

West Yorkshire highways zoom meeting 5/05/2021

The Motorcycle Action Group is a volunteer led organisation whose aim is the protection and promotion of motorcycling throughout the country. Powered two-wheelers present a viable, economic, non-congesting and low-pollution alternative to cars, especially where bicycles or public transport are not a realistic option. We don't seek any special treatment, but particularly as we're classed by the government as Vulnerable Road Users, we do expect both fair treatment and, at the very least, for us not to be placed in increased danger through altered road infrastructure.

Over the past few years, throughout West Yorkshire there has been an explosion in the amounts of both bus lanes and cycle lanes which has in turn compressed the road space for motorcyclists, making it far more dangerous to make progress through the traffic where these restricted lanes are in use.

One of the things our members wanted was for local councils to come into line with the many local authority areas around the country that allow motorcycles access to bus lanes.

In 2013 the Leeds & Bradford branch of the Motorcycle Action Group approached Leeds city council to investigate the possibility of allowing motorcycles access to "with flow bus lanes" throughout the city.

After several meetings over approximately 18 months, we were told that the new West Yorkshire Combined Authority would have control over the counties roads and we would have to deal with them on this subject.

Though frustrating, having to start from scratch again, we felt that this was possibly a good idea as bus lane access for motorcycles throughout West Yorkshire was a better idea as West Yorkshire was now basically one big conurbation and the borders between various councils were often blurred and the last thing we wanted was for riders to be inadvertently in breach of each individual councils rules when making a journey across the county.

MAG had dozens of meetings with the Combined Authority over a period of a couple of years regarding making West Yorkshire a better place for motorcyclists to ride and after a far reaching consultation costing taxpayers over £20,000 it was put into the Combined Authority 20 year transport plan that "where possible, motorcycles should have access to with flow bus lanes, throughout West Yorkshire"

At this point MAG felt that our efforts had paid off but unfortunately that was only the start.

It seems that the West Yorkshire Combined Authority is a toothless extra level of bureaucracy that can only advise the five West Yorkshire councils and as such each council can pick and choose which bits it wants to implement.

We were now back in a position of having to hold talks with each of the five individual councils on the subject of bus lane access – *the exact opposite of what we had been told several years earlier.*

Some councils have been more receptive than others. The current state of play is: **Leeds City Council** - a trial was promised over two years ago but is still not in place. It is planned for the Kirkstall Road corridor but council officers have already stated that as it is the widest bus lane in Leeds, it may not give them the data they

need for a city wide roll-out. They're now even talking of an *extra* consultation at the taxpayers expense, about actually holding the trial!

Bradford City Council - have a 18 month trial in place on the Hall Ings bus lane through the city centre with a view to a city wide roll out upon its successful completion.

Wakefield City Council - completed a successful trial on one bus lane but it hasn't rolled the policy out city wide.

Calderdale Council - all bus lanes will allow motorcycle access

Kirklees Council – is refusing to engage with us to even *discuss* motorcycle bus lane access as one of their officers is vehemently against it.

The motorcyclists of West Yorkshire would like to see a joined up approach by the five councils in introducing motorcycle bus lane access across the county as we strongly feel that motorcycles are very much part of the solution to congestion and emissions on our roads (we're rarely stood still and stuck in traffic). We're also the optimal way of travelling to maintain social distancing.

One of the other things that was very apparent was the massive rise in **motorcycle theft** throughout the county. From Freedom Of Information requests we discovered that in 2019, after London, West Yorkshire was the worst area for motorcycle theft in the country!

When MAG was in discussions with the Combined Authority, part of those discussions were to try to get more secure motorcycle parking throughout the county. We felt that with more locking points, coupled to an educational campaign to promote motorcycle security to riders and a concerted effort by the police, we could help to turn the tide of motorcycle theft.

Initially things went well with both Leeds, Kirklees and Calderdale putting in a few extra secure parking bays, and Leeds mounting some information/warning posters at several motorcycle parking bays.

Police in Leeds mounted an operation to target bike thieves which led to a 90% drop in motorcycle theft, for the time the thieves were incarcerated.

MAG had thousands of A5 flyers printed up to promote motorcycle security and these were places in dealers, handed out at events and sent to all MAG members in their magazine.

MAG's discussions with the Combined Authority resulted in the award of £14,000 per council, per year for three years (2019, 2020, 2021) ring fenced for secure motorcycle parking throughout the council.

We approached each of the five councils to try to get this money spent in the best way possible. Little did we realise how difficult it would be to get the councils to spend this money!

We are greatly concerned that there has been little uptake on this grant as not only is this a big issue for motorcyclists (the trauma of having your motorcycle pinched, coupled to massively high insurance premiums for up to five years following a theft) but there is the attendant wider social aspect of illegal, untrained & uninsured riding, drug running, bag snatching etc.

Bradford Council have been a beacon of hope for motorcyclists as they have liaised with MAG for the correct type of barrier, and installed secure motorcycle parking in all the council owned car parks throughout Bradford.

Leeds City Council have had many meetings with MAG representatives but things seem to have gone into reverse! Two secure bays in central Leeds have actually been removed and new bays haven't been decided upon yet. Last year 90 Sheffield stands were ordered but as far as we're aware none have yet been installed.

Wakefield, Kirklees and Calderdale are yet to spend any of the ring fenced money on secure motorcycle parking, as far as we are aware, although getting a straight answer isn't easy.

We feel that motorcyclists, whilst perhaps not being deliberately discriminated against, are largely ignored or forgotten about, leading to undesirable and often dangerous outcomes. Other serious concerns relate to:

- Orcas, which have been installed without consultation or testing, and present a real danger to two wheeled vehicles
- Speed humps and cushions, almost ALL of which are dangerously positioned, and many of which have now fallen into pot-holed disrepair, presenting an additional danger to motorcyclists (& cyclists), which has been deliberately put in place by the local authorities!
- On-road Cycle lanes, on which pedal cyclists are barely safer, but which do make motorcyclists *less* safe by removing road space.

MAG have been very proactive over the past eight years with the local councils in not only trying to make things better for motorcyclists, but to try to help with the blights of congestion and antisocial riding but we strongly feel that this has not been reciprocated by the local councils.

Bradford and Calderdale have been our main shining lights, as they have worked with us to make things better for all, **Wakefield** have been rather quiet, **Kirklees** have been ambivalent and **Leeds** seem to give us platitudes in meetings, and then seem to do whatever they want, regardless of any prior agreements.

We vainly hoped that the Combined Authority would facilitate a joined up transport strategy upon its inception. Unfortunately this hasn't happened, but it is still possible for the five West Yorkshire councils to work in unison, alongside the Motorcycle Action Group, to make motorcycle usage better and simpler, whilst improving safety and the environment for everyone, throughout the county.

RJM (amended by JN)