsible behaviour towards other road users should be cen-

Conclusion

tral to the process. It must also be recognised that this training process does not begin when a learner driver first sits in the driving seat of a car, but many years before. Road Safety staff at forward thinking local authorities have introduced pedestrian and cyclist training courses which prepare young people with the skills, strategies and attitudes which will eventually make them safer and more responsible motorists. The Forum campaigns for greater recognition of the value of this work, and believes that it should be supported with real funding from central government.

Creating the right climate will also require greater and more equitable enforcement of road traffic law. Dangerous motorists and cyclists persist in anti-social behaviour because they do not perceive any risk of being caught, or punished. We believe that road traffic law should be enforced properly, but in relation to the relative threat offered to others by each type of road user.

Indeed, the rise in complaints about the threat posed by illegal cycling to pedestrians indicates the extent to which the threat posed by criminally negligent driving to pedestrians has faded into the background.

The Road Danger Reduction Forum rigorously condemns inconsiderate behaviour by cyclists. Our vision is one of "all road users taking full responsibility for the effects their transport choices have on others". This will be realised only through a complete change in our transport culture, a change we are committed to bringing about.