

## 1. Introduction

In recent years there has been a visible increase in the number of cyclists in Belfast, fuelled by their desire to help the environment, avoid rising petrol costs, improve their personal fitness and to travel around the city faster.

However, growth in cycling is being hampered though inadequate quantity and quality of cycle network, insufficient promotion to the public, particularly in schools and business, and a lack of an agreed strategic vision.

The aim of the Belfast Cycle City Vision for 2020, is to bring cycle use in Belfast on par with the top ten cycling cities in the UK and Ireland.

This collaborative vision written by Belfast Friends of the Earth, with input from Sustrans and the Northern Ireland Cycling Initiative, represents the growing number of cyclists calling for an ambitious but realisable target of 10% of all trips by bicycle in the city, increases in funding for cycling projects, and the need for a comprehensive Cycling Strategy for Belfast.

## 2. Current Situation

Much has been said in Government policies about the benefits high levels of cycling can bring to a city. These benefits include health, environmental, social inclusion for those who cannot afford to, or are too young to drive, economic benefits through easing congestion and promoting tourism.

While cycling participation in Belfast has more than doubled since 2000, there is still much to be done. Apart from the riverside route along the Lagan, the Comber Greenway and some areas of south Belfast, there are not large numbers cycling. The Travel Survey for Northern Ireland indicates that 3% of

people commuted to work by bike in the period 2005-07, up from 1% in 2003-05.

The high quality National Cycle Network route along the river Lagan has seen investment in riverside paths, reallocation of road space, new traffic lights for cyclists and cycle parking at businesses. This has seen a rise in usage of 166% since 2000.

The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2004 identified a proposed cycle network but only short sections have been delivered. Indeed the planned pedestrianisation of the city centre may make cycling more difficult should the introduction of one way streets take place.

Cyclists have benefitted from 20mph zones and traffic calming in certain residential areas.

Cycle shops are reporting very good sales and this is partly due to the Government's tax free cycle purchase scheme.

Due to lack of funding the Belfast Cycle Routes Group, which had coordinated the development of cycling, has not met since 2006. This group brought together, Government departments, local councils, and cycling organisations to encourage a partnership to developing cycling.



### 3. Vision

Our vision is to create a strong cycling culture in Belfast. Cycling will be a normal way to get about, especially for short trips. Next to walking, cycling will be the most popular means of getting to school. Our universities and colleges will be bustling with bicycles. Business men and women will see the bicycle as the best way to travel for part or all of their daily commute. Shopping by bike will be as normal as it is in many Northern European cycle friendly countries. We will have a healthier population and will gain economically as cycling helps ease congestion, and provides us with a fitter more productive workforce.

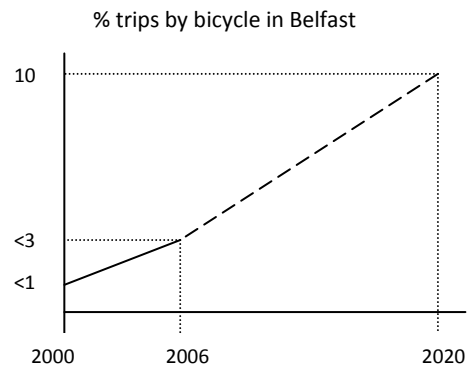
The Belfast Cycle City vision is calling for three actions;

- 10% target for cycling in the city by 2020,
- An annual spend on cycling of at least £15 per person per year,
- A new Cycle Strategy for Belfast to be delivered in 2010.

Amsterdam is one of the leading cycling cities in Europe with 30% of journeys by bicycle. This has been achieved through decades of investment in cycling and promoting a culture of cycling.

Belfast’s cycling target should match the 10% target of the Irish National Cycling Policy Framework, and the 10% target set by the Scottish Government.

London is witnessing a massive resurgence in cycling presently driven by its Mayor, Boris Johnson. In the morning peak in Central London the ratio of bikes to private cars is now 1 to 3. The highest rate of cycling in the UK is in Cambridge at 28%.



The amount of money invested in cycling in Amsterdam is £10-£20 per person per year, compared to an estimated £1 person per year in Belfast. The Cycling Demonstration Towns and City initiative in 18 towns and 1 city in England provides funding of £15 per citizen per year, which is a suitable benchmark for Belfast to follow.

No one single action is likely to bring about the sort of increase in cycling we are calling for, so there needs to be a wide package of measures to integrate with wider transportation policies as well as other policy fields such as land-use planning, road safety and health. The production in 2010 of the first Cycling Strategy for Belfast allows a co-ordinated plan of action to be put in place to meet the 2020 cycling targets.





## 4. Benefits

### Every penny counts

The fiscal benefits of cycling include the value to the health service as a result of not having to treat illnesses which result from physical inactivity; as shown in “Towards a Healthier Economy” (Transform Scotland Trust), a cycling mode share of 13% in Scotland would result in savings of between 1 and 2 billion pounds each year.

There are also gains in productivity arising from reduced absenteeism and having a fitter and more alert work force. Increased cycling numbers means less urban congestion, thus benefiting businesses. Cost benefit analyses shows that investment in cycling outweigh the costs to a far greater extent than investment in other modes. For example, Benefit / Cost ratios of up to 38:1 are accepted by the Department for Transport for cycling links to schools.

Through decreasing congestion and improving the health of the population, cycling directly contributes to the aims of both the Road Service and the Health Service.

### A cleaner, greener Belfast

More people cycling rather than driving means less pollution, improved air quality, less damage to our old and distinguished buildings, and, critically, less greenhouse gas emissions.

### A great place to live and raise a family

Cycle training, traffic speed reductions, and dedicated cycling infrastructure, enables children to be more independent, to cycle to school, to their friends or just to explore their neighbourhood.

### A city for everyone

When John Boyd Dunlop invented the first functional pneumatic tyre in Belfast, cycling became practical for women as well as men, for old as well as young. We want to recapture the liberation that cycling offered but to achieve this cycling must both be safe and feel safe.

In countries such as the Netherlands, women account for 55% of trips by bike, and elderly people cycle almost as much as children. Cycling is a truly democratic form of transport, open to almost everyone. It offers personal mobility for those unable to afford a car, and can allow disabled people to get around or exercise on specially adapted cycles.



## 5. Action Required

### Belfast Cycling Strategy

In order to ensure there is an agreed vision to develop Belfast as a cycle friendly city we feel a Cycle Strategy for Belfast is needed. Indeed the NI Cycle Strategy recommends that there are local strategies and local targets. To implement the Belfast Cycling Strategy we need a dedicated Cycling Development Unit. The aim of the unit would be to work with strategic partners to see more people cycling more often in Belfast, and to develop and embed the Cycling Strategy for Belfast.

### Infrastructure

It is essential that the road network, parks and other public spaces become a comfortable environment for those who cycle.

We ask that the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan routes are delivered in full. Other infrastructural improvements include a city wide 20mph network, exemption of one way systems for cyclists, cycle tracks, greenway networks, signage, cycle stands and links to public transport.

We believe that 20mph should be the default speed limit for streets in Belfast, with only the busiest strategic routes qualifying for higher speed limits

### Schools and Further Education

With most school pupils unable to drive, offering independent travel options is crucial. Obesity levels amongst school children are alarmingly high. In Northern Ireland, currently around one in four girls and one in six boys in primary one are overweight or obese.

We would like to see programmes working with every schoolchild in Belfast to motivate and empower young people to cycle to school. These programmes would include on road cycle training and Safe Routes to Schools and Bike It.

The announcement by the University of Ulster that it is significantly expanding its Belfast City Centre Campus undoubtedly provides an opportunity for creating quality cycle routes between Queen's University and the UU Belfast campus/Cathedral Quarter (with potential links to student residential areas).

### Sustainable Travel City

Cycling should be considered as part of a wider Sustainable Transport City. There is much that could be done to make buses, trains, taxis and walking easier and more enjoyable. This will require making driving and parking less easy in the city and reallocating road space to sustainable means of travel.

### Promotion

Creating a cycling culture within a city is not just about infrastructure improvements but also means working with people and communities to change their travel behaviour. Engagement is required with cycle traders and employers to coordinate a range of events, festivals, bike weeks and bicycle users groups within places of work. The Tax-Free Bicycle Purchase Scheme should also be available to all civil servants.

More information on the Belfast Cycle City 2020 Vision can be found at [www.belfastcyclecity.org.uk](http://www.belfastcyclecity.org.uk)



This report has been written and published by Belfast Friends of the Earth with invaluable input from Sustrans and the Northern Ireland Cycling Initiative. Belfast Friends of the Earth is a voluntary environmental campaigning group established in 2006, one of nine Friends of the Earth local groups in Northern Ireland. If you are interested in becoming a member call Co-ordinator Andrew McMurray on 079 0990 0883 or for more information on the Belfast Cycle City Campaign, call Campaign Co-ordinator Jonathan Davison on 078 4299 2298 or visit [www.belfastcyclecity.org.uk](http://www.belfastcyclecity.org.uk)

