

Enforcement of Traffic laws and Regulations

Dear All Party Parliamentary Group for Cycling & Walking,

Hull Carbon Neutral 2030 (HCN2030) is a community group with the goal of “..engaging the people of Hull in the Council’s commitment for Hull to be carbon neutral by 2030. The group exists to help and monitor the transition to carbon neutrality.” HCN2030 is one of two public groups invited to contribute to the development of decarbonisation pathways by Kingston upon Hull City Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

In 2020, HCN2030 published a report “The Contribution of Cycling to Hull's Carbon Neutral 2030 Commitment”, which is accessible from the link provided in the references, [1]. The report contains a large number of references to evidence the statements made. The report includes the following extracts:

“Fear of being struck by a motor vehicle is identified as the largest barrier to cycle use. .. Police indifference to offences where cyclists are victims is also a large deterrent to cycling in Hull. Other UK cities enforce laws against parking in cycle lanes, violation of cycle advance stop zones and dangerous overtaking. In Hull these offences are ubiquitous, especially by professional drivers, and the law unenforced. This is directly counter to commitments made in the Humberside Police and Crime Plan and dehumanises cyclists as worthless victims.”

Cyclists in Hull experience a “hostile environment” where offences against cyclists are ubiquitous and there is no enforcement by the police or council officers. Humberside has 500-600 reported cyclist casualties a year, with the unreported cases probably an order of magnitude higher. By comparison, there are about 400 violent crimes reported to Hull police per year. Traffic offences cause a similar amount of physical harm to cyclists as other categories of serious crime to other groups. Despite this, the police often portray traffic offences as trivial and a distraction from serious crime. The police are more like to commit offences against cyclists than to prevent them. This appears to be common across the UK, as described by daily posts in the Facebook site Stop Killing Cyclists, [2].

Cyclists face systematic verbal and physical abuse that would be a hate crime if the victim had a protected characteristic. I will provide two examples from my personal experience, although I believe these are typical for any assertive cyclist.

Example 1:

The first example is of the Council condoning dangerous and illegal parking near schools. During the period I have accompanied my primary aged children to school, I was struck three times by motorists and faced abuse most days. I complained to the Council many times and was ignored. I have seen Council civil enforcement officers walk past the scenes below. My children were too frightened to cycle to secondary school and chose to walk instead. This Council policy leads to car dependency cascading down the generations. Auckland Avenue, in Hull, has double yellow lines on the east and a single yellow line on the west. The single line highlights the prominent signs stating that there is no parking on the western side from 8AM to 6PM. It is commonly used by pupils of three nearby schools, two of them primary. Fig. 1A shows a typical scene at 3:45 PM. When cycling south with my children, it was a daily occurrence for motor vehicles to be deliberately driven head-on at us, on the wrong side of the road.



Fig. 1A



Fig. 1B



Fig. 1C



Fig. 1D

On the day these photos were taken, the white van in Fig 1B crossed to the wrong side of the road and was driven into me. Figures 1C and 1D were taken without dismounting and the front wheel of the cycle is visible in Fig. 1C. I was subjected to constant shouted abuse and threats from the van driven and other motorists.

Example 2:

The second example is of police indifference to crimes against cyclists. Figure (right) shows a West Yorkshire Police van parked in a cycle lane within 100 m of a primary school. The van was parked for over 2 hours while the staff performed a routine interview of a witness in their home. Safe and legal parking was available closer to their destination and a few seconds walk further away. My complaint was dismissed as WYP asserted that cycle lanes are “for information only”. This is false and parking in an advisory cycle lane is a “MUST NOT” offence in the Highway Code. When challenged WYP then claimed they had an exemption from parking restrictions from Hull Council. The Council has confirmed this is false. Police driving policy states



that exemptions from traffic regulations can be claimed if required for “policing purposes” and “necessary, proportionate and reasonable”. When I asked how parking this van met these standards, I was ignored as was all subsequent communications. Every time the police overtly flout the law, it advertises to all other road users that offences against cyclists are condoned. I have never known an offence against a cyclist resulting in action when it is reported to the police. A recent survey by the Hull and East Riding Green Party found that cyclists advance stop zones were violated by motorists stopped at a red traffic light 85% of the time. This is also a “MUST NOT” offence in the Highway Code.

Conclusions

Modal shift from motor vehicle to active travel will not happen until cyclists and pedestrians feel safe and valued. Cyclists face daily verbal and physical attacks, often amounting to hate. They are dehumanised as worthless victims, as crimes that cause significant numbers of deaths and serious injuries are treated as trivial and ignored by the police and civil enforcement officers. Until parents are comfortable with their children cycling in their neighbourhood, communities will be locked in a cycle of car dependency. Until Home Zones and segregated cycle routes are the norm, this requires enforcement of existing laws and a complete change in attitude by enforcement agencies.

Police forces should be made to collect and publish statistics on reported offences against cyclists and pedestrians, and the resulting outcomes. They should also publish estimates of unreported offences and have a target for the proportion reported. All forces should be required to have a web portal where offences against active travellers can be reported and images uploaded, and a guarantee of a timely response. Police and council staff that commit offences should face internal disciplinary action even when the offence is not prosecuted. There should be targets for annual reductions in cyclist and pedestrian casualties with consequences for Chief Constables that fail to meet them.

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References

- (1) The Contribution of Cycling to Hull's Carbon Neutral 2030 Commitment, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1C0UfHmKdk2qbqsBG-hITnErYHy1pt3L6/view?usp=sharing>.
- (2) Stop Killing Cyclists: https://m.facebook.com/groups/1374560226128219/?ref=group_browse.