

Abergavenny Cycle Group Submission to Monmouthshire County Council's Local Transport Plan

Key points in summary

- **Abergavenny is characterised by very low rates of cycling but considerable 'suppressed demand'. Cycling could contribute to reduction in congestion, shorter journey times, cheaper transport, healthier more active lifestyles. Abergavenny Cycle Group would like cycling to become a viable option for people of all ages and abilities, particularly for shorter journeys (<3km) that are so well suited to cycling.**
- **On the vast majority of fast, busy main roads there is no safe space for cycling. This effectively cuts off Abergavenny from surrounding habitations (Llanellen, Llanfoist, Govilon, Pandy, Glangrwyney) and neighbouring towns (Crickhowell, Gilwern, Raglan).**
- **Measures to control motor traffic in the town (e.g. the many one way streets) have reduced permeability of the town to cycles, requiring circuitous routes on busy main roads.**
- **Several good cycle routes are hampered by a small number of dangerous pinch points or missing links which diminish their usage considerably.**
- **Reducing motor traffic in the town would not only improve conditions for cycling and walking but would make for a more pleasant town.**
- **Abergavenny has had very little focus on cycling infrastructure over the years, by focussing in on a relatively small area with a high potential for cycling growth can achieve more than spreading schemes so thinly over the county they will not make any difference.**

1. Who we are

Abergavenny Cycle Group (ACG) is a group of volunteers who have been working since 1995 for safe cycling in Abergavenny and the surrounding area. ACG is a registered charity and open to all local people. Membership costs £5/year. ACG has close links with the Abergavenny Road Club, the local Friends of the Earth group, Transition Town Abergavenny and the Abergavenny Civic Society.

+ Cycling is healthy, low cost and non-polluting. It can also be very enjoyable. ACG wants more people to choose to cycle to work, to school, to shop, and for leisure. Using the bike instead of the car for short trips reduces traffic and congestion, making towns and villages more pleasant places to live.

+ We offer advice and support to new cyclists, for instance on routes and equipment and organise a programme of social rides that are especially popular with families and over the years our cycle training in Abergavenny schools has trained more than 500 children with on-road cycling skills.

+ Too often, busy and dangerous roads deter potential cyclists from taking to two wheels or discourage those who do give cycling a try. We campaign for improvements to the conditions for cycling in the area to make Abergavenny an inviting place to ride bike, whatever your age or ability.

2. Cycling in Abergavenny and around

Cycling is popular as a competitive sport and as a leisure activity in and around Abergavenny. The town supports two successful independent bike shops, the Abergavenny Road Club has 250 members and is one of the most highly-regarded cycling clubs in Wales, both for its sporting success, events and rates of

participation, especially among young riders. Abergavenny has hosted major cycle sport events including the national road race championships and the Tour of Britain. Abergavenny is the gateway to the Brecon Beacons National Park, a popular leisure touring cycling destination, and sits at the nexus of several routes in the National Cycle Network. Monmouthshire County Council has invested in hosting high profile cycle sport events in the town and has pledged to build a brand new Velo Park in the locality, in support of making the Monmouthshire the 'cycling capital of Wales' and Abergavenny the 'cycling capital of Monmouthshire'. Despite this, Abergavenny has received very little investment in the infrastructure necessary to make cycling a viable option for short, everyday journeys.

As a result, rates of everyday cycling in and around Abergavenny are very low. Anecdotal evidence and the limited amount of official data available confirm that rates are broadly in line with the low rates of cycling for the whole of Wales (with the exception of Cardiff, which has seen a significant increase over the past few years). Compared to countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, where cycling is a mainstream mode of transport and upwards of 20 per cent of journeys are made by bike, rates of cycling in Wales and the rest of the UK are very low. According to the official National Survey for Wales (2013):

95 per cent of people in Wales have learned to ride a bike and 57 per cent of people in Wales own a bike but....

+ only 6 per cent of people in Wales travel a bike once a week or more;

+ only 5 per cent of people in Wales use a bike to go shopping and only 3 per cent use a bike to travel to work;

+ only 2 per cent of primary school children in Wales ride a bike to school, and just 1 per cent of secondary school children ride a bike to school.

Research by Brake, the road safety charity, found that 35% of people in the UK could be convinced to use a bike to get to work and 46% to use a bike for other local trips *if the roads were less dangerous*. See: <http://www.brake.org.uk/campaigns-events/take-action/latest-news/843-commuters-call-for-safer-streets-for-cycling-to-enable-more-to-get-on-their-bikes>

We believe there is a considerable suppressed demand for cycling in and around Abergavenny, among people who currently do not cycle, or cycle rather little, because of the barriers that make the roads feel unsafe or makes cycling routes difficult or inconvenient. Too often, the bikes you see in Abergavenny and around are strapped to the back of cars as people are driving to the places where it's safe and pleasant to ride.

Planning for suppressed modes of transport like cycling and walking requires an approach that goes beyond the 'predict and provide' model of transport planning which foresees ever more journeys by private car and simply seeks to accommodate this growth: an impossible task as every increase in capacity for motor traffic induces yet more motor traffic. Instead, planners should seek to make efficient, cheap, non-congesting, non-polluting modes of travel a viable option for the majority of the population. This begins with addressing the barriers to cycling that currently exist.

3. Overcoming barriers to cycling

Abergavenny is a small market town, not vast urban metropolis. It should not be a scary place to ride a bike, yet the volume of traffic, the lack of good cycle infrastructure, and the narrowing of carriageway space by on-street parking, makes cycling an unpalatable choice for most people who might consider riding a bike for local journeys as an alternative to driving.

We would like the Monmouthshire County Council's local transport plan to make it a top priority to

improve conditions for cycling, not just for current cyclists, but to make cycling an appealing and practical option for people who do not currently cycle and recognising that many interventions that benefit cycling also benefit pedestrians and to improve the quality of the public realm in the town.

A clear focus on Abergavenny as a cycling town makes a lot of sense given the town's preeminence in sport and recreational cycling, potential for growth in everyday cycling and lack of investment in cycle infrastructure over the past decades.

Cycle routes in and around Abergavenny should be **direct, pleasant and must feel safe**.

In April 2014 ACG held a well-attended public meeting specifically to seek input on what can be done to make the roads in Abergavenny and around more inviting to people on bikes. The feedback from AGC members and members of the public has led us to conclude that the principal barriers to cycling, and the solutions required, fall into the following six broad categories:

A. Safe cycling on main roads linking communities and places

B. Reducing traffic speeds

C. Fixing dangerous junctions

D. Pinch points, obstacles and missing links

E. Cycle contraflows

F. Cycle parking, route signage, maintenance

4. Detail on example interventions that would improve conditions for cycling

(A) Safe cycling on main roads linking communities and places

Main roads, where traffic speeds are greater than 40mph, are effective no-go-zones for all but a very small minority of the bravest, most confident cyclists. In many cases these are key routes linking communities and places. Where no equally direct alternative cycle route is available, action is required to make cycling a viable travel option. Wide, segregated cycle tracks are the preferred option on main roads, though where a cycle track is not possible due to the limits of space, and pavements are wide enough, and a shared use cycle/walking paths is another way of providing safe cycling infrastructure. However, care is required to avoid conflict with pedestrians and to ensure cyclists have the same priority over side roads as motor vehicles using the main carriageway. Examples:

- **Glangrwyney**. The section of the A40 between Crickhowell and Glangrwyney has an almost continuous and fairly wide pavement running along the north side, but the 3.6km section from Glangrwyney into Abergavenny has a discontinuous and narrow pavement. Routing a cycle track or wide and well-surfaced shared use path, built to a high standard and designed alongside the A40 would open up Abergavenny to be a true gateway into the National Park.

- **Gilwern**. A cycle path alongside A465 to Gilwern was a missed opportunity when widening of the Heads of the Valleys Road a few years ago. Providing a segregated cycle lane along the side the road is still possible, but there are a series of access roads on the north of the A465 that, if linked, would also provide a good commuting cycle route to Abergavenny.

- **Llanellen**, while very close to Llanfoist and Abergavenny, is currently isolated for all but the most confident, fastest cyclists who are willing to share a narrow road with motor traffic travelling at upwards of 40 mph. The narrow and fast Gypsy Lane acts as a barrier to getting to Llanfoist and the busy narrow bridge with no footway as well as the lack of safe cycle route through the Hardwick roundabout.

- On the A465 towards **Pandy** there is plenty of carriageway width for wide, fully, segregated cycle track.

- On the B4598 towards **Ragan** there is plenty of carriageway width for wide, fully, segregated cycle track.
- The A4143 from Llanfoist Bridge north to the A40 already has wide footpaths that are be suitable for a shared use cycle/walking path. This would facilitate access to Neville Hall Hospital as well as the Union Road industrial estate (climbing centre, soft play, shops and galleries etc)

(B) Reducing traffic speeds reduces road danger at source and can have a huge impact on road safety and how safe cyclists feel while riding, which is the major determinant of whether people chose to cycle or not. Reducing road danger benefits pedestrians and other road users as well. Examples:

- A 20mph default speed limit for the whole of Abergavenny is the single change that would have the biggest positive impact on people who cycle and walk in Abergavenny – i.e. practically everyone. The longest journey across Abergavenny is about 2 miles and therefore a blanket 20 mph zone would “cost” most people driving in or out of Abergavenny no more than a minute, possibly less.
- Rat-run through Deri Road, Chain Road and Pentre Lane. School traffic from King Henry VIII School, exiting the school onto Pen-y-Pound, uses this very narrow route as a quicker way, at a busy times, of getting to the A40 or to Old Hereford Road.
- Rat-run along Park Crescent, a residential street, makes this street hostile for cycling, particularly since much of the carriageway is occupied by parked cars. Measures could be taken to ensure through traffic remains on the main distributor roads rather than taking short cuts along residential streets.

(C) Fixing dangerous junctions reduces unnecessary conflict and a significant source of road danger.

- Lower Castle Street is a dangerous junctions at both ends, for cyclists and pedestrians. It is also unnecessarily confusing and difficult for motorists to navigate. At the north-east end, junction with Cross Street and the A40, priority is unclear, there are no pedestrian crossings and poor sight lines. At the south-west end, junction with Castle Street, motorists heading up the hill are often in conflict with cyclists riding south along the Castle Street towards the Sustrans cycle route beside the castle.

The Hardwick Roundabout is very hostile for cycling and restricts access to the B4598 south towards Raglan.

Cycle access to the **Waitrose** supermarket could be much improved by creating safe crossing points for cyclists and pedestrians on the gyratory around the site. Currently, access from National Cycle Route 46 (the cycle route to Abergavenny) requires crossing the slip road to the A465 on a hazardous unsignalled crossing, bringing cyclists and pedestrians into conflict with fast-moving motor vehicles headed to or from the dual carriageway.

(D) Pinch points, obstacles and missing links. A missing or poorly designed road or path puts people off using of an otherwise safe and direct route. These pinch points can be as simple as a single poorly-designed gate or a lack of a safe crossing point. Other pinch points require significant investment, such as the Llanfoist Bridge. Examples:

- A very short (30m) section of unsurfaced, steep, rough and rutted track linking Castle Meadows & Mill Street to Castle Street. The track is part of the national cycle network 42 and is vital for people heading east towards the station. It is not passable by road bikes or inexperienced cyclists, nor by people in wheelchairs.
- A lack of safe crossing points on the busy A40 and A4143 roads makes walking and cycling journeys unnecessarily hazardous, slow or circuitous.
- The popular cycle route across Castle Meadows requires crossing of two kissing gates at the western end,

close to the Llanfoist Bridge. These are not easy for most bikes and impossible for tandems, many cargo bikes and bikes pulling trailers.

- Llanfoist Bridge is short hostile section of main road that is off-putting to many cyclists and potential cyclists. Even wheeling bikes across is hazardous as the single footway is so narrow and many of the vehicles crossing the bridge are very large. The absence of crossing points either side of the bridge makes matters worse, both for cyclists and for pedestrians.

- The 700 metre long 'missing link' on the 12km long Clydach gorge cycle path which requires users to leave the original railway path and join roads with very steep gradients, making the riding the whole route longer, more arduous and off-putting for many cyclists.

(E) Cycle contraflows. Allowing cyclists to travel against the direction of a one-way street avoids length detours and cycling on busy, hostile main roads.

- Union Road East leading to Merthyr Road and Tudor Street is one-way and requires cyclists heading from the hospital into the town centre to cycle three sides of a square, on hilly terrain. A contraflow cycle lane would create a direct route and encourage more people to make the journey by bike.

- Frogmore Street and Lion Street. Cycle contraflows would allow cyclists access to the heart of the town without having make a lengthy detour along the A40.

(F) Cycle parking, route signage, maintenance

- The only 'official' cycle parking at Abergavenny station is five bike cages, which means that the majority of cyclists have to try to secure their bikes to the sides of the cages, to lamp posts and other unsuitable street furniture. The space occupied by the cages would otherwise have provided parking for 20+ cycles if normal Sheffield-type stands had been used instead.

- Wayfinding on backstreet routes requires good signage. Much of the current signage is low standard and intermittent at best.

- It should go without saying that all cycle facilities need to be maintained in the same way that roads, pavements and street furniture is maintained. Broken glass leads to punctures, often cited as a reason to not use a route. Bumpy and broken surfaces for example where tree roots have damaged paths are a disincentive to cycling as well as being potentially hazardous. Potholes in roads are an irritant for car drivers but can seriously damage cycles and, in the worst cases, cause physical injury to cyclists.

This is not a comprehensive survey of the problems and assessment of potential solutions but it is a start, based around ACG's own internal analysis and input from the general public. A more detailed overview and discussion of issues of concern can be seen on ACG's 'Cyclescape' website:

<http://abergavenny.cyclescape.org/>

We are keen to work with Monmouthshire County Council to advise and assist with making a reality out of our vision for a cycling-friendly Monmouthshire.

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