



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	NI Bicycle Strategy response & Bank Square Access
Date:	21 st October 2014
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	NI Bicycle Strategy The Department for Regional Development (DRD) has prepared a Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland which sets out, over the 25 year horizon, how they plan to make Northern Ireland a cycling community.
1.2	The Draft Strategy document outlines the vision for cycling in Northern Ireland and, at a high level how they intend to achieve this vision. The consultation period will run from 27 th August to the 21 st November 2014 and a public consultation event will be held in Belfast on the 4 th November (10am to 2.00pm) in the Radisson Blu Hotel in the Gasworks. The draft response to the Bicycle Strategy is attached in Appendix 1, for consideration.
1.3	Bank Square Access Transport NI received a request to relax taxi access on Chapel Lane to service the businesses in the area following the completion of the DSD Bank Square public realm scheme. Bank Square and Chapel Lane are currently part of the overall city centre pedestrian zone with no access permitted except for loading and unloading before 11am and after 6pm.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The vision outlined in Draft Bicycle Strategy is as follows: “to establish a cycling culture in Northern Ireland to give people the freedom and confidence to travel by bicycle, and where all road users can safely share space with mutual respect”
2.2	The Department plan on achieving the vision is to first develop this high level strategy which will be followed up with a Bicycle Strategy Delivery Plan which will outline specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound objectives.

2.3	The document identifies a number of key connections between the Departments cycling future and other sectors they are as follows: regeneration, tourism and culture, the local economy, health improvement, environmental, sports and recreation, learning and skills and services and facilities.
2.4	They have outlined a three pillar approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build – Infrastructure, cycle parking and flagship schemes; • Support – supporting measures, safety and security and training mapping; • Promote – marketing campaigns, flagship events and responsible cycling.
2.5	In moving towards the vision the Department have developed four key elements to achieve the vision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive network, • inviting places, • safe spaces and • greater numbers.
2.6	In relation to the comprehensive network, it is proposed that it will comprise of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arterial routes, • Quiet routes and • Greenways.
2.7	The document states that it is committed to creating a network of high quality routes. The quiet routes will be less trafficked options for cyclist and Greenways which may be orbital or less direct off road routes. It states that going forward the Department will ensure that provision is more integrated and coherent in nature by providing ‘whole of route’ treatment. In urban areas the Department states that it will develop masterplans to develop urban routes.
2.8	It is suggested that the Council supports the vision for a Bicycle Strategy in Northern Ireland and the Department’s cross sectoral approach to delivering the vision for cycling as outlined in the Strategy. In supporting this work, the Council would recognise that increased levels of cycling in Belfast can have benefits for regeneration, tourism and culture, the local economy, health improvement, environmental, sports and recreation, learning and skills and services and facilities.
2.9	A high level strategy is proposed in the document, which would support the subsequent Bicycle Strategy Delivery Plan, which will outline specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound objectives. The Council could support the allocation of a budget and resources and timetable to deliver this plan as this would contribute to other areas of work to improve cycling.
2.10	The three pillar approach to build the infrastructure, provide supporting measure and promote cycling would be welcomed for Belfast. The broad approach is critical as infrastructure alone is not sufficient to increase bicycle trips.
2.11	The Strategy suggests a comprehensive network for the Bicycle which will comprise of arterial routes, quiet routes and greenways. This mixed form of provision would develop a network of routes which provide options for cyclists of various abilities and for commuting as well as leisure with support on work by Council to promote cycling and access.

2.12	For urban areas, the development of suggested cycling masterplans should be welcomed with an emphasis on Belfast as an early priority. The cycling masterplan should consider innovative and high quality measures which are being considered in other cities.
2.13	As the Department will be aware, the Council are currently developing a Public Bike Share Scheme in Belfast. In order to support this scheme there is a need to improve the general cycling infrastructure across the City for current and future users.
2.14	Bank Square access Bank Square and Chapel Lane are currently part of the overall city centre pedestrian zone with no vehicle access permitted except for loading and unloading before 11am and after 6pm. Until recently the PSNI did not strictly enforce vehicle access to this area. The DSD public realm scheme is programmed to be complete by December 2014 and will prevent vehicle access to Bank Square. It is also the intention of DSD to construct rise and fall bollards on Chapel Lane which will control access to Chapel Lane between 11am and 6pm. Service vehicles will be permitted before 11am or after 6pm.
2.15	Local businesses are concerned that enforcement and restrictions on taxi access to Chapel Lane may impact on the night time economy in the Bank Square area and the safety of tourist and visitors to the area at night. The local businesses have requested Transport NI to consider amending the regulations to permit taxi access to Chapel Lane (not Bank Square itself). Due to the rise and fall bollards proposed by DSD on Chapel Lane this will allow taxi access after 6pm in the evening.
2.16	It is suggested that elected members support this proposal as it would provide safe access for people visiting the Bank Square area in the evening without impacting on pedestrian movement during the day.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	No resource implications have been identified.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	None.

5	Recommendations
5.1	It is recommended that Members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consider the proposed draft response to the DRD Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland in Appendix 1 and if appropriate endorse this as an agreed response. - To consider the proposals on access to Chapel Lane and agree response to be submitted to Transport NI.

6	Decision Tracking
There is no decision tracking attached to this report.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
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DRD Department for Regional Development
DSD – Department of Social Development

8	Documents Attached
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Appendix 1 - Draft Response Draft Bicycle Strategy for NI August 2014	
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Appendix 1

Draft Response to the NI Bicycle Strategy August 2014

The development of a 'Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland' by Department for Regional Development is broadly welcomed by the Council. The Council published a revised Transport Policy in 2008 and a key objective outlined in the policy was "to seek to influence the development of transportation policies and proposals which improve connectivity and encourage modal shift away from the private car to more sustainable forms of travel, such as walking, cycling and public transport".

The Vision

The vision outlined in Draft Bicycle Strategy is as follows "to establish a cycling culture in Northern Ireland to give people the freedom and confidence to travel by bicycle, and where all road users can safely share space with mutual respect" The Council supports the vision for a Bicycle Strategy in Northern Ireland.

The Council recognise that this is a high level strategy and would support the follow up of the Bicycle Strategy Delivery Plan which will outline specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound objectives. The Council would request detail on the timetable for the production of this plan and the need for commitment for a budget and resources to deliver this plan along with targets.

It is important that the strategy makes reference to how it will be financed and set targets on what the strategy will achieve.

The document identifies a number of key connections between the Departments cycling future and other sectors. They are as follows: regeneration, tourism and culture, the local economy, health improvement, environmental, sports and recreation, learning and skills and services and facilities. The Council supports the Departments cross sectoral approach to delivering the vision for cycling as outlined in the Strategy. The Council recognises that increased levels of cycling in Belfast can have benefits for regeneration, tourism and culture, the local economy, health improvement, environmental, sports and recreation, learning and skills and services and facilities.

Approach

The Council supports the three pillar approach to build the infrastructure, provide supporting measures and promote cycling. The Council would agree that infrastructure alone is not usually sufficient to increase bicycle trips.

Comprehensive Network

The Strategy suggests a comprehensive network for the Bicycle which will comprise of arterial routes, quiet routes and greenways. The Council would support this mixed form of provision to develop a network of routes which provide options for cyclists of various abilities and for commuting as well as leisure.

The issue of applying 'whole of route' treatment is also supported. The current cycle lane provision in the city can be piecemeal and fragmented.

For urban areas the Council would support segregation for cycling on main roads and arterial routes as preferable where traffic volumes are high or speed is high. On the quiet routes it is suggested that a 20mph speed limit is appropriate along with priority for cyclists at junctions.

Urban routes

The Council would support targeting areas with high population densities such as Belfast where there is the greatest potential for increasing the opportunities for residents to switch modes of

travel to cycling for short commuter, school and other journeys.

The Council would strongly support a cycling masterplan to be developed for Belfast as a priority which would consider innovative and high quality measures to match the quality of best practice in Europe. In other areas Authorities are currently trialling innovative cycling infrastructure such as:

- segregation within carriageway, side road crossings and separation methods;
- Dutch style roundabouts;
- Traffic signals for cyclist – high and low level; and
- bus stop by passes.

Other pioneering measures are being considered such as armadillo and planter segregated cycle lanes.

Greenways

On the greenway routes, the Council recommends that consideration is given to the management of different user requirements from the commuter to leisure cyclist. The issue of user security on greenways routes should also be considered.

Education and a code of conduct for users on greenways to ensure users respect each other would be beneficial.

Maintenance

The Council welcomes the inclusion of maintenance of the bicycle infrastructure in the draft strategy, in particular that targets are set to ensure routes are treated for snow and ice.

Safe Spaces for the Bicycle

The Council support the commitment to creating safer and more legible routes in the urban areas. Without safe, practical, and continuous routes in urban areas it is unlikely that the increasing levels of cycling can be sustained.

A legible Network

The Council would support the development of a consistent, uniform signage and design format for the cycling network. The Council would suggest that consideration is given to putting distance and time to cycle on signage.

Respect and understanding

The Council considers the approach to encouraging greater respect and understanding between all users of the transport network as a very important element of the strategy.

In addition to the measures suggested the Council would also include a review of driving test theory and practice, to ensure awareness of cyclists is adequately covered.

Education

The Council would support the need for education to influence the travel behaviour particularly in young people.

A strong behaviour change initiative/campaign targeted for different areas is needed, as areas of deprivation will have different needs/behaviour compared to other areas and most probably be experiencing health inequalities. Motivation and confidence programmes to start cycling should be included in the strategy.

Greater numbers

The Council support the measures suggested to increase the numbers of people travelling by bicycle.

It is noted that public bike hire schemes are mentioned and as the Department will be aware, the Council is currently developing a Public Bike Share scheme in Belfast city centre. A primary objective of the scheme is to provide a sustainable low cost transport alternative for the citizens of Belfast and visitors. The scheme should lead to 'greater numbers' of cyclist in Belfast which is one of the four key elements for achieving the DRD cycling vision. It is suggested that the strategy and delivery plan should identify supporting measures to realise the full benefits on this high profile Active Travel scheme for the city such as improved cycling infrastructure alongside investment in cycle proficiency training for users. In addition, the first phase of the scheme will cover the core city centre of Belfast and it would be desirable to allocate resources to expand the network to areas outside the city centre.

The Public Bike Share Scheme will also target tourists and visitors to the city as a cheap and sustainable mode of transport in the city. Supporting infrastructure such as the provision of secure bicycle parking at appropriate destinations is essential.

Interchange between modes

The Council support the measures identified including secure cycle parking at public transport stations, carriage of bicycles on public transport and the use of folding bikes. Consideration should also be given to the use of Public Bike Share schemes. The Council considers that the Belfast scheme will facilitate and encourage citizens to choose cycling for short trips in the city centre linked to public transport. It proposes that the scheme in Belfast will be used by commuters to cycle from the bus stop, car parks or rail station to workplaces.

Working with Employers

The Council would suggest that the following initiatives are considered:

- Provide National Standards cycle training at zero cost to employers in return for employers releasing staff to attend training as part of the workplace travel plan and staff PDP.
- Occupational Health units to be able to refer staff to National Standards training delivered as part of Health Wise schemes.

Traffic Calming

In addition to traffic calming measures outlined in the draft strategy, the Council suggests that the following initiatives are considered:

- Implement no right turns from oncoming traffic when bus/cycle lanes are in operation.
- Remove breaks in solid white lines in bus/cycle lanes at points where traffic stops to turn right.

New Developments

The Council would support the aspiration to ensure planning policy supports the need to recognise the bicycle as an integral mode of transport. A commitment is needed to ensure that the needs of cyclist are taken into account in the design and implementation of all future development and public realm schemes.

It is suggested that that the Department considers joint investment with other partner organisations i.e. investment in environmental improvement, major capital developments (within Belfast this could include the relocation of the University of Ulster to York Street, Streets Ahead Phase 3, the transformation of leisure facilities, development of the Girdwood site, etc) to work in partnership to maximise the potential benefits of proposals for improved connectivity and cycling.

The impact of significant 'journey generators' on traffic flow and congestion should be considered in developing a network. Density of employment and proximity to employment opportunities provides the opportunity to make significant gains in the number of cyclists, while assisting in solving other negative issues such as congestion, poor air quality, etc.

Environmental Improvement Schemes

The Council supports the strategy's commitment to ensure that the needs of cyclist are taken into account in the design and implementation of all public realm schemes.