



Road Danger Reduction Forum

The Future of Cycle Training

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*Quality Control***



The Forum believes that high quality cyclist training for children is essential to achieve the aims of the Integrated Transport Strategy.

Good training provides children with the skills required to be responsible, safe road users not only as children but possibly as future drivers. It is also essential in order to promote and encourage more cycling, particularly through giving parents the confidence to allow their children to cycle.

National standard

Good training, available to all, should also encourage more responsible cyclists who do not cycle illegally on pavements. To this end the Forum is seeking the establishment of a national standard for the provision and content of child cyclist training, backed up by sufficient government funding so that all councils can fulfil it.

In 1994, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), produced a Code of Practice for practical cyclist training. This document set out best practice in a manner which remains an excellent blueprint for the provision of effective training.

In 1996 the Transport Research Laboratory report, "The Effectiveness of Child Cycle Training Schemes" (TRL Report 214), gave the results of the first proper research into the effectiveness of the various types of cycle training available in the UK. This confirmed that RoSPA's best practice guidelines, if followed, were the most effective means of training primary age children. The report also showed that follow up training at secondary school age improved results further.

Training works

The result of these two pieces of work is that we now know that appropriate training works. The blue print is:

- training should be carried out on the road
- courses are best spread over a number of weeks
- children should learn strategies for safe cycling
- instructors should be well trained, competent and experienced cyclists.

Current provision

Only a minority of authorities are currently offering training which conforms to best practice. Of these, only a minority are able to offer training to all appropriately aged children. And of these, only a handful offer follow up training at secondary school age.

The reasons for this can primarily be put down to a lack of resources. The higher standards which best practice demands come at a price which few authorities can afford.

Best practice is virtually impossible to maintain if it is based on networks of volunteer instructors as has been traditional with National Cycling Proficiency schemes. The spotlight of Health & Safety legislation and practice demands much more rigid vetting and training of instructors, with associated costs.

Availability

Those authorities which have overcome these problems have done so by employing professional instructors. However, this usually means that some of the cost is passed on to parents. This can restrict the availability of training, especially for poorer families.

Providing effective training is too expensive an option for most authorities to contemplate on anything other than a limited scale.

Meanwhile, the British Medical Association has recently called for cyclist training to be made part of the national curriculum. This would rightly emphasise the importance of training but would not solve the resourcing problems.

The way forward

The way forward would be to set a national standard for training and provide adequate funding for authorities who meet that standard. The RoSPA best practice guidelines already provide the blueprint for such a standard.

Local authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside are working together to establish a regional accreditation. This will set the standard which instructors must meet and could be the basis for a national standard.

The real cost of providing training in York is in excess of £20 per child at primary and £10 at secondary school. The cost for all

children likely to require training would be some £31,000 for York. Transposed to the whole of the UK, the cost would be around £10 million. Given the number of children who are killed and injured as cyclists, this level of funding is small compared to the benefit which would be gained.

Recommendations

The Forum therefore recommends-

1. That the government, in co-operation with appropriate road safety bodies, establishes a national standard covering all aspects of cycle training.
2. That the government establish a fund of £10 million per year to support local authorities whose cyclist training services meet the national standard. Authorities would be able to claim £20 for each child trained in primary school and £10 for each receiving training at a secondary school.

The Forum contends that unless these recommendations are implemented, effective cyclist training will only be available to a small minority of children in the UK. This would be a tragedy as, not only would the road safety benefits be lost, but the potential for increasing cycling would be seriously reduced. Good training is also tremendously popular with parents, schools and children and if funded properly would provide employment. The £10 million required could be found within existing transport funding with little detrimental effect and great benefit.