

## **Bristol Cycling Campaign AGM 26 November 2019**

### **Annual Review**

#### **Background**

Bristol could make a good case as the home of British cycle campaigning. Cycle Bag, out of which grew both the Cycle Campaign (BCyC or Campaign) and Sustrans, was founded in 1977, following a series of XR like instances of civil disobedience. It went on to start work on the Bristol Bath Rail Path under John Grimshaw. His account is interesting.

<https://bristolcycling.org.uk/the-start-of-cycle-campaigning-in-bristol-lessons-for-today>

The Campaign was founded in 1991 and its first action was an occupation of the M32. Sustrans meanwhile have gone a different route and now turnover tens of millions and the livelihood of hundreds depend on them. People tell me they've left behind the spirit of Cycle Bag (not surprising given their size and nature) and the old Campaign whereas we, just about, keep it alive.

#### Cycling City

Bristol was the UK's first and, so far, only Cycling City. Between 2008 and 2011 the City of Bristol and South Gloucestershire, oddly our Northern and Eastern suburbs are not part of the City, had about £22m to spend on cycling measures. Much emphasis was placed on "soft" measures, which are relatively well catered for in Bristol. There were major infrastructure projects, including the Concorde and Malago Ways around this time.

<https://betterbybike.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Cycling-City-end-of-project-report.pdf>

Sustrans and the City Council spread the funding relatively evenly and placed more emphasis on length, rather than quality, of cycle routes. In contrast Andrew Gilligan and TfL more recently concentrated much larger sums on a few relatively high quality schemes in a few areas in London. It is, however, evident that cycling has increased significantly in Bristol in the last 10 years. Possibly demand for cycling is so suppressed by hostile road design and conditions that any infrastructure, even sub standard, leads to an increase. In my opinion Cycling City was a very worthwhile project so long as it is seen as a start and is built on. There is, however, a worrying tendency to see it's very modest measures and the, in transport terms, tiny investment as job done.

#### Three Mayors

In 2012 George Ferguson, an independent, became Bristol's first directly elected Mayor. Cycle Campaigners had high hopes for his administration. We understand he

decided he had other battles to fight, including the introduction of City wide 20mph limits and Residents Parking Zones. These were highly controversial and other politicians (possibly opportunistically?) took advantage.

In 2015 Bristol was European Green Capital. That is slightly embarrassing given we have some of the least sustainable transport and highest car dependency in England and perhaps north west Europe. It seems to have been a largely theoretical, paper exercise, so far as is transport is concerned.

With funding from the Cycle Ambition Fund and otherwise Bristol has continued to improve its infrastructure. Partly because of funding challenges and partly lack of ambition this is very piecemeal. Some good mainly segregated city centre routes are, however, steadily emerging.

<https://travelwest.info/projects/cycle-ambition-fund/bristol>

In 2016 Ferguson was defeated by a landslide by Labour's Marvin Rees. Historically Bristol has been a Labour City, so perhaps the 2012 result was the upset. In 2017 we got a new Metro Mayor, a Conservative, Tim Bowles. The West of England Combined Authority comprises the City of Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset. The majority of the population is urban; Bristol, Bath and their satellite towns, but the majority of the land is rural.

<https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/>

Bristol remains the Highway Authority, at least at present. Bowles, so far as we can see, is sitting on significant sums of his devolution money, including funds other Metro Mayors (notably Andy Burnham with the Transforming Cities Fund) are using to enable active travel. Bowles appears keen on road building.

Recently new cycling projects have been thin on the ground and the pipeline is limited. Rees reviewed 20mph limits, as he committed to do, but made no significant changes.

<https://www.bristol20mph.co.uk/>

In my view this was political games playing, a waste of resources, and sad that we, and others, had to fight a rearguard action.

## **Current Local Controversies**

### Metrobus

Is billed as a Mass Rapid Transit system but looks like a bus although part of its routes are segregated from general traffic and it has a measure of priority at junctions. It started in 2006 and came into service in 2018-19 with three routes, costing £240m. The project involved a new South Bristol Link road which has a bus lane but, as yet, pending further housing developments, no buses. And significant new road building in South Gloucestershire.

<https://metrobusbristol.co.uk/>

Its detractors say Metrobus is an expensive white elephant replacement of one bus service by another. Its supporters, often, it has to be said people with a vested interest, say it is "transformational". Assessing it rationally is very difficult, because it is new and there is a lack of information; notably as to comparable passenger numbers. It is evident Metrobus still gets caught in traffic.

In my view Metrobus improves certain public transport journeys, notably around Bristol's Northern fringe, and I'd like to see it succeed. It is, however, very expensive, as always with public transport I suspect it costs a lot to deliver each switch from car travel. If it is transformative it is only for a small number, both living and working on the routes. For £240million you could have truly transformed Bristol as an active travel city, with switches from cars costing far less. Some certainly consider it was a road building scheme under the guise of a bus scheme.

### Arena

Bristol is the UK's largest city without a large entertainment venue. Ferguson proposed building one on Arena island, central land near Temple Meads station. Rees has abandoned those plans. His intention is to build the Arena at the Brabazon hanger on an old airfield in South Gloucestershire, on the City's Northern Fringe, a car centric destination, which is being developed as housing. The Campaign and many others oppose those plans. In fairness to Rees funding played an important part in his decision and an Arena may or may not get built, regardless of location.

### Western Harbour

This is the name for the Cumberland Basin development in Hotwells. This brutalist 1960s road gyratory system is in need of repair or replacement. Earlier this year an informal consultation took place on the options. The intention is to build new housing, and it seems emphasis has been put on maximizing the number of units. It is also a key part of the city's, and national (A4), road network.

<https://bristol.citizenspace.com/growth-regeneration/western-harbour/>

Everything is at a very early stage but options include moving the dual carriageway further east into the city, possibly blighting residences and businesses or moving it further west possibly spoiling the Avon Gorge and the view of the Clifton Suspension Bridge. The Arup report released after pressure suggests active transport, despite nice words, was virtually forgotten.

### Metro

The current Mayor is interested in developing an underground railway for Bristol. A feasibility study is ongoing with 3 lines. In reality this will take decades (generations?) and billions (tens?). My view is a Metro would be brilliant but there is no evidence of the necessary demand; 50,000 or 60,000 people drive into Bristol on weekday mornings from every direction and distance whereas 30,000 an hour

travel on the Central line from more or less one direction. Earlier this year there were reports that the underground was being downgraded to a "fast" bus, mass rapid transit. Even if a Metro is feasible, very doubtful, it is a second half of the century scheme. It must not stand in the way of quicker, cheaper, effective measures.

### The Bristol Transport Strategy

<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/policies-plans-strategies/bristol-transport-strategy>

This document for transport up to 2036, was adopted after consultation earlier this year. It's got something for everyone but is disappointing on cycling. The number one ask in the consultation responses was "Cycling improvements", which was ignored by the Council on the grounds that the response came from the wealthier parts of the City! We did, after a struggle, get in the idea of segregating cycling provision which was not in the original draft. WECA has an equivalent Joint Transport Strategy which might have been written by a Seventies Highway Engineer, who had not heard of climate change. It contains a late twentieth century level of road building.

### Clean Air Zone

Bristol has non compliant air quality. The DfT wrote to the Mayor criticizing his plans for a CAZ. This month a new plan has emerged, which we are still digesting. It is significantly more ambitious and proposes banning diesel vehicles from a Central Zone and charging Commercial vehicles entering a larger zone.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-50292596>

Some suggest this is just politics; a ban will require legislation, the Government will refuse so the buck continues to be passed and nothing is done, certainly not until after next years Mayoral election.

## **Where we are now**

### Politics

Rees is up for election in May 2020. He is favourite. A majority of Bristol's Councillors are Labour, as are all 4 of the City's MPs. That said the Green, Sandy Hore Ruthven, thinks he's in with a chance (the Greens topped the European election). The Greens also hope to take Bristol West, arguably their best hope after Caroline Lucas' seat, in the General Election, despite a huge Labour majority, with the LibDems standing down. People sympathetic to the Campaign are part of Ruthven's team.

Sadly Rees does not appear well disposed to cyclists or cycling. This may be because Sustrans/the Campaign/the green lobby (vulnerable but very top down and not perhaps very effective) are associated with Ferguson (as is Ruthven). Rees may not be actively hostile to us but his interests are elsewhere (equality, social justice

– we've tried making the Social Justice case for active travel and some Labour Councillors have shown interest).

WECA and Bowles appear uninterested in active travel. Bowles emphasis is on rail and road. A charitable explanation is that he sees his role as connectivity into and out of WECA and between the local authorities rather than within them but even then cycle travel from suburban South Gloucestershire to Bristol could play a major role.

The problem is the lack of leadership and apparent unwillingness to be pro cycling results in piecemeal provision of very variable standard, often not continuous or coherent. The problem is perhaps political; does Marvin Rees think being anything other than pro car, Bristol has very high car dependency, is a vote loser? So it seems cycling must, if he is re elected, go under the radar. Obviously with another Mayor that could change.

### Campaigning

The Cycle Campaign has around 350 paying members, an income of over £3,000 a year and a bank balance of about £9,000. After a long period of steady slow decline in membership numbers, common we understand for organizations of our type, our numbers have risen from around 300 to 350 in the last 6 months, probably as a result of increased activity, which we need volunteers to build on.

We also have over 3,000 supporters, who subscribe to our Periodic Newsletter and 5,000 followers on twitter. We seem able to mobilise support at the Consultation stage. Councillors have referred to the "cycling lobby", sadly disparagingly. For a community group we don't do badly but there are bodies (business, university, NHS, First Bus, Airport, developers, investors etc etc) who have access and influence we can barely dream of.

Bristol is, in my view, fortunate in the calibre of its Officers, certainly at a junior level. The Campaign works well with them, they make time for us and take our suggestions seriously. Sometimes it is evident they would rather do what we want (eg bus gates and cycle infra on Gloucester Rd) but have to follow Council policy. Council liaison the Campaign does well. We are less good at engaging the public, mainly because of lack of active members and particularly effective active members, who want to do things rather than tell others how they should do things!

We are working well with Bristol Walking Alliance, Sustrans and Cycle Bath to promote Liveable Neighbourhoods, modelled on the Waltham Forest mini Holland. Bath's LibDem Council, part of WECA, are developing LN schemes, and have organized training with Brian Deegan. Sustrans are taking key Bristol Councillors to see the Waltham Forest mH and the former leader of that Borough, Clyde Loakes, is speaking in Bath in January.

Bristol has a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan in preparation. The Campaign have been involved in pre consultation discussions. It looks promising;

10 arterial routes, but it is simply a plan. There appears no appetite politically in Bristol for reallocation of road space, certainly not motor capacity reduction, even to the extremely modest extents achieved in London, in favour of cycling. The bus deal contemplates reallocation in favour of public transport, we shall work to extend that to active travel.

XR is strong in Bristol and around a thousand people attended a XR Critical Mass ride in the summer, which we helped promote, although taking a neutral stance on XR's other activities. The Council has declared a climate emergency and the Mayor talks a good game but, so far as we can see, has done very little, although that may change with the diesel ban. The Climate emergency argument for active travel is popular but has yet to produce action rather than words.

Ten years ago Bristol arguably led English cities in enabling cycling but that is sadly not the case at present. There is no doubt Cities with Cycling and Walking Commissioners have more ambitious plans and pipelines than we do. Leeds is, I think, the only city more populous than Bristol without a Commissioner

### Bus Deal

In so far as he is engaging with transport issues, other than his distant vision of a Metro, Rees is currently promoting his bus deal.

<https://news.bristol.gov.uk/news/better-bus-journeys-en-route-for-bristol-commuters>

In truth this is a non binding statement of intent, to my lawyer's eye effectively meaningless, that the Council will build bus lanes on main arterial routes and priority at junctions and the bus operators, principally First (but the Bristol business is up for sale), will run more buses. There is a real risk the Council, at considerable expenses, does its part first and then the operators, under no binding obligation, do not perform their part.

The operators will only increase services if it makes commercial sense and these measures alone will, in my view, make little difference. Where it will make a difference is if motor reduction measures are taken (workplace parking levy, filtered permeability streets, bus gates, removal of car parking etc). There is no evidence of political will for that at present.

Public Transport, which members of the Campaign are not experts in, is very challenging in Bristol and vastly more complicated than enabling cycling (build it and they will come). It would certainly need a different legal and regulatory regime (would a PTE or ITA give sufficient control?) which is partly a national issue. Building bus lanes without influence, preferably control, of the buses in them (the only current proposal) is very high risk and likely to be of very limited effect.

We will engage with sympathetic officers to try to influence the Bus Deal programme to include high quality, preferably segregated cycle routes. This will be

challenging as space is limited on most Bristol arterial roads. Recently, however, a consultation on bus lanes on the, admittedly relatively wide, A4018, which was very unpopular with locals, has resulted in a reasonably good design for a segregated cycle route on a main road into Bristol from the M5. It would be brilliant if the Bus Deal could be transformed into a corridor based reallocation of roadspace to sustainable travel.

### Current Transport Situation

Bristol "punches above its weight" in terms of congestion and motor traffic delay. It has relatively low bus use, high walking levels and fairly high cycling. It has a very active, vibrant cycling community, which is however disjointed and disorganized. 'A' Road traffic speeds in peak hours are under 9mph, buses 6mph, both below cycling speeds. We visited the Traffic Management Centre. It is plainly run to crises manage the avoidance of gridlock and to keep bus routes open, particularly if there are incidents, it seems rat running is accepted as relief on a system at or close to breaking point. To me, taking an overview, it looks like planning for failure but as little as possible, at present.

Sustrans' Bike Life report contains lots of facts and figures on cycling here;

<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/2954/bike-life-bristol-2017.pdf>

The figure of 75 miles of physically separated cycle routes puzzled most Bristol cyclists, who counted 5 or 6, but it may be so widely, almost meaninglessly, defined. Personally I think it's misleading; cycling in Bristol is not very different from elsewhere; although it isn't as challenging as London as competition for road space is less brutal and frightening. Eventually to make almost any journey, however, you have to battle with hostile motors, junctions and road layouts. As we know most people won't cycle in these conditions.

More helpfully the Report is very good on the benefits of cycling to people and the City. It also found 77% support for protected cycle lanes even when that means less room for other traffic, which considering most people do not cycle is very positive and surprised me.

Compared to most English cities we have a lot of so called cycling infrastructure but it is no coincidence the twitter handle @shitfrastructure is a Bristolian as most is of poor quality. To summarise Bristol's cycling infrastructure.

- More "cycling infrastructure" than most English cities.
- Lots of legal cycling pavements; ie shared use with 90 degree turns, conflict with pedestrians, slow, inconvenient, hard to use
- Many barriers, all must dismount or scoot and not accessible to non standard bikes
- The Railpath – the jewel in the crown but all shared use and over capacity at the Bristol end at peak hours – Sustrans are consulting on improvements but transport cycling can not be mentioned.

- Some cycle tracks of good quality but often where they could be fitted in, not joined up, not where you want to go, not easy to access
- Reasonable amount of filtered permeability but scope to improve
- Emerging network of mostly segregated city centre routes
- Many beg button crossings shared with pedestrians
- Cycling treated alongside walkers, not vehicles, and as lowest priority
- Some good backroads routes (effective quietways) but usually only for those in the know and often with short challenging sections.
- So far as I can see many, possibly most, cyclists in Bristol ignore much, but certainly not all, of the infrastructure because it is inconvenient, slow and difficult to use.

### Current Campaigning

The Campaign has two groups of active members; General and Space4Cycling, which meet monthly, currently on the last Tuesday and the second Thursday of each month respectively. Anyone is welcome to attend. Additionally our Road Justice group has ad hoc meetings and we have numerous ad hoc meetings for other purposes.

Space4Cycling focuses on transport, particularly cycling infrastructure, liaison with Council Officers, WECA, Consultations and stakeholder engagements. It's chaired by Richard Williams and he, in conjunction with others, does an excellent job of engaging with the Council and almost all relevant Consultations.

Road Justice, chaired by Rob Harding, tries to influence the Police on law enforcement and road incident issues. More recently we've had a number of active members focusing on Events and Communications, including preparing a membership recruitment strategy which we hope they will implement in the coming months.

We certainly need more active members, including those with skills in, or interested in;

- IT and/or web skills
- Public engagement, organizing and representing the Campaign at events
- Communication
- Political campaigning for pro cycling policies
- Cycling Infrastructure and joining and being active in the Space4Cycling group
- Ride leading and organizing

Our existing members will endeavor to support you so please get involved.

Nick Davies, Chair