

Sustainable Transport & Active Travel Summit- Transcript from Local Progress on cycling and walking

November 17, 2023

With Gem Aellah, Bespoke and Roddy Crockett, Sustrans

Jim Murray: We will sign you off now, and we're gonna go on to the local progress on cycling and walking.

And we have Gem Aellah

And it's just you on your own, is it?

And you're from Bespoke?

Gem Aellah:

Hi everybody, my name's Gem Aellah and I'm the chair of Eastbourne Safer Cycling group Bespoke and we've actually got loads of Bepokes here today so you can if you want to talk to them later.

You'd be very welcome to.

So Roddy after me is going to be talking about cycling provision on a national level. And what I wanted to do was give you a little bit of insight into what it's like to cycle on a day to day, every day basis in Eastbourne on a very local kind of more personal perspective here.

So I don't have a car.

I have two children and I work full time and I also have a visual impairment.

That means that I'm unable to drive, but very safe to cycle just in case anyone worried about that.

And this means that I use my bicycle to take my kids to school, to go shopping, to take them to do all the different activities that they do, they need to do around town, and I have to say, in contrast to what Emily's been talking about doing this in Eastbourne is hot renderings, depressing.

Depressing, and which is part of the reason that I joined our local cycle group when I first started to do this because I wasn't expecting it to be so die.

And as you can see, this is my bike up here where I can carry two kids on the back of my bike and when I first got this bike I wanted to carry the two children because they were too small to cycle and now I find myself in a position of having to carry a 10 year old because it's unsafe to cycle the roots idea, especially at Victoria Dr.

If anyone lives around there, you'll know that you just can't let a child cycle up there, despite him having done every stage of our very friendly and helpful Bikeability group.

Umm.

So this in these are the two things I really wanted to talk to you about.

And the first is the school run, and if anyone's interested in thinking about this a bit more than they're welcome to join me in the workshop afterwards.

So Eastbourne compared to some other towns around here, has a lot of infant and genius schools.

And that means that parents find themselves in a position of often having to take two primary school children to different schools twice a day, which is what I have to do.

And this is a journey that if I was to walk it from the centre of town where I live to Old Town where my children go to school, would take me an hour to the first school, 15 minutes back to the second, and then 45 to get home again.

And doing that twice a day, you can imagine it's really impractical doing that by bus is also not very feasible, given that the buses don't go to the schools and regularly.

So I cycle it and I am one of the very few parents in Eastbourne that continue to cycle with their kids to school, to the point that we organized for world Car Free Day a couple of years ago.

We organized a school bus as a solution, so asking parents and their kids to gather together so that we could take the road to do the school run.

We got about four children who were all marshalled by our bike group and it was, quite frankly, a really terrifying experience.

And there are several reasons for this.

The first is that the infrastructure of Eastbourne is just miles behind other towns and that's something that people probably are aware about if they've been following our campaigns on my route to these the way I am taking my children, there are five schools and there are no cycle paths in this entire week.

That's protective cycle routes, and that's also any markings on the road.

There's also no 20 mile an hour limits, so it's really unsafe and there are an awful lot of very, very stressed, sometimes aggressive parents rushing to make all these different school runs in this environment.

So it can be really difficult simply because the provision isn't there and just something as simple as well, like I know it's not simple, but something has obvious as

installing a 20 mile an hour limit around the school zones during school run time would make a significant difference.

The other thing is that as a town I would safely say that the attitude of our particular population is still very much pro car and you can see that when you look at some of the aggression that we receive as a group now, like I'm biased because I'm the chair of our cycle group.

But we're pretty mild mannered, pleasant people and we try and engage with residents and with our County Council politely and courteously.

And it I have lost count of the number of times I've been sworn out with kids on the back of my bike just for going a little bit slower than traffic taking up a little bit of the road, meeting somebody a little bit late for school and it's really depressing the first time you hear your kids tell people where they learn certain swear words and it's all my bike.

I'm I find it very distressing to feel like people are actively out to kill me, but that's honestly how I feel in Eastbourne and that kind of aggression is something that we don't get in other towns.

I think cycling around, for example in Lewis or Brighton, which technically is a lot bigger and OK and these things.

Yeah.

So I think there's quite a lot to be done to change the attitude towards cycling in this town to make it a bit more pleasant and friendly in order to kind of push some of the initiatives that we need to and the other thing that makes it really difficult is that we have a somewhat antagonistic relationship.

I feel with our County Council currently, say the Borough Council, because you're not really responsible for cycling.

I'm but we find ourselves time and time again having to object to plans and proposals rather than collaborate in a productive way to them.

So for example, one of our most successful things that we've done is having to mobilize a large group of people to object to a traffic restriction or objection order that would have prevented cycling through the town centre and we don't want to be in that position where we're kind of having to be defensive would rather be collaborative and work together to try and change the narrative of this town because we all have to be realistic about this.

This isn't just about climate change.

It's also about the fact that in five or ten years, things are going to shift.

We can't continue in this way in terms of number of cars at all.

OK, one minute.

And the other thing I just wanted to say, well, I have a a room is about the C front and there's a common misconception in in Eastbourne that what cyclists would like to do is to cycle and receive front for aesthetic purposes to go and see the sea.

And that's really not the case.

The seafront is a major throughway.

If you for example let me live in town and you want to take your children to our swimming pool, the only route to do that at the moment is the national cycle route, which goes back down to seaside which if anyone has driven or walking walk down there, you will know that's not a very safe place to cycle down.

We can't cycle down the sea front Rd because it's a very dangerous Rd, so he's like on the front.

If you would like to you after this you can go outside to our stand and have a look at Roberts map and he's drawn a map of the coastline of all the towns around the coast which allow cycling on their sea front and essentially Eastbourne is the only one that doesn't.

And that is an ongoing battle that doesn't need to be this complicated.

It's like finally.

OK.

The final thing I wanted to say is in recent years, because we have experienced how difficult it is to try and change the infrastructure in this town and how intransigent it has been to work with our Council, I would say County Council, we have organised critical mass, which is an international movement.

We do it twice a year and we invite all the children that we know, all the families that we know, any kind of cyclist to come and join us, to cycle on the road to experience what it could be like to cycle in a joyful group.

Now we do this by marshalling it really carefully and we report our routes to the police and doing this has been incredibly uplifting and a counterbalance to some of this negativity that we have around cycling.

And I just wanted to show you these pictures because it's been quite moving, seeing what children feel like when they can experience slowing down a bit, cycling through the town and really feel that they're part of this lovely movement which is much more about celebrating the joy of active trouble travel, then focusing on the negative aspects.

And if anyone wants to join us, the next one of these is in me.

Thank you.

Jim Murray: Thank you.

Now we have Roddy Crockett from Sustrans, who's talking about national cycle routes.

Roddy Crockett: Hello.

Thank you.

Jim Murray: 7 minutes.

Roddy Crockett: OK.

Thank you, Jim.

That was that was really inspiring.

I just think we need to spread the stories that people have of everyday journeys and some of the difficulties that we all experience and make our politicians hear those stories.

This morning we've seen so much of the data behind it and the reasoning, and I think most people in this room agree with the data that something needs to be done is the speed at which we're moving, which is so frustrating to see if I can get this working, I'm gonna start with a the story as well.

So I'm not quite sure how to use this.

I turned it off.

Well, well, let's hopefully sorting yourself out.

I'll start the story as well.

This story is from 1941, when my dad was born in Eastbourne and on that day it was snowing and there was no way to for the phone or to get any support.

So my great aunt got on a bike through the snow and went and got some some help.

And then the baby was born.

Then Doctor came just after that but.

Thank you and welcome on the path.

But I'm just going to talk about my dad's experience because I I asked him about what it was like in the 1950s.

My grandparents never owned a car.

They had travelling equipment which were sensible shoes and umbrella newspaper for the journey.

Wide brimmed hat, and that was it.

Maybe a bus ticket too, but if they had to get somewhere in Eastbourne, it might be 45 minutes.

It might be an hour, but they didn't have any other way to get around.

So I asked my dad, you know, what was it like?

And he said the bus frequency was normally around 15 minutes.

Some routes were even more frequent.

Most of the buses were double deckers at the time and they were trams and they were staffed by two persons.

Very few people in Eastbourne owned cars and most people walk to destinations of less than a mile and some would cycle and many side roads were generally taken over by children as unofficial play area announcer, town town, out of town.

Retail parks are unknown, so it almost feels like if we want to move forward, we need to go back to the future.

Is there any signs or?

You know how we talked with the slide?

OK.

Right.

Well, it's gonna talk about South Strand.

Sustrans has two main priorities.

One is past for everyone, which is the National Cycle Network and the other one is livable cities and towns.

So the national Cycle network is sorry this, sorry.

Last year there was 400 walking trips and 400 cycling trips.

Men, women generally used to psych national Cycle network, which is unusual because most walking is more, more women walk than men.

So there's something about access to the National cycle network by women going on there.

We had last year we had still not working a bit tricky, OK.

The national networks passes within one mile of around half of the UK population and it carried last year 764 million trips is made up of 12,000 miles of signed routes and it's used by walkers, people cycling as well as joggers.

Wheelchair users and horse riders.

It contributes £2 billion a year to local businesses and 2 billion boost to the economy each year from reduced congestion, improve and the environment.

Still got nothing.

OK, well, I was going to show you a map of the National Cycle network and how it connects to Eastbourne here and I was going to point out some of the things that we've been working on, but we have an aim for the national cycle network and that is by 2040, there will be no on road miles on the national cycle network in 2017, a third was traffic free and 2/3 were on road.

And it's just simply not good enough.

And we remove 3700 miles in 2019 to make A to make it smaller but safer, but still 33% of the national sales cycle network is still rated very.

Thank you.

Brilliant.

That's the one, yes.

And what we're trying to do by 2040 is to have about around 1/3 of it to be quite way miles.

Now this relates to the 20 mile now neighbourhood of speech that we had earlier, because quite way miles fit with local transport.

Note 120.

So by quiet ways we mean reduce speeds, routes which are accessible for people walking, cycling, horse riding, Wheeling and so by reducing speed on the roads that make more sense to do that the residential routes, roads, the sea roads, then that means that they can be opened up for more people to travel actively along them.

And then we want none of it to be on road that shared with traffic shared with traffic, which isn't a quiet way treatment.

We're waiting for the guidance to come out from London, from central government on the quiet way now that should have come out already, but it hasn't hasn't come.

There's also guidance coming out on rural routes as well and that hasn't that, that's still due to come as well.

OK.

And that's just next slide.

This is this is our network plan.

This is how we do planning.

We look at routes and then we look at sections and what needs to be done.

I'm just gonna quickly go through some of the things that we've been working on now are working on.

So egrets way Lewes to Eastbourne, we're slowly completing sections working with

the South Downs National Park Authority pitting Hoe is being worked on at the moment.

Camber to rye.

We had a few 100,000 to resurface that we're working on that and also on the way to Kent as well.

Hopefully next year, we're liaising with the Environment Agency on flood defence work.

There's quite a lot of that going on at the moment.

We're looking at 7:02, and we also did this on the egrets way.

Our volunteers helped to keep some of the routes free of vegetation and remove Dave Reed due to storms, and we're also looking at signage and wayfinding, which is a problem for a lot of the sections along the National Cycle network.

We're also looking at rerouting the NCCN along the A 27 section in time for the Paris Olympics because there's going to be a focus on the avenue there between London and Paris because soon neck and Macron agreed to promote that.

We've also been removing 29 barriers from the Cuckoo Trail, along with some resurfacing, and we would love to extend the NCN and improve the NCN into Eastbourne.

We've also got an officer working in the havens and sometimes in Eastbourne, working with refugees.

We've just been awarded some money for inclusive active travel, focusing on New Haven and we're continuing to run our deaf responded air quality work in schools.

We'd like to do more on working on healthy places and with spatial planning.

We're currently working in every county in the southeast of England apart from Medway and just my the last.

I wish I just leave you with is our local priorities.

The 2040 targets the for everyone, which means looking at the demographics and which people have less access and find it less easier to use than national cycle network.

We're developing the network, we're improving it and we're also working through all those acronyms.

A lot of my work is with acronyms, but they're all important and often they are obscured by what they are.

You know, like transport for the Southeast and the regional attitude, travel strategy and action plan, which I'm on the steering group with and spatial planning.

If we can have a higher standard of gold standard for how we want to create the future, maybe we can retrofit and see how we can improve what we've already got. I think I'll.

I'm sorry, I feel a bit of a fraud coming up here because I was supposed to be talking about local progress on cycling and walking, and I said to the organisers, do I have to?

Because I just don't feel that we've really made enough progress, especially want to think back to what it was like in my father's time in the 1950s.

So that's why I spoken a little bit more widely than just Eastbourne.

Thank you.

Thank you.

So we've certainly got the appetite for more cycling in the town.

We just need to some more active, proactive, proactive work towards getting it.

So we're gonna move it to our breakout sessions now.