

## **Abergavenny Cycle Group**

### **Response to Active Travel Consultation for Abergavenny**

**October 2020**

Abergavenny Cycle Group is a group of around 30 paid up members who have been working since 1995 for safe cycling in the Abergavenny area. Registered Charity, no. 1070816. Abergavenny Cycle Group is open to all local people and our mailing list and Facebook Group has over 200 members.

This consultation response was prepared by the group committee following discussions at group meetings.

This response contains some general comments about measures to improve active travel routes in the town, such as reducing speed limits, tackling rat-running and cycle contraflows on one-way streets. We then list our priority improvements and there follows a detailed response to each of the routes in the INM and some routes that we believe should be added to the INM.

#### **General comments**

Abergavenny is a small market town, it is not a vast urban metropolis. It should not be a scary place to ride a bike. Yet the every increasing volume and speed of motor traffic and the legacy of almost a century of car-oriented highways policy have combined to make cycling an unpalatable choice for the majority of people who might consider riding a bike as an alternative to driving for journeys in the town.

The Covid lockdown of spring and early summer 2020 and the resulting evaporation of most motor traffic showed just how many people in town own bicycles and are keen to use them, if only it is safe to do so. During the lockdown there were more people cycling in Abergavenny than any time within living memory. Now that motor traffic - and road danger - has returned to pre-lockdown levels cycling is back down to previous low levels.

Both cycling and walking could contribute to reduction in congestion, shorter journey times, cheaper transport and more active, healthier living.

The single most powerful intervention to improve active travel in Abergavenny is **a 20mph speed limit on all roads in the town, including all main roads where cycling is permitted**. Signs and enforcement can go some of the way, but design

interventions such as narrowing carriageway widths and widening footways, introducing cycle-permeable chicanes, planting trees and reducing sightlines can all contribute to reducing traffic speeds and thus cutting road danger at source.

Some residential streets are hostile to cycling due to the volume of **rat-running** (eg. Park Crescent and Ross Road) Measures to discourage rat-running not only enhances the quality of a street as a place to live, but increases its attractiveness for active travel journeys. Modal filters (technical term for bollards) can transform a residential street cheaply and immediately.

One way streets were introduced to the Abergavenny to discourage motor traffic from the town centre. But they are a significant impediment to cycling by forcing cyclists onto more hostile distributor roads. Cycle contraflows on one-way streets are the answer. Among these problem one-way streets are Lion Street, Upper Cross Street, Frogmore Street, Lower Castle Street, Market Street, Commercial Street and Union Road West. The eastern end of Baker Street was recently made one way (ironically, as part of public realm works funded as 'active travel improvements'). This has cut off what was previously an important cycling route in the town.

The Welsh Government has recently announced draft legislation for blanket 20mph limits in residential streets and to tackle widespread pavement parking. These are both critical measures for active travel, and Monmouthshire should get ahead of the curve on introducing 20mph zones and combatting pavement parking.

New developments (residential and commercial) must be 'active travel proofed' at the earliest possible pre-planning stage. It must be made clear to prospective developers that no planning applications will be approved without the provision of high quality active travel routes.

We welcomed the draft cycling strategy for the county but believe that a meaningful strategy needs measureable targets for the outcomes it seeks, not just vague, unspecific aspirations, and a clear framework for delivering those outcomes through policy.

## Top priorities

All measures to improve active travel in the town are welcome. However we realise that not everything can be done at once. Beside a blanket 20mph limits on all streets which remains the highest priority of all, these are our priorities for improvement right now:

\* Cycle proof the recent town centre public realm improvement schemes (Frogmore Street / Cross Street). This scheme had the unfortunate and unintended effect of closing key town centre streets to cycling. This needs to be addressed through clarity on where cycling is allowed and signage to indicate cycles are permitted on Frogmore Street and upper Cross Street. This includes a west-bound cycle contraflow Lion Street and a smaller contraflow on Baker Street. We would like to see cycling permitted on Nevill Street (part of MCC-A2) and High Street.

\* MCC-A1. New walking/cycling bridge to Llanfoist. We support the idea of a new bridge as it will provide a safer and more pleasant (though possibly slower and less direct) alternative cycling route between Abergavenny and Llanfoist. Approaches to the Llanfoist bridge(s), especially on the Llanfoist side. The roundabout outside Waitrose is more hazardous and hostile for cycling than the present bridge over the Usk. Building the new bridge must be accompanied by measures to provide safe, attractive and direct journeys onward journeys through this junction and into Llanfoist. We believe a new traffic-light controlled junction with cycle phases is the best solution. Beyond the roundabout, the B4246 through Llanfoist is excessively wide and fast. There is scope for narrowing the carriageway and providing wider footways and / or dedicated cycle infrastructure here.

\* MCC-A19. The spine route from Mardy to the town centre should be a safe, accessible, direct, well-defined and continuous route.

\* MCC-A3. A new and enhanced riverside route from Llanfoist bridge to the railway station. With nothing more than resurfacing, a high quality route is possible as far as Mill Close (and onwards to the station via Belmont Road, Belmont Close and an alleyway linking to Station Road). A better route would emerge onto the A40 directly opposite Station Road, but this may require a small amount of land acquisition. In either case, a new crossing point on the A40 would be required. A traffic light controlled junction at Station Road / A40 would benefit traffic flow to and from the station, and reduce speeding on the A40 which is a recognised problem by Community Speed Watch.

\* MCC-A5. Castle Street to Mill Street link upgrade (MCC-A5). This is a very quick win. The route is part of NCR 42 but is a very poor surface and there is a dangerous junction with Lower Castle Street. Paint and resurfacing (and even better, works to even out the gradient) is all that is required.

\* MCC-A21. The Junction of A40 / Upper Cross Street / Lower Castle Street. This is primarily a pedestrian benefit but it would also benefit cyclists travelling southbound on A40 and looking to go up Lower Castle Street or Cross Street. At present this manoeuvre requires cyclists to wait in the middle of a junction with bad sight lines and heavy traffic - not safe or inviting at all. We propose relocating the traffic lights from outside St Mary's Church to this junction. Lower Castle Street is dangerous for pedestrians with very narrow footways, despite being a key pedestrian linking route with no alternatives. Traffic calming measures (e.g. width restrictions & bollards) are badly needed.

### **Detailed comments on the ERM and INM routes:**

#### **MCC-A1**

We regret the continued delay to the long promised new cycling and walking bridge.

Given the level of road danger on the present bridge, and the fact that Sustrans recently removed the bridge from the National Cycle Network due to the level of road danger, we are surprised it features on the Existing Routes Map as it clearly doesn't meet the standard required by the Active Travel Act.

Even if the bridge is built, without cycle safety improvements to the A4143 and, in particular, the roundabout by Waitrose, the risk is that there will be little or no increase in cycling, as crossing the roundabout by cycle is more dangerous and intimidating than cycling on the old road bridge.

We propose this roundabout either be converted into a traffic-light controlled junction or a cycling and walking friendly roundabout (Dutch style), with priority for cycles. The most dangerous part of the current roundabout is where traffic is exiting the A465 at speed, and coming around the corner towards the bridge.

Another option is to create new crossing point of the A4143 between the bridge and the roundabout to connect with the cycle route south to The Cutting.

At the northern end of MCC-A1 the route should continue on north all the way to the roundabout junction with A40. It is an important link within the town and there are no alternatives anywhere near as direct. It is a wide road so there is plenty of space to make improvements. At times motor traffic is fast and intimidating. We would propose a lower speed limit (20mph), narrowing of the carriageway and segregated or soft-segregated cycle lane. If the footways were widened this could be a shared use footway/cycleway, though it should have priority at junctions with side roads.

Though it looks on the map as if MCC-A1 connects with Union Road West/East and this is an essential linking route from Llanfoist bridge to Western Abergavenny including King Henry VIII school (via MCC A8), but lacks speed reductions / cycle infrastructure. As a result it's not an especially pleasant or safe road to cycle on. The road needs a 20mph speed limit or dedicated, separate safe space for cycling (with priority over side turnings).

## MCC-A2

Nevill Street (part of MCC-A2) and Frogmore Street is indicated on the ERM and INM as a cycle route. However, there are signs on Nevill Street which show cycling is prohibited. Likewise for upper Cross Street following the recent daytime restrictions of motor traffic.

The Cycle Group was repeatedly assured that the recent public realm improvements would not prohibit cycling in the town centre. Unfortunately that is exactly what has happened. Clarity is required on whether cycling is permitted on these town centre streets. We propose that responsible, courteous cycling should be permitted. On sunny days when there is a lot of pedestrian traffic, cyclists will naturally get off and walk. Most of the time there is plenty of space, and cyclists should be permitted to cycle here. Sorting this out should be a top priority.

The route up through the car park is very steep and convoluted with many conflict points with motor vehicles and pedestrians. It needs attention, as well as consideration of Merthyr Road as a faster and more direct alternative.

## MCC-A3

A new link between Llanfoist and the Railway Station is a very good idea. Needs to be continuous all the way to the railway station via Station Road (i.e. not via a link to MCC-A6). We acknowledge that this is aspirational due to land ownership issues but it has great potential. Needs to be tarmac or, at least, very good clean gravel, not mud as at present in many places.

The present timber kissing gates around Castle Meadows are just about usable for normal cycles but are difficult or impossible for cargo bikes, trikes, handcycles or cycles with trailers. The gates could be improved to reduce journey times.

## MCC-A5

The cycle/footway from Castle Street west towards Mill Street and south into Castle Meadows is a key route but in dire need of upgrading. This is a potentially very powerful route within the town centre, and much needed as Upper Cross Street is one-way so it's not possible to cycle down it. The off-road cycle/walking route from Castle Street to Mill Street is very rough and steep. It needs a better surface. Though the gradient is steep in places, this

has the potential to be a very useful route, and is already part of the National Cycle Network. We regard this as a high priority and a quick win.

#### MCC-A6

A useful route. Is there a need for improved signage too, as this route is little known?

#### MCC-A7

This route is essentially sound, but signage could be improved. There is sometimes conflict with pedestrians at the narrow 'cyclists dismount' section. The new cycle parking at the station is welcomed.

#### MCC-A8

Old Hereford Road needs its 20mph speed limit enforced - especially for downhill traffic which is often speeding. The road is wider than it needs to be, which contributes to the speeding problem. The illuminated and speed reactive 20mph sign on the downhill direction (outside Deri View primary school) has been out of order for at least 5 years.

#### MCC A9

This route needs to be two-way for cycles on the lane from Pen-y-Pound to the leisure centre & King Henry VIII school.

#### MCC-A11

The problem with Ross Road is speeding motor traffic and a lack of a footway for pedestrians at the upper end. At the very least a 20mph speed limit is required. The road is wide and narrowing the carriageway would reduce speeds. There are sections of this road frequently used by pedestrians, despite no footways at all. Why not consider making the top of this road one way (uphill only). Southbound traffic should use the B4521 Grosvenor Road and join the Hereford Road.

#### MCC-A12

This is a good walking route and a potentially good cycling route, however it is narrow and the metal barriers are placed too close for many cycles, especially bikes with trailers, cargo bikes, trikes and hand-cycles. Widening the tarmac strip and removing/replacing the cycle-unfriendly barriers would help.

## MCC-A14a +b

This is a useful route but pavement parking and congestion during school pick up times is a problem, especially outside Deri View school. St David's Road is a good candidate for a cycle route contraflow between Llwynu Lane and Old Hereford Road.

This is a potentially very useful route. There is a barrier chicane on one footpath section here that stops use by cycle trailers, cargo bikes, trikes and hand cycles etc and overgrown hedges. There is a lack of signage, and dropped kerbs for cycles. We believe it is a high priority to get a good safe route between the town centre and Mardy, a relatively deprived area where not everyone has access to car. This route is popular with children going to and from schools.

## MCC-A16

Brecon Road / A40 is the only direct route into the town centre for all the residents on the western edge of town. There is a need for more pedestrian crossing points and speed reduction to reduce road danger for cyclists using the road (20mph limit). The junction of MCC-A16 with MCC-A9 is problematic for cyclists - this busy junction needs a redesign to make it safer and more attractive for walking and cycling.

## MCC-A19

It is a top priority of our group to get a safe, direct, attractive and visible route between the town centre, Morrisons supermarket, Bailey Park and the Mardy. The links from this route to King Henry VIII school could be improved, e.g. via between MCC-A19 and MCC-A8 via Bishops Crescent and/or Rholben Way and footpaths to Old Hereford Road.

Going north on this route, there is a steep hill (Hillcrest Avenue) and so anyone heading to the north/east of the town, may wish to avoid it take Park Crescent or Park Avenue in an easterly direction and either taking the Hereford Road (MCC-A20) or Ross Road (MCC-A11) north.

The Llwynu Lane footpath has a narrow metal barrier which prevents non-standard cycles from using this route. This should be removed. The hedges are also overgrown which narrows the footway.

## MCC-A20

Hereford Road is a clear desire line for cycles as it is straight and avoids the worst of the hills that rise to the west of the road. It is currently a busy road for motor traffic and narrow in places. The northern section (north of the junction with Croesonon Road / MCC-A24) has sufficient width to provide safe, segregated cycle infrastructure on the road. As there is new development in the north of the town, and more coming in future years (at the Deri Farm site), this link is important to the future active travel needs of the town. Where the road is too narrow to provide safe cycling, the focus should be on speed reduction with a 20mph speed limit and accompanying cycle friendly traffic calming (e.g. cycle permeable chicanes and cycle permeable speed humps).

## MCC-A21

Likewise for MCC-A20 above, this should be a cycling/walking route as it's the most direct route into the town centre from the south and south-east end of the town including the railway station.

The junction between Upper Cross Street and the A40 (outside the Angel Hotel) is in urgent need of improvement to enable safer use pedestrians, and cyclists. This is probably the most dangerous junction in Abergavenny for pedestrians and should be a priority for active travel improvements. For cyclists, the most dangerous route is when coming southbound on the A40 and turning right or going 'straight on' up Lower Castle Street.

Lower Castle Street is not pedestrian friendly, yet is an important walking route in the town. The footways are very narrow. It needs a single surface, a speed table and/or a width restriction at the entrance (and possibly occasional bollards to contain traffic).

## MCC-A23

This is an important town centre route. The cycle contraflow on Lion Street, announced as part of the recent Covid-related active travel measures, is welcomed.

## MCC-A26

This is an interesting proposal but the surfaces need to be improved.

## MCC - A27

Motor traffic on the Monmouth Road is fast and busy at times. It is too narrow to provide for cycle lane so speed reduction is the best solution. 20mph.

## **Cycling routes missing from INM:**

1. Merthyr Road from A40 to A4143 - this is a key linking road, and no matter whether there are good links across Castle Meadow, this will always be faster and more direct, therefore a popular choice for cyclists travelling between Llanfoist and Abergavenny town centre, especially the western side of town including King Henry VIII school. Also, when Castle Meadows floods, there will need to have an alternative route. It should be part of the INM.

2. Baker Street (in both directions). This is a key linking route between Frogmore Street and Tudor Street. It needs a cycle contraflow (paint and signage would suffice) at the Frogmore Street end, where Baker Street has newly been made one way.

3. East-west links from MCC-A11 to MCC-A19. These are already there, on residential streets, but depend on suitable crossing points on Hereford Road. Oxford Road - Park Avenue is one possibility. There are elevation differences on the western side of MCC-A11 that need careful consideration.

4. Commercial Street - Pant Lane is a useful quiet and direct desire line route from the foot of Chapel Road to Tudor Street and the town centre. It is fine southbound but northbound it's not useable due to Commercial Street being a one way street.

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