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Cycling in London: have we got it right?

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Why promote cycling in Central London?

(Cycle hire and Cycle Superhighways)



Boris Bikes are fuelling central London's traffic conflicts

What is the point of Boris Bikes ('Bike hire cuts Tube and walking trips', LTT 4 Nov)? Nine out of ten of the trips were already being made by 'sustainable' modes. The bike trips switching from car or taxi (6%) means around 1,200 short trips a day, saving no more than 6,000 motor vehicle kms, compared to around 2.5 million vehicle kms daily in central London. Reductions in congestion or emissions will not be noticed at this level.

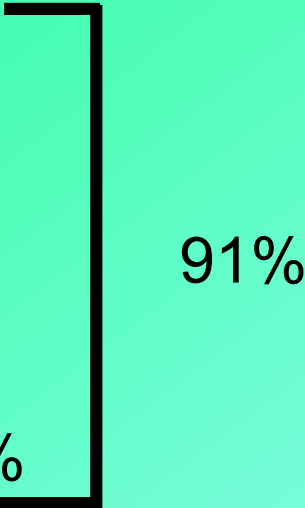
Promoting cycling in central London could perhaps be justified if it was accompanied by a substantial reduction in vehicle kilometres driven in that area, enabling a significant reallocation of scarce roadspace to cyclists, buses and deliveries. But neither the Boris Bikes, nor the commuter-oriented 'cycle superhighways' can achieve that type of mode switch, because marginal drivers abandoned central London long ago. Central London now offers better conditions for walking than ever before, and the bus network has been developed into one of the best in the world. The combination of going on foot or by bus works well for short-to-medium length journeys, and this situation should not be disturbed without good reason.

Pulling people off other sustainable modes (walking, Tube, train) and onto bikes will add to the intensity of traffic conflicts in a street environment almost totally unsuited to special cycle facilities, and with no compensating gains. Pedestrians will have to cope with greater difficulties crossing the street, and bus passengers will have to tolerate slower journeys as buses are hindered and slowed by bikes, especially at bus stops and junctions. The only people to benefit will be those choosing the cycle mode.

Cycling does have a role to play in London, but this should be carefully thought through and in context. There is huge scope for cycling to solve transport issues in outer suburban London, for example, and much to do to achieve that. So why is the main effort going into encouraging bikes in the constrained environment of central London, where a few will exercise their choice to the inconvenience of everyone else?

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Cycle hire mode shift

- Tube 34%
 - Bus 20%
 - Train 3%
 - Walking 26%
 - Own bicycle 8%
 - Taxi 3%
 - Car/van/motorbike/moped 3%
 - Other 3%
- 
- 91%

Nine out of ten of the trips were already being made by sustainable modes. So increased cycling is not, in central London, making much of dent on the amount of motor traffic.

Only 6% of hire bike trips transferred from car/taxi

- 1,200 short trips per day
- Saves no more than 6,000 motor vehicle kms
- Equates to 0.002% of central London vehicle kms
(roundly 3 million kms per day)

Reductions in congestion or pollution will not be noticed

So what problem are we trying to solve?

- Walking conditions are improving
(e.g. Strand, Oxford Circus, Piccadilly, Covent Garden, riverside)
- Bus services are greatly improved
(More frequent, more reliable, longer hours)
- Motor vehicles reduced (mostly due to C-Charge)
- Underground good for longer trips
- Streets mostly unsuited to separate (safe) provision for cyclists

So why introduce a mass mode that is disruptive to other street modes and activities?

Cycles are more problematic in central London

- An additional “independent stream” of movement to be fitted into a tight street environment
- Hinder movement and stopping of buses
(Bike average speed similar to buses, so hinder at each stop/junction - a platoon effect)
- Conflict with on-street parking and loading
- Conflict at side road junctions
(In London, side roads are frequent e.g. one every 135 metres on CS7)
- Reduce crossing opportunities for pedestrians
Cycle often fill the gaps in between platoons of motor vehicles, reducing informal crossing opportunities
- Cyclists can easily intimidate and endanger pedestrians

Is this why the Cycle Superhighways don't go into Central London?



Cyclists can easily intimidate pedestrians



Screen grabs from
Youtube videos

Frequent interruptions
of cycle lanes force
cyclists into the line
of traffic

Cyclists can virtually
decommission
bus lanes





Cyclists and buses do not mix well



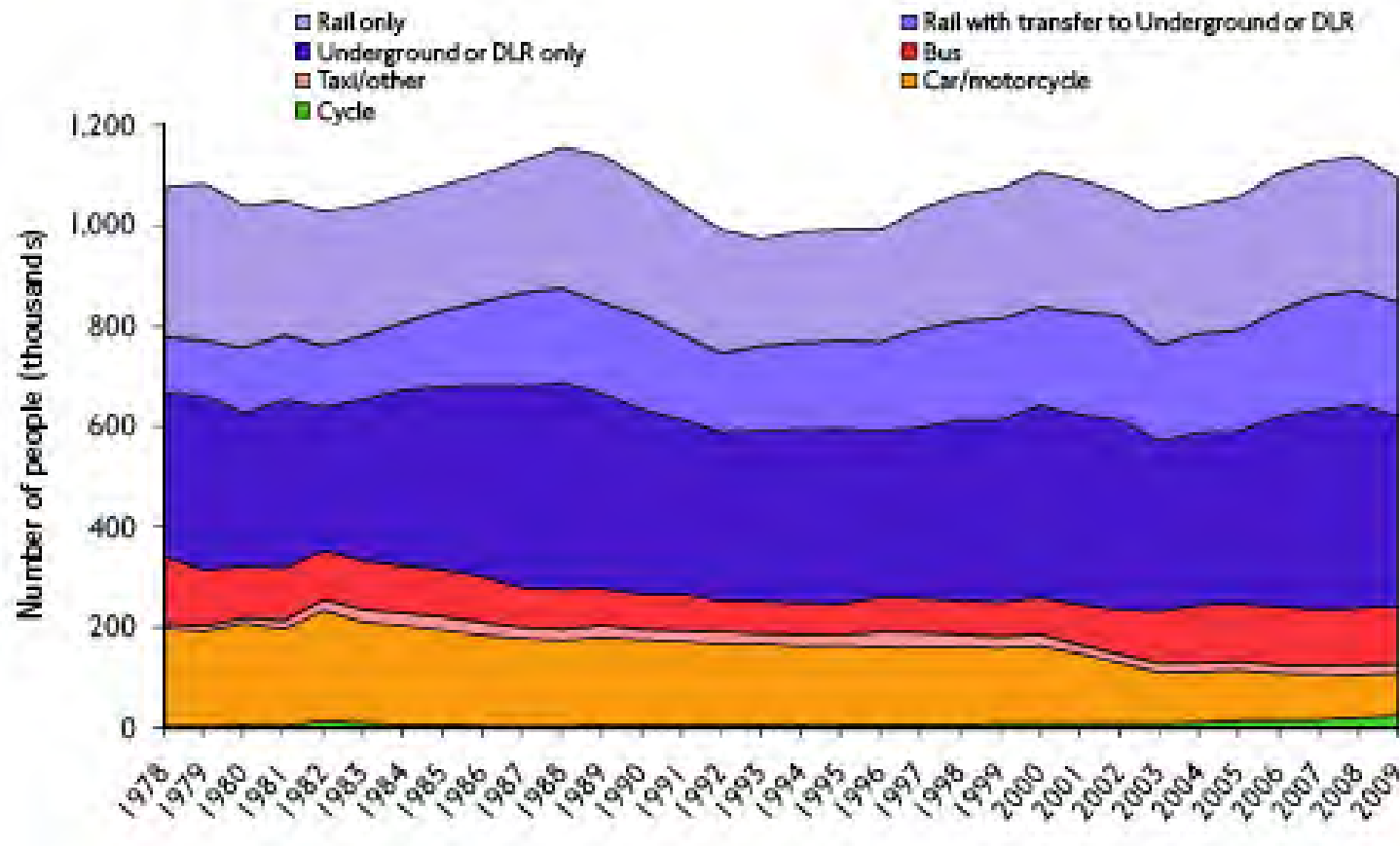
The pedestrian at the crossing could have crossed in the gap between motor vehicles, but could not do so because of the approaching cyclist. Cyclists often occupy the gap between motor vehicle platoons, so reducing informal opportunities for pedestrians to cross.

Reduce crowding on public transport?

- Peak PT arrivals around 1 million
- 5% reduction needed to make journeys less crowded?
(e.g. 13 less per Tube car)
- Shift to bike would mean an increase of 50,000 peak cycle trips
- With around 40 main routes into central London, this could mean over 1,000 bikes per hour inbound.

Graphic shows the preponderance of public transport for Central London peak arrivals. Cycle are shown just emerging from 2003 onwards

Figure 2.13 People entering central London in the weekday morning peak, 1978 to 2009.



Cycling for health?

e.g. PM10 “Exceedances”



Benefits of cycle promotion in CL?

General:

- Critical mass of bikes increases awareness (which can reduce the casualty **rate**, although not necessarily casualty **numbers**)
- Breaking down social stigma against cycling

Profile of cyclists dominated by adult males in full time work - people who outside London would mostly be commuting by car. Cycling can therefore be associated with “success”, but may also lead to antagonism if cyclists behave aggressively.

For the individual cyclist

- For those choosing to cycle, convenience and avoidance of public transport crowding, and fitness
- Filling gaps in PT network
(E.g. Belgravia, Mayfair and east-west through Marylebone, Fitzrovia and Bloomsbury)
- An additional means of recreation for visitors

These benefits should be weighed against the disbenefits to other street users

The way forward?

Rigorous planning needed:

objectives, context and consequences should all be clearly analysed

- Cycling in outer London easier, more worthwhile
 - Greater potential for mode shift from car
- Can we cater better for cycling in central London?
 - Streets too narrow for segregated provision?
 - Diversions away from bus routes?
 - Major infrastructure at key barriers?
 - Roadspace at expense of cars/taxis?

Thank you,

for not throwing things at me!



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