



FEATURE  
Transport  
cycling

WORDS CHRIS PECK

# BUYING INTO CYCLETOPIA

Cycletopia will only be built on a foundation of cash. CTC's **Chris Peck** looks at what funds are available for cycling and how they should be spent



1

**C**ycle campaigners regularly invoke Dutch cycling infrastructure to show how things could be here. Getting it built, to the same standards, is another matter. CTC's Cycletopia project showed what is being done – and what needs to be done – to bring Dutch conditions to Britain.

The ingredients seem simple enough: firstly, funding that's dedicated to cycling; secondly, the political will to dedicate road space and resources effectively; and thirdly, planners who can get the details right. Unfortunately, over the decades, Britain has failed on all three fronts.

**SHOW US THE MONEY**

The first step, finding the funds for cycling, has been hardest of all. Despite making up 2% of trips, cycling has typically received far

less than that proportion of the transport budget. Across the UK, around £250 is spent per person on transport per year, but in England only around £1-2 goes on cycling (see p47). In Scotland, it's usually a little more; Scottish campaign group Spokes suggests a figure of around £5 per head. Even that is an improvement on the past.

The economic outlook may now be bleak, but in his Autumn Statement last year the Chancellor managed to find £42m for cycling down the back of the Treasury's sofa. That comes on top of the 'Local Sustainable Transport Fund' of around £140m a year for English sustainable travel schemes for 2011-2015, some of which will also go on cycling. Finally, there was also a one-off allocation of £50m in 2012, partly in response to the Times's 'Cities fit for cycling' campaign to improve cycle safety.

These recent injections of cash don't sound like much when put alongside the £1bn the Chancellor found for new roads and his decision to freeze fuel duty, which cost hundreds of millions more. But £42m, to be spent over the next two years, is actually the same amount committed by Cycling England to the cycling town project in the last years of the previous government.

Under that scheme, 19 locations in England benefited, testing the idea that cycling could grow significantly if spending was boosted to European levels of around £10 per person per year. Other places in Britain have tried similar approaches, with Cardiff designated a 'sustainable travel city'.

**TARGETED SPENDING**

Deciding where to invest the money to maximise impact is another issue. All





**In the photos**  
1 & 2 Cycling bridges, as in Plymouth and Gateshead, mean a better cycling network  
3 Cycle parking in the Netherlands – as usual, chock-a-block  
4 UK cycle parking is seldom so busy  
5 Dutch cyclists enjoy greater investment

## THE CYCLING TOWNS PLAN

Instead of spreading cash thinly across the country, Cycling England (which was terminated by the Coalition Government in 2011) concentrated its funding and spent intensively in a handful of selected areas. The approach was based on a model first tried in Denmark – and it worked.

The initial investment in six towns saw steady growth in cycling levels of around 4% per year, which, although modest in comparison to say, London's explosive 9%

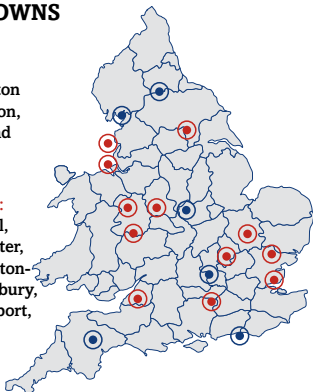
average growth over the last 10 years, is still on a par with the growth rates achieved in cities which experienced a cycling renaissance over the last few decades in places like Germany, Switzerland or Denmark.

The first six towns were funded for 2005-2011, with 12 others and one city – Bristol – joining for the final three years. Teams of engineers, planners and even councillors from the towns shared their experiences.

### CYCLING TOWNS AND CITIES

● **First round:** Aylesbury, Brighton & Hove, Darlington, Derby, Exeter, and Lancaster with Morecambe

● **Second round:** Blackpool, Bristol, Cambridge, Chester, Colchester, Leighton-Linslade, Shrewsbury, Southend, Southport, Stoke on Trent, Woking, York



of the new cash has been restricted to infrastructure schemes only – such as bridges, cycle paths or cycle parking. The experience of the first round of cycling towns was that 75% to 90% of the budget was spent on infrastructure, but that the marketing campaigns and promotional activities were crucial to ensuring that any improvements to the network were actually used by residents.

Changing transport behaviour is hard. Habits are locked into people's lives by decisions often taken decades before on housing and planning. Some groups are more willing to contemplate a shift in behaviour, usually those who are undertaking a change in lifestyle, such as moving home, starting work, changing job, or having – or evicting! – children. A marketing technique known as 'personalised travel planning' is used to identify those individuals most susceptible to change and target them with advice or incentives, such as cycle training, or provide them with cycle maps for the area.

Coventry missed out on the cycling town money, but it's decided to follow the example set by that programme. The local authority has managed to secure over £7m – all for cycling – and has ambitious plans for a network of routes and accompanying

promotion. CTC's local campaigner in the area, George Riches, is, so far, pretty impressed. The city has identified the main problem areas on each route corridors and has organised a couple of site visits with campaigners. 'Rather than spread the £7m over the city, only half the city will be targeted, which will allow a much higher-quality solution,' says George.

However, the political will to choose radical solutions still isn't entirely there. George notes: 'The bulk of the routes follow quiet roads and green spaces; they don't explicitly take away road space.' Removing car parking and reallocating road space in order to reduce motor traffic represents the biggest political problem, yet research from UCL found it was the most effective way of triggering a shift towards walking and cycling for everyday journeys.

### BRIDGING THE GAPS

Another city that missed out on earlier funding but has using the 'cycling town' approach is Plymouth, which received a grant of a little over £4m in 2011, most of which will be used to improve the cycling links with the edge-of-town residential communities on the east side of the River Plym. Crossing the river is the big problem: cycle paths lead up to both banks, but



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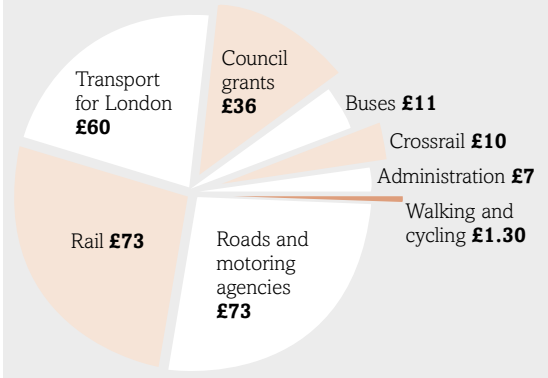


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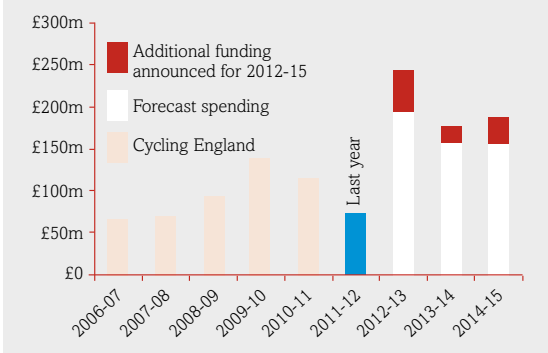
## ECONOMIC CYCLES

Spending on cycling is proportionally tiny, although figures are improving for the next few years in England

### Transport spending in England 2011/12



### Approximate sustainable travel spending (England)



currently disgorge their users onto an inadequate shared-use path alongside a dual carriageway bridge. The ambition is to resurface a parallel, crumbling old rail bridge to provide a dedicated walking and cycling bridge, one of the key elements CTC suggested was required for Cycletopia.

Plymouth's experience is one of co-operation between organisations and community groups. The routes are planned by Sustrans, which also runs the local Bikelt project in a dozen schools across the city, while CTC's Cycling Development Officer, Brett Nicolle, provides adult cycle training and coordinates bike maintenance courses to support the behavioural change programme. Brett says: 'I run bike safety checks in partnership with a local social enterprise – Bikespace – which provides training for kids excluded from school, giving them skills and the route towards a career. One of them has even been taken on as an apprentice to help run the courses.'

**“TRANSPORT HABITS ARE LOCKED IN BY PLANNING DECISIONS TAKEN YEARS BEFORE”**

There's been a perceptible shift in attitudes within Plymouth Council. 'Virtually everyone in the transport planning department rides a bike,' says Brett, 'and the number of bikes parked has increased in recent years.' Although huge cuts to local government funding loom, the transport department at Plymouth is already a lean area, and – while dedicated funding exists – is less likely to suffer drastically than other areas in future.

### HEALTH AND TRANSPORT FUNDING

A significant opportunity for finding funding for cycling comes in April, when English local authorities take control of health funding, which is protected from the worst of the local government cuts. Cycling is uniquely placed to benefit from this, since the health benefits of getting people riding to work are potentially vast, and are far more cost-effective than other interventions to motivate people to be more physically active.

Most of the 50 or so projects that benefited from the 'Local Sustainable Transport Fund' include cycling elements, but it's only a minority that give cycling full prominence. Both Plymouth and Coventry represent places where funding is almost wholly going to support cycling. Other recently funded projects include schemes

in: Greater Manchester, where secure cycle parking facilities for commuters are being constructed; 'Bike North Birmingham'; and smaller places, such as Lowestoft, where CTC's local campaigner John Thompson is greatly enjoying defending Suffolk Council's plans for a new cycling and footbridge against criticism from those who would prefer another road crossing of the harbour.

Outside of the direct grants supplied by central government, a few local authorities are using their own resources. Brighton has several innovative schemes to improve access for cyclists, including one of the first 'hybrid' cycle lanes – partly on and partly off-road – and returning many one-way streets back to two-way for cycling. But such dedicated spending, political ambition, and enlightened planning is rare.

So, a few places have made a start towards Cycletopia. But without adequate funding, most will never get close. Meanwhile, elsewhere in Europe, where cycling is already a mainstream mode of transport, levels of investment in cycling are already far greater than here. In Copenhagen, where 36% of people cycle to work (and the city wants to make that 50%), the annual budget for cycling is more than £18 per person, per year, and has been for at least the last six years. We've got a long way to go. ☺