



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## What is the Cycling Embassy of Great Britain?

It's a new organisation that aims to bring best practice in cycling provision to this country so that we can have a truly mass cycling culture, rather than cycling being a minority activity.

## Why 'Embassy'?

It's modelled on the Cycling Embassy of Denmark and the soon to be established Cycling Embassy of the Netherlands. However, where they promote an already established bicycle culture with infrastructure design that, whilst not always perfect, has had proven success, we have a car culture with cycle infrastructure that is largely circuitous, dangerous and unfit for purpose. So our Embassy is more aimed at representing the interests of people who ride bicycles and would like to ride bicycles to our own governments, national and devolved. Also, we like Ferrero Rocher



Photo: by [ibikelondon](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4637111856/>

## What does the Embassy want?

In a nutshell, it wants our roads, towns, villages and cities to be designed in a way that they invite cycling



Photo: by Jon Tringham, on Flickr. All rights reserved  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jontringham/3823981925/>

(and walking too) rather than being designed around the needs of the car. If you look at what has been achieved in Germany and Sweden (10% of all trips by bike), Finland (11%), Denmark (18%), and particularly the Netherlands (27%), cycling has become a mass means of transport accessible to everybody, not something to do at the weekend.<sup>1</sup> Current standards for cycle infrastructure in the UK, while well meaning, are often misinterpreted by Local Authorities resulting in infrastructure which is a cheap compromise shoehorned around a car-centric environment, rarely making cycling look inviting and often bringing cyclists into direct conflict with

pedestrians and people with disabilities. It tells the public exactly what government, local and national thinks of cycling.

---

<sup>1</sup> Figures quoted in Pucher *et al* (2008), 'Making Cycling Irresistible: Lessons from The Netherlands, Denmark and Germany', *Transport Reviews*, 28:4, 495 — 528, available at <http://www.policy.rutgers.edu/faculty/pucher/irresistible.pdf> Figures date from 2001-3 and may now be higher. By contrast, the UK figure (2001) was 1%.

## Ah, but don't the Dutch only cycle because it's flat?

It's true that the Netherlands is famously flat although, as all those windmills attest, it's also quite windy which can increase the effort in cycling just as much as the hills can. But the differences in cycling rate among Dutch cities show that it's not just terrain that has an effect – Leiden has almost double the cycling rate of Rotterdam,<sup>2</sup> for example – it's the quality of the infrastructure and the level of cycling investment. Meanwhile in that other famously flat country, Switzerland, 6% of journeys are by bike and in places much higher: Basel's investment in cycling has seen levels rise to 21% and the creation of a complete cycle network in Zurich has increased cycling rates to 8%.<sup>3</sup>

## So it's all about Dutch-style cycle paths?

Given that the Dutch have the highest cycling rate of any developed nation, and among the lowest road deaths (particularly of vulnerable people – children, the elderly, and cyclists),<sup>4</sup> why wouldn't we want to look to the Netherlands first as our inspiration? They have steadily grown a bicycle culture since the 1970s and as their approaches to infrastructure developed they made mistakes and learnt from them. We do recognise that we're a very different country from the Netherlands with different traffic laws and terrain and starting from a much lower cycling base. Not everything that works in the Netherlands will work here, but it would be foolish to ignore what the Dutch –and to a large extent the Danes - have done. So where Dutch-style separated cycle paths would be the best approach to safe cycling on a particular route, that's what we'd advocate. And where other approaches – shared space, home zones, reduced speed limits, on-road lanes, or contraflows – are appropriate we'd advocate those instead.



Photo: by [i b i k e l o n d o n](#), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4636526831>

---

<sup>2</sup>48% as opposed to 26%: even low Dutch cycling rates are spectacularly high by UK standards. Fietsberaad report: *Cycling: important contribution to CO2 reduction*

<http://www.fietsberaad.nl/index.cfm?lang=nl&repository=Cycling:+important+contribution+to+CO2+reduction>

<sup>3</sup> Sustrans Scotland, *Civilising the Streets* <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/assets/files/scotland/civilising-the-streets.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> IRTAD database, June 2010, *Road User Fatalities* <http://www.internationaltransportforum.org/irtad/pdf/risk.pdf>; *A Comparative Study of the Development of Road Safety in the SUNFlower+6 countries: final report*. Available at [http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk/UsefulReports/SUNflower+6\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk/UsefulReports/SUNflower+6_Final_Report.pdf)

## But aren't separated cycle paths more dangerous than cycling on the roads?

There has been some widely-cited research that has been used in evidence of this,<sup>5</sup> although most of it has been concerned with shared-use unpaved paths, rather than well-lit, paved, parallel tracks that run alongside roads. Other, more recent, research has found that such separated paths are safer, especially on faster rural routes and around roundabouts.<sup>6</sup> Certainly the Netherlands, with its extensive network of separated cycle paths and high cycling rates, also has among the safest roads in the world, suggesting that well designed tracks are not incompatible with safety. Some design changes, such as merging separated tracks into lanes at junctions, providing separate traffic light sequences for cyclists and moving the stop lines for cars well behind those of bikes can improve safety further. Either way, separated paths encourage more people to cycle, providing safety in numbers for people on bikes.<sup>7</sup>



Photo: by [ibikelondon](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4552256400/>

## How can we fit cycle tracks into Britain's crowded towns and cities? It's just not practical to have them on every road.

No, and that's not what we're advocating. For example, Danish traffic design works around separation principles depending on the speed, and volume of traffic.<sup>8</sup> At speeds of up to 20mph, or 30mph on roads with less than 2,000 vehicles a day, mixing bikes and other vehicles is fine. As speeds and traffic volumes rise, paved shoulders, cycle lanes and ultimately fully separated cycle tracks are provided. Adopting these principles here would mean that most residential roads, as long as they're not rat runs, would not be affected. It's the big fast rural roads – where there is plenty of space to provide parallel tracks – and the urban thoroughways which blight many of Britain's town centres that we'd like to see redesigned to give space back to people on foot and on bikes.

<sup>5</sup> See for example the compilation of evidence against separated cycle infrastructure compile by John Franklin <http://www.cyclecraft.co.uk/digest/research.html>.

<sup>6</sup> See for example CC. Reynolds *et al* (2009), "The Impact of Transportation Infrastructure on Bicycling Injuries and Crashes: A review of the Literature", *Environmental Health*, 8:47, <http://www.ehjournal.net/content/8/1/47>, and AC. Lusk *et al* (2011), "Risk of Injury for Bicycling on Cycle Tracks versus in the Street" doi:10.1136/ip.2010.028696 *BMJ Injury Prevention*, Vol 17, Issue 2, <http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/17/2/131.full>

<sup>7</sup> For instance, S.U. Jensen, C.Rosenkilde & N.Jensen (2007), *Road Safety and Perceived Risk of Cycle Facilities in Copenhagen*, (a study often cited by opponents of cycle tracks) <http://www.trafitec.dk/pub/Road%20safety%20and%20percieved%20risk%20of%20cycle%20tracks%20and%20lanes%20in%20Copenhagen.pdf> found that the construction of cycle tracks resulted in an 18-20% increase in bike and moped traffic on those roads; constructing cycle lanes saw increases of 5-7%.

<sup>8</sup> *Planning of Traffic Areas* from the Danish Handbook of Directions. Available at [http://www.fietsberaad.nl/index.cfm?lang=en&repository=Planning+of+traffic+areas+\(English\)](http://www.fietsberaad.nl/index.cfm?lang=en&repository=Planning+of+traffic+areas+(English))

## Won't we just get more 'crap cycle lanes'? Have you seen Warrington Cycling Campaign's 'Facility of the Month' site?<sup>9</sup>

We have, and we've bought the book,<sup>10</sup> but just because we've all seen and laughed at rubbish



Photo: by [ibikelondon](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4199931668/), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4199931668/>

infrastructure, it doesn't mean we shouldn't be pressing for well-designed cycle facilities instead. Let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater. The fact is that rubbish cycle lanes will get built whether we campaign for them or not, because the guidance that is out there is too weak and often ignored. Rather than give up all hope of getting decent bike lanes and learning to survive out there on the roads, we think that there should be national minimum standards for cycle facilities which will prevent any more of those cycle lanes that run into the sides of bus stops or demand cyclists dismount every 50 yards. We'll be working to develop those guidelines and to promote best practice nationally and locally. It will be a sad day for

lovers of cycle-related humour when the last 'crap cycle lane' passes into history, but a good day for everyone else.

## But cycling isn't actually that dangerous. Shouldn't we just be training people to ride bikes safely on the road instead?

While training – particularly in the techniques for cycling in traffic popularly known as 'vehicular cycling' – is a useful thing to do, and is helpful for cyclists who have to cycle on Britain's current bike-hostile roads, we don't think it's the be all and end all of getting mass cycling in this country. For a start, each person has to be individually trained, which is cost intensive. Secondly, if you look at the advanced cycling techniques needed to handle the most challenging situations, such as multi-lane roundabouts or fast A roads, not everyone can actually muster the acceleration (let alone the nerve) to safely negotiate them. For example, to quote from Cyclecraft,<sup>11</sup> the recommended course book for the national Bikeability training standard, here is the description of turning right on a large, multi-lane roundabout:

*It needs great care, confidence and, preferably, the ability to attain a sprint speed of about 32 km/h (20 mph). Approach the roundabout in the middle of the right hand lane... it can be advantageous to position yourself just to [the] left [of other vehicles] and to use the shelter of those vehicles for making the turn ... During any roundabout manoeuvre, you must keep your eyes and ears alert, monitoring other traffic all the time. Be ready to respond... to the slightest threat to your course*

We have no problem with Cyclecraft and cycle training as a survival guide for hazards such as these, but as the passage above makes crystal clear, even with training, such conditions will never be suitable for

---

<sup>9</sup> Warrington Cycle Campaign's Facility of the Month <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/pete.meg/wcc/facility-of-the-month/index.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Warrington Cycle Campaign, *Crap Cycle Lanes* <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Crap-Cycle-Lanes-Warrington-Campaign/dp/1903070589> Royalties support the Cycling Defence Fund

<sup>11</sup> John Franklin, *Cyclecraft: the complete guide to safe and enjoyable cycling for adults and children* [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Cyclecraft-complete-enjoyable-cycling-children/dp/0117037400/ref=pd\\_cp\\_b\\_1](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Cyclecraft-complete-enjoyable-cycling-children/dp/0117037400/ref=pd_cp_b_1)

mass cycling. Even with all the training in the world, would you want your ten year old handling a roundabout like that? Would you even want to do it yourself?

### **Shouldn't we just be pressing for 20mph speed limits or strict liability laws? Those are the real reason why Dutch roads are so safe**

Both of those are great initiatives and we particularly support 20's Plenty<sup>12</sup> as a campaign that will bring real benefits to communities, pedestrians and children. However, 20mph speed limits on their own don't improve safety for cyclists, who still have to mix with heavy traffic, as much as they do for pedestrians or motorists.<sup>13</sup> Slow moving vehicles can be just as dangerous – a fifth of all deaths of cyclists in London in recent years were due to left-turning lorries.<sup>14</sup> As with the roundabout example above, 20 mph roads aren't particularly safe for slower cyclists such as children, older people, or those running errands or unsure of their route – they only really benefit fast-moving fitter cyclists who can keep up with traffic.

Strict liability – reversing the burden of proof when a vulnerable road user is injured on to the less vulnerable party – was only introduced in the Netherlands in 1992, long after deaths and injuries on the road started to fall, so it does not explain much of the safety effect seen there. And in some form or other it is widespread across Europe, yet nobody is arguing that it has made Italy's roads, for example, much safer for cyclists.<sup>15</sup>



Photo: by [ibikelondon](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4551617249/>

---

<sup>12</sup> 20's Plenty for Us <http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk/>

<sup>13</sup> S.U. Jensen (2005) *Review of Blackfriars Bridge*, Traffitec, [http://www.traffitec.dk/pub/Review\\_of\\_Blackfriars\\_Bridge.pdf](http://www.traffitec.dk/pub/Review_of_Blackfriars_Bridge.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> A.S. Morgan *et al* (2010), 'Deaths of Cyclists in London: trends from 1992 to 2006', *BMC Public Health* 2010, 10:699, <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/10/699/>

<sup>15</sup> See for example Norman Baker's letter, cited in the Cambridge Cycling Campaign Newsletter <http://www.camcycle.org.uk/newsletters/94/article4.html>

## What about the cycling revolution in London?

London has certainly seen some impressive increases in the number of bikes visible on the roads, particularly in the centre. However, this increase needs to be put into perspective. For a start, cycling rates are still only 2% of all journeys, up from 1.2% in 2000, with a target of just 5% by 2031, which would not even put London into the top ten UK cycling cities. Secondly, much of the increase has come about because of existing cyclists taking more journeys by bike. Many of the new cyclists attracted by the Barclays Bicycle hire scheme, the bicycle superhighways and other high-profile investments, are merely replacing other cyclists who have given up because of the hostile nature of the roads in London in general. London also has a number of 'push' factors as well as pull factors attracting cycling: the congestion charge, the difficulty of parking in central London, the crowding on the tubes (and tube strikes) and low rates of car ownership and high levels of congestion. These make driving a car far less attractive than it is in many other parts of the country. And when you move away from the centre of the city and look at the outer boroughs where none of these factors are as much of an issue, then apart from Richmond upon Thames, cycling rates are lower than they are in many parts of the rest of the country, with less than 1% of trips by bike in places like Bromley, Harrow, Enfield and Waltham Forest. As to why people don't cycle more in London (or, indeed, in the rest of the UK) the answer is always the same: they don't feel safe.<sup>16</sup>



Photo: by [i b i k e l o n d o n](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/5723817196/>

---

<sup>16</sup> For more information about the figures cited here see Transport for London (2009) *Travel in London Report*, <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/corporate/Travel-in-London-report-1.pdf> and Transport for London (2010), *Analysis of Cycling Potential*, available at <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/roadusers/Cycling/analysis-of-cycling-potential.pdf.pdf>, particularly chapter 6.

### **So it's a case of 'if you build it, they will come'?**

Not necessarily. Building bike lanes, and preferably bike tracks, on its own does increase the number of bikes using those facilities, even when they are not particularly well-designed (for example, London's 'Cycle Superhighways', though widely criticised for their design and execution, saw a 70% increase in the number of cyclists using those routes<sup>17</sup>) although there's some evidence that some of the increase is down to cyclists using those facilities in preference to other routes. However, simply building a network of bike routes is not enough – as has been seen in Milton Keynes. The routes must go where the cyclists want to go and they must be joined up, well-maintained and feel safe. More importantly, they must be at least as direct as the equivalent route by car, and preferably faster and more direct. When combined with factors making motoring less convenient such as car parking charges, then people will choose the bike – not because they have been trained to do so, or encouraged to do so for their health or the environment, but because it is the most convenient way for them to get to where they want to go.



Photo: by [ibikelondon](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4636527145/>

### **Isn't that anti-car?**

We're not anti drivers – we know that most people use their cars because they have no practical alternative, not because they're lazy, ignorant or somehow bad people. But the fact is that transport policy has for decades been built around the needs of motorised transport first and foremost, with walking and cycling trailing far behind. Investment decisions in infrastructure, for example, have valued the time of the motorist more highly than that of the pedestrian, as anyone who has had to wait for two or three separate 'green men' to make a single crossing can attest. Transport for London still places 'the smooth flow of traffic' above other considerations, as has been shown in the Blackfriars bridge redesign. While a car can provide great benefits to its owner, at least in the short term, it comes with significant externalities for everyone else (including other drivers) in the form of congestion, pollution, obesity and road traffic deaths. Provision of parking – let alone new roads – takes up precious space on our crowded island. All we are asking for is a little re-balancing of priorities in order to make those forms of transport with fewer drawbacks to society the practical choice for the individual. If that's anti-car, then yes.

---

<sup>17</sup> Cycling along Barclays Cycle Superhighways is on the up  
<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/media/newscentre/archive/17912.aspx>

### Well this sounds wonderful in theory but how can we afford it in a recession?

We would ask – how can we afford not to? The modest decline in cycling between 1995 and 2005 is calculated to have cost the country a total of £600 million in health, congestion and pollution costs over the decade, whereas increasing cycling rates by just 50% would save the country £1.3 billion over 10 years, with the largest benefit coming from less congestion.<sup>18</sup> Building decent bike infrastructure isn't cheap compared to painting lines on the road; the Dutch now spend €30 per head a year, and we've got a long way to go to catch up with them<sup>19</sup> but even so, that would amount to less than half the £3.4 billion that will be spent on widening the M25. The evidence from elsewhere shows that investing in networks of walking and cycling tracks pays back around four to five times the amount spent, a far better ratio than any other kind of transport investment.<sup>20</sup> Even with the more modest investment and cycling increases (of 27%) seen in Cycling England's Cycling Demonstration Towns, the benefits were between 2.6 and 3.5



Photo: by [ibikelondon](#), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/5378694638/>

times the costs.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Cycling England (2007) *Valuing the Benefits of Cycling* <http://www.dft.gov.uk/cyclingengland/site/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/valuing-the-benefits-of-cycling-full.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Fietsberaad

<http://www.fietsberaad.nl/index.cfm?lang=nl&section=nieuws&mode=newsArticle&repository=jaarlijks+487+miljoen+euro+voor+de+fiets>, via David Hembrow <http://hembrow.blogspot.com/2010/05/487-million-euros-for-cycling.html>

<sup>20</sup> K. Sælensminde (2004), "Cost-benefit analyses of walking and cycling track networks taking into account insecurity, health effects and external costs of motorized traffic", *Transportation Research Part A* 38 (2004) 593–606, available from <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/assets/files/International/Norway%20cost-benefit%20analysis.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Department for Transport (undated) *Cycling Demonstration Towns – Development of Benefit Cost Ratios* <http://www.dft.gov.uk/cyclingengland/site/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/091223-cdts-bcr-analysis-final-edit.pdf>



**But don't you need get more people cycling first before you can press for better facilities? At the moment, cycling is such a minority activity no politician would dare champion it.**

There is a seductive line of reasoning that suggests we can 'bootstrap' a cycling culture cheaply through training, exhortation, Sky rides and modest bike hire schemes, slowly building cycling rates until everybody is a cyclist and politicians are willing to invest in infrastructure at Dutch levels of spending. Unfortunately, even if we could afford to wait that long, there's no evidence that this approach will work. Cycling rates are still meagre in this country despite years of the above while targets – such as the 1996 National Cycling Strategy's target to quadruple cycling by 2012 – have been set and then quietly dropped when they've been found to be unachievable.<sup>22</sup> Nor is there any sign that increased cycling levels will make politicians more willing to listen to cyclists' concerns – there are more bikes than cars crossing Blackfriars Bridge in London during the rush hour, yet initial proposals for redesigning the bridge included removing one cycle lane and increasing the speed limit to 30 mph.<sup>23</sup> We need to reach out now to the much bigger section of the population who would like to cycle if they felt they could. And we need to see real leadership from politicians to see beyond the noisy motoring lobbies and make far-sighted changes that will bring benefits not just to the 3% of the UK population who currently cycle regularly, but to everyone.



Photo: by [ibikelondon](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4961259562/>

**Aren't there cycling groups dealing with this sort of thing already?**

The Cycling Embassy of Great Britain is the first organisation to campaign specifically for better infrastructure based on the experiences of countries with high modal shares through proven success in its implementation of cycling facilities. Particularly as they have made all the mistakes for us as they developed since the 1970s, and can now help us unlock many of the problems we experience in the UK due to traffic congestion from health to social exclusion. All this obviously requires the golden egg that is political will. For this, cycling needs to show a united front and the Embassy is happy to support other cycle groups where we overlap and where appropriate. We will never be the venerable CTC or CycleNation, nor would we wish to be. They do what they do well and they have seen cycling in Britain through some dark times indeed. It's still very early days for us, but if we can all work together to create conditions for mass cycling in Britain, then the implications for all cycling groups, politicians and the whole country, whether cyclists or not, are very bright.

Above all we want to make riding a bike as easy as – riding a bike.

---

<sup>22</sup> Cycling England (2007) *op.cit.*

<sup>23</sup> See *Cyclists in the City* blog (<http://cyclelondoncity.blogspot.com/>) for full details of the Blackfriars Bridge redesign, and particularly the traffic breakdowns <http://cyclelondoncity.blogspot.com/2011/02/london-bridge-and-blackfriars-bridge.html>



Photo: by [ibikelondon](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4122696454/), on Flickr CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibikelondon/4122696454/>

To find out more about the Cycling Embassy of Great Britain, please visit our website  
<http://www.cycling-embassy.org.uk/>