

Motorcycles in West Yorkshire

A Local Transport Plan



A joint submission by the local West Yorkshire MAG branches
September 2024

Contents

Document Control	3
Introduction	4
Why Motorcycles?	5
Principles.....	6
Implementation	7
Safety and Security	7
Safety.....	7
Security.....	8
Active	11
Inclusive	12
Zero Emissions	13
Reliable and Resilient	14
Integrated	15
Conclusion.....	16
Contacts and Local Groups	17
Local Group Meetings.....	17
Huddersfield	17
Leeds and Bradford	17
Wakefield.....	17

Document Control

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Introduction

This document is a joint submission by the Huddersfield, Leeds & Bradford, and Wakefield branches of the Motorcycle Action Group (MAG) in response to the review of the Mayor's West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan (LTP). We represent the interests of thousands of motorcyclists across the county.

As stakeholders in the transport network we welcome this chance to contribute to the revised plan. Transport policy previously concentrated on encouraging people to use pedal cycles. Now that this is established we would like to see the consideration of other forms of personal transport. Bus franchising and trams are at very early stage. In the meantime a county-wide policy of encouraging the use of motorcycles could help to make West Yorkshire a leader in forms of non-car personal mobility.

Motorcycles offer an alternative to private cars that is more flexible than buses and which is not dependent on the user's physical ability or the terrain. 50cc mopeds may be used from the age of 16 and adapted motorcycles give people with mobility issues the ability to travel independently. Motorcycles are also cheaper to run than cars.

An electronic version of this document and an executive summary are available from <https://bit.ly/WYMAGLTP>.

Why Motorcycles?

The notes¹ accompanying the consultation state that “public transport, walking, cycling and wheeling can move more people in less space [than cars] and are better for our environment”. The 2017 WYCA Local Transport Plan stated “Motorcycles are another convenient, affordable and efficient form of transport in their use of fuel and of road space. We believe that levels of motorcycle usage could increase due to the lower costs associated with motorcycles and the limited alternative transport options in some areas.” Other than this motorcycles have been largely absent from most discussions of local transport policy.

One of the main benefits of motorcycles is transport for the “last mile”. Buses, trains and trams do not usually stop outside people’s houses. Transport hubs in outlying areas may be too far to walk. People may need to get to work before the bus service begins for the day. They may have equipment to carry. Motorcycles provide a “step up” from active travel without the costs, road space and pollution associated with cars. The motorcycle Certificate of Basic Training provides a simple, low-cost form of personal transport that is available for people from the age of 16.

Motorcycle technology has moved on over the years. Euro-3 compliant vehicles are clean enough to be exempt from paying ULEZ charges in Greater London. Electric motorcycles are starting to become available and powered assisted e-bikes are even available for hire through schemes such as Leeds City Bikes.

We are aware that some traffic planners have concerns about the use of motorcycles. Leeds & Bradford MAG first contacted Leeds City Council about motorcycle access to bus lanes in 2012. We obtained meeting minutes from the Transport Task Force for the period 2019-20² where concerns were raised about bus lane width, the effect on other forms of transport, and the principle of private vehicles (other than pedal cycles) using bus lanes. However, once a trial of motorcycle access to bus lanes was carried out in 2022-23, these concerns turned out to be unfounded.

The consultation is primarily based on asking the question “what would it take for you to exchange a car for a pedal cycle?” We would like to see the next phase of the consultation to include a further option: “What would you think about using a motorcycle instead of a car?”

Petrol and electrically powered motorcycles will converge over time. The LTP is intended to run until 2040. A carefully thought-out plan would give people an additional option for personal mobility and would cover any future developments. A consistent, county-wide approach to all powered two-wheel vehicles would reduce duplicated effort and the cost of individual councils producing their own plans.

We are aware of the financial constraints affecting local authorities. Encouraging the use of motorcycles is not expensive. For the large part all it requires is a more positive attitude and a few new signs and traffic regulations. Improving infrastructure for motorcycles would have benefits for other road users, especially cyclists and pedestrians. Encouraging motorcycle use would also reduce road maintenance costs as their lighter weight reduces wear and tear.

In order to increase knowledge of the benefits of motorcycles we would like to extend an invitation to attend our meetings. Contact and meeting details are listed towards the end of this document. We would also like to see consultation events take place at motorcycle dealerships and cafés in addition to community events.

¹ <https://www.yourvoice.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/ltp/widgets/96772/faqs#25370>

² https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/bus_lane_widths_and_guidance

Principles

Motorcycles are a legitimate form of personal transport that fit alongside pedal cycles and buses as an alternative to the private car. The MAG document Pathways for Progress³ includes the following principles:

- Attitudes - Changing attitudes towards motorcycling do not need to be cost intensive in terms of monetary input, but they will require both consistency and time
 - Integrate motorcycles in all communications about sustainable transport
 - Introduce motorcycling officer to all Local Transport Authorities
 - Integrate motorcycle use into planning policy and travel plans
 - Promote and support leisure riding health and wellbeing benefits
- Infrastructure - Infrastructure changes to promote motorcycling are small in comparison to current spending on cycling infrastructure. Revolving more around access to existing infrastructure than the introduction of new, these proposals are not cost prohibitive
 - Access to segregated road space – including bus lanes and advance cycle stopping lines
 - Road furniture review
 - Inclusion of motorcycles in planning policy and guidance
 - Provision of plentiful, fit-for-purpose secure motorcycle parking facilities
 - Provision of adequate motorcycle-relevant charging Infrastructure – including the ability to secure unattended motorcycles to lower the risk of theft
- Behaviours - Ultimately, to reap the potential benefits that motorcycles can deliver requires behaviour change amongst the population. Changing attitudes towards riding and providing better infrastructure for riders will not result in benefits without a behaviour change resulting in a greater proportion of motorcycles in the transport mix.
 - Promote modal shift to motorcycles
 - Exempt motorcycles from all charging schemes
 - Actively and publicly seek to remove barriers to modal shift to motorcycles
 - Promote Wheels To Work schemes
 - Align motorcycling and cycling policies

At a more local level we would like to see:

- The WYCA and district councils to develop a unified strategy covering both ICE and electrically powered two-wheel vehicles
- Motorcycles should have access to all with-flow bus lanes and non-signalised bus gates
- Initiatives to improve road conditions for motorcycles should have a fixed implementation date
- The “ride the route” principle of highways officers experiencing at first hand the impact of any changes extended to projects that may affect motorcycles.
- A fast-track way to deal with potholes, diesel spills and other road defects
- A plan to address the issue of motorcycle theft and antisocial riding
- Councillors and council officers to be encouraged to improve their knowledge of motorcycles and the issues they face

³ https://wiki.mag-uk.org/images/9/96/Pathways_For_Progress_v2.0_2019_10_30.pdf

Implementation

This section is based on the subheadings in the consultation. Some of these points are strategic decisions to be made by the WYCA. Others should be cascaded down to district councils. Vague terms like “in due course” are open to interpretation. It is therefore important that they are timebound and consistent across all five districts.

Safety and Security

The consultation has the principle of “Reducing crime on and around the transport network, ensuring that people feel safe when travelling. Zero fatalities on the West Yorkshire road network”. Road safety and security are two separate issues and we feel that combining them like this will only cause confusion. This will therefore be addressed separately.

Safety

The key road safety initiative is “Vision Zero”. There are many interpretations of what it means. We contacted Leeds City Council⁴ to ask how they see it being applied to motorcycles. They told us:

“Vision Zero seeks to reduce and prevent injury collisions on its network, through a data led approach. At the present time, reactive road safety interventions are identified for funding consideration via Police injury collision data. This data then helps identify length and sites of concerns which have a greater injury collision record than the Department for Transport's national average. Each location is then reviewed on a site-by-site basis, looking into each collision at greater depth, this would involve reviewing the type of vehicles involved, causation factors, any patterns to the collisions, which ultimately leads to recommended engineering, educational or enforcement intervention.

“Leeds also conducts ‘cluster’ site reviews across all of its highway network, which may identify if there have been 3 or more motorcycle or cycle collisions at a bend, in the dark, within 50m of each other etc. This data review also enables sites of concerns to be identified, so that measures can be considered.”

The current edition of the Highway Code establishes the principle that motorcycle users are vulnerable road users. Further transport policy changes establish the idea that safety for vulnerable road users should be improved by means of design such as providing dedicated road space, making them more visible. It also represents the end of the idea that people should be discouraged from using forms of transport with higher accident rates.

Department for Transport guidance on overtaking recommends a gap of 1.5 metres when vehicles overtake pedal cycles in general traffic lanes, and a bus lane width of more than 4.5 metres to allow motorcycles to overtake pedal cycles. The experience of the Kirkstall Road trial suggests that guidance for bus lanes is somewhat overcautious and narrower bus lanes would be suitable for being shared with pedal and motorcycles.

One of the main causes of motorcycle accidents that authorities have control over is road design and maintenance. Road space has been taken away to make room for segregated cycling infrastructure, making it harder for motorcycles to filter safely. Road maintenance has been cut back and speed limits reduced due to spending cuts. Transport for London has written a Urban Motorcycle Design Handbook⁵ which provides advice on ways to include motorcycles into road design.

Mention also needs to be made of traffic calming schemes such as Active Travel, Low Traffic and Fifteen Minute Neighbourhoods. Where roads are closed as part of these schemes, the next nearest route may

⁴ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/motorcycles_and_vision_zero

⁵ <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/tfl-urban-motorcycle-design-handbook.pdf>

not be the most suitable for motorcycles. They may prefer routes that avoid busy dual carriageways or complex roundabouts. Traffic planners being encouraged to “ride the route” so they experience these issues at first hand may assist with scheme design. It may also be worth considering allowing motorcycles to go through filters that restrict cars. A properly managed way of doing so would be much safer for all road users than having cycle filters being used illegally.

Another issue is that riders of small motorcycles with L plates cannot use the Leeds inner ring road or M621 because they are classed as motorways. They are also restricted from large sections of Leeds city centre due to the use of bus gates. The technology does not exist to distinguish between learner and non-learner vehicles. Therefore the only realistic solution would be to allow all motorcycles to use non-signalised bus gates.

Research commissioned by Transport for London⁶ found that up to 19% of fatal motorcycle accidents involved stolen vehicles and 44% of fatal motorcycle accidents had some form of illegality such as no tax or insurance. There is therefore a need to consider theft as a risk factor.

Leeds’ interpretation of Vision Zero comes across as very reactive. A more proactive version could address safety without having to wait for people to be killed or seriously injured.

Our recommendations are as follows:

- Invert the Vision Zero pillars so that road design and maintenance are at the top
- Better coordination of road works to minimise disruption
- A fast-track method for reporting diesel spills
- Initiatives to improve rider skills such as the Biker Down and Bike Safe courses, and “upgrading” a CBT certificate to a full A1 class (or higher) licence
- Initiatives to encourage riders to purchase protective clothing, such as money-off vouchers for new riders
- Initiatives to improve skills for food delivery riders
- Develop training for users of e-bikes and other power assisted two wheel vehicles
- Tougher and more prominent enforcement of motorcycle theft
- Incorporate the Transport for London Urban Motorcycle Design Handbook into road schemes
- Consideration of the MAG document Welcoming Roads⁷ in relation to safety issues
- Speed reductions are cheap and easy to implement. However they may mask other issues affecting road safety. We would like to see other safety improvements (such as repairing potholes or improving sight lines) carried out before reducing speed limits.

Security

West Yorkshire has one of the highest rates of motorcycle theft outside London and Leeds has the highest rate of all districts in the county. Our members report that the risk of theft puts them off using motorcycles more than any other reason, especially in Leeds city centre.

Our research⁸ has found that the recovery rate in the Leeds and Bradford police divisions is consistently less than 50% and the prosecution rate is a fraction of one percent. These figures include e-bikes and electric motorcycles. Lighter weight vehicles such as e-scooters are even easier to steal. Many secure on-street motorcycle parking points were removed during the Covid-19 pandemic and city centre redevelopments.

Once motorcycles have been stolen they are often ridden antisocially or are used to facilitate other types of crime. An unintended consequence of new cycling infrastructure has been its illegal use by motorcycle

⁶ <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/ppr621-motorcycle-fatal-files-report.pdf>

⁷ https://wiki.mag-uk.org/images/6/66/Welcoming_Roads_2021_06.pdf

⁸ <http://leeds.mag-uk.org/2019-20-leeds-and-bradford-motorcycle-theft-stats/>

thieves. They provide convenient escape routes and segregated cycle lanes parallel to the East Leeds Outer Ring Road are a particular hotspot for antisocial behaviour. Theft gangs are often highly organised and have social media accounts to show off what they have stolen. There are also links to criminal gangs in other parts of the country. The author of this report had his motorcycle stolen from Seacroft and it was recovered outside Stockport a few days later.

West Yorkshire Police has limited resources which means that the victim is often given a crime number and left to deal with their insurance company while no further action is taken. Some riders, especially females, do not feel safe riding along York Road through East Leeds because of the possibility of being bike-jacked.

We note that the Leeds City cycle hire scheme has also been badly affected by theft. Bike hire bays located in known motorcycle theft hotspots are out of action due to vandalism. Some other councils have had to withdraw their e-bike hire schemes due to excessive rates of theft and vandalism. Thieves do not care about the difference between e-bikes and motorcycles. As long as it has two wheels and some sort of power source they consider it fair game.

Convictions secured as part of Operation Badgeland in December 2017 were successful and led to a large decrease in the rate of motorcycle crime while the offenders were in prison. However it resumed once they were released.

At the beginning of 2021 the WYCA allocated Leeds City Council £40,000 to spend on secure parking in car parks outside Leeds city centre. As of September 2024 this parking has not been installed and we are still trying to find out what happened to the funding.

In June 2022 concerns were raised on social media about high rates of theft from Skelton Lake service station. It is easy to access from non-motorway roads and is very close to Halton Moor where a large number of stolen bikes have been found.

The Leeds Off Road Bike Team and initiatives such as Operation Dieselcrest and Steerside have been making a difference. We believe that further improvements could be made. Police personnel sometimes change positions due to promotions and other organisational changes. We have made headway in discussions with senior officers, only for them to move to a new role. A defined county-wide point of contact would improve information sharing and help to prevent intelligence being lost due to internal reorganisations.

We will be making a separate submission to the Deputy Mayor for Crime and Policing recommending a multi-agency approach to address motorcycle crime. From a transport strategy point of view we suggest:

- Reinstatement and enlargement of secure street parking. This should include charging points for e-bikes. Where space is limited this could be shared with secure cycle parking
- Secure parking to be available in all local authority controlled car parks and clarification that its use will be free of charge. The difficulty of attaching parking tickets securely to motorcycles makes pay and display schemes impractical
- Where possible parking should include facilities for the storage of personal items such as motorcycle helmets
- A detailed map of town and city centre parking facilities including a guide to navigating any one-way systems
- Planning policies to encourage the provision of secure motorcycle parking in private car parks and at transport hubs, places of employment, education and leisure
- Motorcycle theft and antisocial riding to be given a higher priority in the Deputy Mayor for Crime and Policing's strategy as a community cohesion issue
- Anti-motorcycle barriers and other measures to reduce illegal use of segregated cycle lanes

- Motorcycle security to be considered alongside initiatives to improve cycle security
- Greater support for victims of motorcycle crime such as post-theft care and attempting to return stolen bikes to their rightful owners. This would also allow intelligence to be shared with specialist police teams
- High profile activity to disrupt crime and dispel myths such as police not pursuing riders who have removed their helmet or number plate
- Review security at motorway service stations to ensure bikes may be parked securely and thieves cannot escape easily
- A central point of contact for people to share information with specialist police teams that does not depend on the availability of a particular officer
- Improvements to the 101 web chat system to allow non-time critical reports of motorcycle related issues to go to the right place much more easily

Active

Motorcycling has physical and mental health benefits in common with aspects of walking and cycling. The physical act of controlling the vehicle burns more calories than sitting still or driving. Research carried out for a motorcycle blog site⁹ suggest it can burn up to 400 calories an hour. The mental health benefits of motorcycling are harder to quantify but it has a strong culture based on close friendship and there are support organisations such as Mental Health Motorbike¹⁰ to provide more formal support. Organisations such as the National Association for Bikers with a Disability¹¹ provide adaptations for disabled riders.

We would like the next stage of the consultation acknowledge these benefits and that that there is a place for motorcycling alongside cycling, walking and wheeling as a form of travel that is more active than private cars.

⁹ <https://www.bennetts.co.uk/bikesocial/news-and-views/blog/why-motorcycling-should-be-available-on-prescription>

¹⁰ <https://mhmotorbike.com/>

¹¹ <https://www.nabd.org.uk/>

Inclusive

Historically motorcycles have not been very prominent in West Yorkshire transport policy. We feel that starting to promote them more positively would help to make the network feel more inclusive, especially for people for whom active travel is impractical. We would like the WYCA and other authorities to build on the 2017 statement that “Motorcycles are another convenient, affordable and efficient form of transport in their use of fuel and of road space.” There is also the need to allow existing riders feel that they have a part in the local network and that their views have been taken into account in the LTP.

We would like council officers and elected representatives being encouraged to increase their knowledge of motorcycling issues by attending bike events, MAG meetings and motorcycle cafés such as Squire’s Bikers’ Café. This should include consultation events such as the next phase of this strategy and district councils’ transport plans.

We would also like to ensure that the proposed tram/mass transit system does not have a detrimental effect on motorcycle use, through permanent diversions, poorly planned roadworks, or tram rails interfering with motorcycle wheels.

We believe that encouraging motorcycle use will be beneficial to the local transport network and recommend the following steps to do so:

- More prominent visibility of motorcycles in transport-related publicity. This could include literature specifically for motorcycle topics such as parking
- Appointment of a designated motorcycle officer and encouragement of responsible motorcycle riding as a leisure activity, in line with MAG’s Pathways to Progress mentioned earlier. Ideally this person will be a senior traffic planner, hold a full motorcycle licence, and ride motorcycles regularly
- A date agreed for access to all with-flow bus lanes and non-signalised bus gates across West Yorkshire
- Any other motorcycle-related items in the WYCA strategy to have clear timelines and milestones
- Inclusion of motorcycles and e-bikes in the Connecting Leeds “Walk it/Ride it” campaign
- Consideration to allowing access to proposed “car free zones”
- Work with charities such as the National Association for Bikers with a Disability (NABD) to improve accessibility for disabled riders
- Promotion of the Ride to Work Day¹² initiative
- Initiatives to encourage motorcycle use and address concerns about perceived risk
- Support charities such as Bumpy¹³ that provide motorcycle training and activities for children
- Motorcycles listed as a mode of transport in its own right in WYCA strategies and building on the assumption that their use will increase

¹² <https://ridetoworkday.co.uk/>

¹³ <https://www.bumpy.org.uk/>

Zero Emissions

The 2017 WYCA strategy acknowledges that motorcycles are more fuel-efficient than cars and that they provide an alternative where other forms of transport are not available. Modern motorcycles meeting Euro 3 or higher standards meet the requirements to be exempt from the London Ultra Low Emissions Zone.

Proposals to phase out sales of new internal combustion engine motorcycles were discussed by the previous government. Even without this the number of more-polluting motorcycles will decline through natural wastage. Older and vintage motorcycles will not go away entirely. It is still possible to occasionally see road vehicles powered by *steam*. Non-petrol motorcycles are at an early stage of development and preferred power sources are yet to be established. It may be rechargeable or replaceable batteries, or some other source may become available.

Encouraging modal shift from cars to motorcycles and e-bikes would be a step towards reducing air pollution. Some recommendations on how to do so are as follows:

- Allow motorcycles to use bus lanes, bus gates and more direct routes where cars are diverted to more circuitous routes
- Encourage the use of motorcycles and e-bikes over cars by exempting them from charges in any proposed emissions charging schemes
- The design of charging points specifically for electric motorcycles varies from cars. A single car space can accommodate multiple motorcycles. There is also a need for secure attachments to discourage theft
- Suitable disposal facilities for life-expired electric vehicle batteries

Reliable and Resilient

The WYCA consultation mentions the need for “A well-maintained network that is in good condition, punctual, provides a wide range of choices, and can withstand extreme weather”. Breaking this down piece by piece in relation to motorcycles:

- “A well-maintained network that is in good condition” – road maintenance has been reduced due to financial stringencies. Potholes can cause serious injury for riders of any two wheeled vehicle including pedal cycles. Faded road markings can lead to confusion and lead to all types of vehicle changing lanes at the last minute.
- “Punctual” – we understand there is some concern that allowing motorcycles to use bus lanes may affect the reliability of bus services. The trial of bus lane access on Kirkstall Road, and the experience of Calderdale and Bradford, has shown that this is not the case.
- “Provides a wide range of choices” – we believe that motorcycles should be included as a primary alternative to cars alongside buses, cycling, walking and wheeling.
- “And can withstand extreme weather” – again this is down to maintenance. Potholes often form over winter as water gets into the surface and expands when it freezes.

We would therefore like to see improvements in how roads are maintained and how defects and obstructions are managed. Proactive repairs at an early stage would reduce the need for major works later on. The lighter weight of motorcycles compared to cars or buses would reduce wear and tear on roads.

Integrated

Motorcycles have a definite role in an integrated transport system. They give access to the “last mile” between transport hubs and a person’s final destination. They provide flexibility that fixed public transport timetables cannot. They do not depend on a person’s physical characteristics and adaptations are available for people with limited mobility. Powered personal transport allows people to quickly depart from areas where they may have concerns for personal safety. Concerns about the possibility of theft mean that there is a need to provide secure motorcycle parking at transport hubs, ideally with storage for personal items such as helmets.

Conclusion

The 2017 WYCA Local Transport Plan provided the foundations for a positive promotion of motorcycling. The review of the LTP provides an opportunity to demonstrate that alternatives to the private car need not be limited to buses and active travel. Motorcycles are a tried and tested alternative that the WYCA acknowledges are lower cost, flexible and more convenient. This consultation has the potential to show the WYCA leading the way in promoting alternatives to private cars. We look forward to seeing more positive promotion of motorcycles and hope to be fully engaged in the next phase of this consultation.

Contacts and Local Groups

Contact details for local West Yorkshire MAG personnel are as follows:

- Yorkshire and Wakefield MAG Group Rep – Steve Travis (stravis@mag-uk.org)
- Huddersfield MAG Group Rep – Andy Foody (afoody@hotmail.co.uk)
- Leeds and Bradford MAG Group Rep – Richard Manton (manny@mag-uk.org)
- Yorkshire Political Rep – Tom Lonsdale (tom.lonsdale@mag-uk.org)
- Local Campaigns Officer, Leeds & Bradford MAG – Marcus Houlden (mhoulden@mag-uk.uk)
- MAG Director of Campaigns and Political Engagement – Colin Brown (cbrown@mag-uk.org)

We would like to be included in the next phase of any consultation and are happy to discuss any matters arising from this document.

Local Group Meetings

Huddersfield

Covering Calderdale and Kirklees. Meetings every Wednesday at 20.30.

The Fieldhead, 219 Quarmby Road, Huddersfield, HD3 4FB.

Leeds and Bradford

Meetings on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month at 20.00.

The Royal Hotel, 30 Station Street, Pudsey, LS28 8PR.

Wakefield

Meetings every Tuesday at 20.30

The Thatched House, 434 Aberford Road, Stanley, Wakefield, WF3 4AA.