

Bexhill Wheelers & Classic Cycle Group
Response to ESCC - LTP3 – December 2010
www.bexhillwheelers.org.uk

Bexhill Wheelers and Classic Cycle Group are predominately a social cycle group interested in promoting safe and responsible cycling in Bexhill. We have an interest in seeing that the balance of investment in transport infrastructure changes from road to more sustainable forms. That is Walking, Cycling and in Public Transport. However that does not mean that we want a second rate road network which we have at present in East Sussex. This has primarily been caused through a sustained lack of funding as it is seen as an easy hit. Please find below my personal response to the LTP3 which combines most of the views of our local cycle group.

The comments, observations and suggestions below are broadly in line with the in depth reply from Eastbourne Bespoke cycle group and also our members. Although individuals in both groups may disagree with some of the comments there is a consensus as to the general theme of improvements to our transport network.

I would also recommend the reading and incorporation into the LTP3 of the excellent “Making a Cycling Town” a Department of Transport publication. This is a compilation of practitioner’s experiences from the Cycling Demonstration Towns programme of Cycling England. Within the document it shows what works, why and how to make it happen. Also the book “Two Billion Cars: Driving towards Sustainability by Daniel Sperling and Deborah Gordon which gives an illustration of where the future may go.

It would be a fool who disagreed with the visions and objectives of the LTP3 all are worthy aspirations. The Plan identifies most of the Transport challenges together with how it affects individuals and the plan has to be welcomed. Most of it states the blindingly obvious and mixes it with common sense. What i would like to lay out here are practical proposals as to how we can achieve the plan and highlight points which i think may not have been given full consideration.

It is good to see in National Goals that the new Coalition Government has indicated that the economy and climate change are the highest priorities, though due regard also needs to be paid to the other three goals.

All the contents of LTP3 are extensions of LTP1 and 2 with more detail. For example in LTP2 it states “promote and improve facilities for walking, cycling and public transport, so these modes are safe and attractive options” also “ continue to improve the environment for cyclists” We feel more could and should have been done for walkers and cyclists after these were produced. Is this just another plan without any hope of it becoming a reality?

In Bexhill specifically we feel little has been done to fulfil LTP2s aims so we are concerned that although LTP3 talks a good talk there needs to be clear directions as to how the aspirations can become reality. The recent Bexhill High School with shared space in Turkey Road and Gunters Lane together with Canada Way cycle path and the Connect 2 Bexhill-St. Leonards coastal route are fantastic news and examples of what can be achieved. We don’t accept that we are being impatient or unreasonable to expect more as there have been some huge sums spent in Bexhill without any cycle provision.

The Eastbourne Bespoke's response is both detailed and reflects by and large the same views as our group, with the following exceptions:-

- 1) **Parking** – Just because a town enforces parking restrictions and has a clear policy which involves pay for parking it does not necessarily follow that it reduces business in towns. On the contrary it can and often does increase business. High spenders would prefer to go to a town where they know they can park and pay for the privilege. Both Hastings and Tunbridge Wells locally are shopping centres where the pay for parking is often full.

- 2) **Trains and Cycle provision** - The rail networks must work efficiently, they have logistic problems in adding more carriages and passengers must come before cycles. They welcome folding bikes and as such they can be taken on any train free of charge. A reasonable compromise until we update our Victorian rail networks.

- 3) **Bexhill – Hastings Link Road**, Glyne Gap roundabout on A259 has one of the highest polluting areas in East Sussex. This is down to congestion at peak times. The construction of the Link Road would help to reduce this. The Link Road is vital to the growth and prosperity of East Sussex also the only way to open up new land for housing. Creating more housing within towns without restricting vehicle access is not sustainable. Demolishing a large house and creating more properties, mainly flats, increases the number of vehicles competing for the same space in towns is not a sustainable option.

The Link road needs to be built if the target of 5600 extra homes is to be achieved. The Link Road design has a Greenway alongside which would encourage sustainable forms of travel. The homes and businesses also created will increase traffic but not necessarily carbon emissions if it reduces congestion on other routes and alternative eco friendly vehicles are used.

The following comments are in addition to that of Eastbourne Bespoke:

Safety _ This month and year is the start of “Decade of Road Safety” where a United Nations Programme can reduce up to 5 million lives. Most of the deaths in East Sussex are caused by bad driving or road design. In the section regarding road safety there is no specific mention that ESCC has no motorways although i realise that it would fall under the Highways Agency it is still significant as a greater proportion of accidents occur on rural roads than motorways. Given that according to DTI statistics there has been a 56% reduction in car occupant deaths over the last 20years and the total road deaths has only marginally come down what specific plans are there to implement an education programme in how to drive on rural roads. Most fatalities occur on rural roads, DFT statistics Nov 2010, also speed is responsible for between only 8-14% of accidents, meaning that the balance is for other reasons. From that it is not unreasonable to assume that we have a specific driver problem in East Sussex that needs addressing. Having said that it would appear that per thousand ESCC has a lower accident rate than both Kent and Surrey.

There is little in your Plan regarding the important part that Driver Education and Encouragement of good practice can play. Where necessary correct and proper enforcement of the Road Traffic acts and the Highway Code need to be carried out in a last resort.

The total of KSI figures show that UK has improved in some areas and not others. For example the number of total KSI's in England for motorised vehicles has reduced from 18332 in 2007 to 15453 in 2009, the number of KSI's on pedal cycles has increased from 2335 to 2470 in the same period, source DTI, <http://reports.roadcasualtiesonline.org.uk/Reports/DisplayReport/310> .

Given that the Institute of Advanced Motorists IAM report *Deaths and Injuries on Britain's roads* estimates that each death costs 1.79 million every KSI that fact alone should prove the need to invest more in safer off road shared use for walkers and cyclists as well as investment in public transport. Another fact that should be included or at least recognised is that between 2004 and 2009 in England total KSI's for motor vehicles reduced by 26%, for pedestrians by 19% however for cyclists there was an **INCREASE** of 17%. Again this fact should reflect in the investment made into traffic free infrastructure. The major reason for the reduction in motor safety is only partly due to better roads a major factor is vehicle safety.

The increase use of MPV / SUV's especially when transporting children on the school run results in congestion at these peak times and is something that needs to be addressed. These and most modern vehicles are much larger than earlier models resulting as can be seen from the statistics that it is the cyclist that suffers. The above should be considered in your plan and solutions developed to make cycling as relatively safe as vehicle use currently is.

If Bexhill is anything to go by driving standards are not improving, if fact they are probably getting worse, this could be due to people driving longer. I overheard a conversation last week in the doctors waiting room, "Do you realise" said one "my arm is so weak i can hardly hold this coffee cup" "yes i know" said the other "My cataracts are so bad i can hardly see to pour the coffee" " i can't turn my head" said the third "because of my arthritis in my neck" "my blood pressure pills make me dizzy" commented the fourth, adding "i guess that's the price we pay for getting old" "Well it's not all bad" piped the first "We should be thankful that we can still drive". Although comical in itself it addresses a very serious issue that the plan does not cover. With an ageing population, I've got to work for an extra 6 years as my wife's pension will start 6 years later than planned 10 years ago and the charts show we will all live longer. However will we all be fit enough to drive motor vehicles ?? The rise of motobility scooters will i think continue as we all live longer but not necessarily with complete mobility. More provision should be made to consider these new modes of transport.

Parking and Road craft - In Bexhill we do not have a traffic warden and the parking of vehicles is a free for all. Every day you see vehicles: double parking, parking against the flow of traffic sometimes with their headlights on, parking on double yellow lines, zebra crossing chevrons, parking on bends, over dropped kerbs, near junctions, parking in loading or disabled bays. On main roads the use of driving and fog lights as well as headlights is on the increase all of which makes more dangerous for all user groups. Some of the above have undoubtedly been the cause of accidents which could have been avoided if good road craft were used. The correct infrastructure and consideration at planning stage could channel vehicles so it is not necessary for any of the above bad and dangerous practices. For example how many times have you seen someone park their vehicle outside a take away dangerously or causing an obstruction. There are many examples of take aways in Bexhill directly outside a Zebra Crossing. This should not be allowed to happen. Planners see it as a police duty to enforce the traffic laws and dissolve themselves of the resulting chaos. How are ESCC going to see that good road craft and the Highway code are followed ??

From a personal point i would like to see the roll out of civil parking enforcement to cover Bexhill. This would not prove popular, however this is probably the only way to achieve many of the aims of LTP3. Also ESCC is to be congratulated on the Pay to Park scheme for its own staff that is a standard by which others should follow.

Use what we have - At these times where the talk is on austerity and budget cuts there has never been more reason to make better use of existing infrastructure. There are many footways that are used by cyclists at present which with little or no money could be opened up and encouragement given to their use. This would help achieve the aims of LTP3 quite easily and frankly this should have been done many years ago again refer to LTP2 and LTP1. In fact some of the ESCC own plans show a footpath as shared use but have a “No Cycling” sign.

Leisure – Old and Young In Bexhill specifically we have one of the highest concentration of elderly in Europe. East Sussex has an elderly bias, with nearly 12% of the population aged 75+ compared to around 8% regionally and nationally. East Sussex still ranks highest of all 35 counties in England for the percentage aged 85+ and aged 90+.

Most if not all have achieved their primary social needs, ie food, clothing and shelter, catered for. Many go out for social reasons, just to get out and enjoy travel for their own wellbeing. We have already a very good bus service in the TN40 post code area and a well designed drop area in Town. The challenge is to make more aware of it and to use it. The only way as i can see it is to price vehicles off the road either by pay for parking or congestion charging. As we are a rural County distances between conurbations is large compared with cities. If a young person wants to visit Eastbourne and stay out late, after midnight, the public transport network effectively closes down. A subsidised service similar to that given to buses might have to be considered as a last resort.

Environment - Alternative fuel sources The LTP3 talks about climate change and reduce carbon output. However does not seem to look beyond 2026. In 1999 Rother said they would work together to achieve a network of cycle routes in Bexhill. The routes exist only on paper 12years on and nothing looks likely in the next 5 years although we remain as ever hopeful. If you plan only 2026 by that time technology and events would have overtaken you. You can't predict the future but you can plan for it. The only way forward is to accept and encourage that in Towns a sustainable traffic model is required, housing areas, schools, shops and hospitals a reduced speed shared space environment and between all roads that enable fast connectivity. Vehicles will be different in 20 years time, more fuel efficient, hybrid, electric and maybe hydrogen fuel cell this will mean an infrastructure to cope with this growing trend. Bio fuel is another alternative is it not possible for ESCC to establish schemes that encourage their development and use. It could be a good investment with our money.

Economy - One reason transport is so important is that we have to travel more for a task that used to be carried out locally in the past. Bexhill Hospital has no minor injuries unit so we have to travel to Conquest in Hastings along a congested road. The similar applies to maternity units that close & centralisation of Cancer facilities in Maidstone. The NHS is fantastic but requires us to travel for appointments. Decisions require an overall view of their consequences which is sadly sometimes lacking. Lack of local work opportunities means getting up around 4am for a 9-5 job in London then arriving home around 8pm. I know a few who do this, needs must and they do. So please try to work with the NHS to see if similar services can be opened up where people live and try to only employ local workers. Many a time you see someone carrying out a task and they have travelled miles when there could easily have been someone locally quite capable.

Planning – The plan says you will “influence the way in which partners design and deliver their services so they are provided where people can access them sustainably, and minimise the need for the County Council or partners to provide specific transport interventions” With the Next Wave project specifically in Bexhill where there was an ideal opportunity to deliver a safe off road greenway along the promenade as part of the NCN2. Your partners feel that Transport is your responsibility and as such should provide funding to support safe routes. This is a clear case where for the last 100 years all the talk has produced nothing so far on the ground. With change of attitudes towards sustainable transport and the fact that the shift from vehicle use to alternatives has started it is ESCC’s duty to fulfil the aims of LTP.

Road Maintenance – 2010 has been a great year for seeing the temperature drop below freezing. Any school experiment will show that water expands when it turns to ice. Our roads are designed to be a sealed surface with sufficient depth to take the traffic expected. The construction usually takes place with good supervision and handed over with the desired structure. So what goes wrong? Services: Gas, Water, Electricity, Storm / Sewage Water, Cable and Telephony all need additions, alterations and maintenance. The co-ordination of District, Parish, Borough, Town, County Councils as well as Highways Agency together with the above services requires a level of competence that can try anyone’s patience. However this is inevitably where most of the problems exist. Currently, in your past and in your future plan there is not sufficient emphasis placed on this important subject. What happens is a very good road is excavated, backfilled too hastily with incorrect material and inadequate compaction then finished with too thin a top coat. The inevitable result is after traffic runs over the repair it heaves and a hole occurs which fills up with water turning to ice in winter. This cycle continues until an adequate repair is carried out, it is a time consuming and wasteful exercise which should be easy to stop. Although ESCC is not directly to blame it is responsible and currently costs us ratepayers a great deal of money which should be passed on to the Utility companies not ESCC ratepayers.

The other cause of wear and tear of the road surface is the gutter being eroded by organic growth. Every road should have a strong weed killer used before any top coat is laid and regularly treated so weeds cannot destroy a surface. The same applies to the footways.

School Travel Plans – It is easy to write a plan, however achieving it is the challenge. The STP’s are a great idea however it seems that each school has followed the government template and substituted their own details. That is similar to the LTP’S. The problem lies in how to make that plan achievable. For example the government target was for a 5% increase in pupils cycling, the schools and ESCC have done very good work in providing extra covered cycle racks and training. It is outside that needs the focus. There needs to be schemes to move children in a safe way from where they live to where they learn by footways being opened up for safe shared use. This is achievable at a very low cost and will help with your LTP3’s goals.

Cycle Paths – We welcome specifically the comment “There is also an opportunity to promote the National Cycle Network (NCN) along the coast and also north-south via the proposed Avenue Verte, a cycle route from London to Paris. This would increase the opportunities for ‘cycle tourism’ and as a sustainable option for utility cycling for residents between local communities.”

This is exactly what we have been saying for over 15 years and Bexhill is a missing link in the network. Please work together with Rother for a safe route along the seafront, ie the Promenade, to encourage new user groups who currently use motorised transport. Pedestrian priority should be maintained and a speed limit with a code of good practice for cyclists. This works not just in other countries but also in other towns in UK and Sussex.

Point 5.52 “In Bexhill, a similar route network has been identified radiating northwards to the key residential and employment areas from the NCN Route 2 along the seafront. The key priority is to ensure a consistent and safe approach is taken to the cycle route along the seafront. The delivery of these cycle networks will be dependent on the availability of funding and will be developed and delivered by external funding using development contributions secured in both towns.” Is most welcome, the only way we see to have a safe route is for it to be traffic free, which means using the Promenade which is predominately 16 m wide and could easily accommodate this at little or no cost. The key aims of the LTP could be achieved by developing this and funds should be relocated for this. Once a piece of infrastructure is built it becomes a long term usable ESCC asset with in this case minimal maintenance which can be carried out by volunteer schemes like Sustrans Ranger programme.

Avenue Verte – London to Paris and back. Wonderful; travel used to be for pleasure as well as necessity. Now that is brought back to life with this scheme http://www.francobritishcycleplan.org/intro_en.html the Franco-British Cycle Plan with European Union Funding, is this not an opportunity to complete the missing link of Bexhill and create a safe traffic free section, please!

Encouraging Cycling – 5.106 the ESCC Cycling Strategy seems to support existing cyclists, however is it not equally or even more important to encourage new user groups, young, old or groups who are no longer able to drive through eg: loss driving licence because of health issues. To do this safe traffic free routes need to be implemented, which is very low cost compared to alternatives. 5.109 very true many travel the same route by the same method and education to the alternatives is required to habit change. Bexhill has no manned TIC which could inform and encourage alternatives to cars.

Cycle Parking – Again much is to be encouraged in the LTP3 and the initiative on extra covered CCTV monitored cycle racks at every station has proved a great success. Cllr. Mathew Lock has observed as soon as they are erected they are full. So please could this excellent example continue to be extended to encourage increase usage at not just railway stations but also other destinations. Again specific cycle routes in and around stations would reduce vehicle traffic.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan – If ever there is an opportunity missed this is it. Numerous Rights of Way have a “No Cycling” sign on them which could easily be removed and replaced with a sign “Cyclists Slow – Give Way to Pedestrians” This attitude would encourage good responsible use of infrastructure and reduce vehicle traffic in time. In many instances Rights of Way are adjacent to railway lines and plant growth extends into the path making it dangerous for all users but especially children in push chairs. Could the county do more to make those responsible for overhanging foliage to clear before accidents happen ?

Intelligent Transport Systems – Traffic signals have a “revert to all red” at night which seems a little silly. Should not main roads be kept on green so as to allow vehicles the unnecessary stopping and starting which besides being frustrating uses more fuel? Also can't believe that the roll out of “Real Time Information” should be considered this technology is available and should be installed to encourage more to use public transport.

WOW what a process having read the three options and the Strategy – Plan – Assessment – Appraisal – Report – Consultation - Etc. I'm very pleased to see that option 3, Sustainable Growth, was the preferred option. This is what we have been waiting for and will be the only way forward in 21st century.

List of National Indicators – whilst it is important to have in the list the KSI's for road crashes and children these are on the decline, however KSI's for cyclists is on the increase. Hence this would indicate that not enough is being done for cyclists oppose other groups. That National Indicator should have been highlighted.

Thank you for the opportunity to have our say and wish you all the success in implementing this plan as it has many good aspirations.

Yours Sincerely

Ian Hollidge