

Bristol Fawcett Consultation Response to Bristol Cycling Strategy, Bristol City Council, 28th July 2014

Bristol Fawcett is broadly supportive of the aims of the Cycling Strategy but would like to submit additional comments as below. These are in relation to how the cycling strategy:

- a) Addresses the needs of Bristol women and girls
- b) Contributes positively to achieving gender equality between women and men in the city

Bristol Fawcett requests response to two things regarding the strategy and the consultation:

- The consultation period of 5 weeks is too short and we understand contravenes the Council's policy on consultation. While we appreciate that some efforts are being made to get out and speak to community groups (both cycling and non-cycling) this is not only a failure to follow consultation policy but also a missed opportunity to engage the residents of Bristol in an important debate about the importance of cycling.
- No Equalities Impact Assessment has been published with the strategy, which we equally understand to be a requirement of all Council strategy, to fulfil obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The EqIA was requested from the Council (w/k beg 14th July) but no response has been received.

Women and Women Cyclists

Fawcett acknowledges that not all women's/ girls' life experiences and needs are the same and that for many women their experiences are also shaped by their identification with other equalities groups, e.g. being a disabled woman or belonging to a BME community. However, there are some experiences and characteristics of women and cycling, and the additional obstacles that may prevent or restrict participation, that are shared.

In the absence of an EqIA or more detailed analysis of the data regarding cycling available within the strategy it is not possible for us to comment on how well the Strategy and the actions that arise have been based on an understanding of women and cycling. We are not going to reproduce the information here but suggest that if not already part of the analysis the Council needs to look to the work of Dr Rachel Aldred (University of Westminster), latest census data and the work of the *Women and Cycling in the City* event held as part of Bristol Cycle Festival, which provides a view on the main obstacles to women's cycling participation.

Summary Response

In summary we would note that the following must be taken into account in the revision of the strategy in order to meet the needs of women and girls, and the requirements of the Equality Act:

1. Women's levels of cycling both to commute and for leisure are lower.

Not only are current levels lower but as Dr Aldred's research demonstrates there can be no assumption that a general increase in cycling rates will increase women's cycling rate, it has

been seen to decrease in areas where cycling rates have been seen to increase successfully overall. This makes a clear argument for specific targeting of initiatives to support girls and women to cycle. The benefits that cycling can bring to women's lives – financial, social, independence, health – are potentially of greater impact so Bristol needs to focus clearly on this.

It is disappointing that currently the Strategy does not identify how initiatives to target 'encouragement' will be prioritised; women and girls must be high on this priority list, in order to address the difference in current cycling levels and risk of a widening gap.

2. Women remain the primary carers in Bristol for children, older people and/or others in their families with additional needs.

They are therefore more likely to be undertaking escort journeys, journeys with multiple stopping points and journeys that are local to their communities. These could be termed 'utility journeys', i.e. they are other than commuting or leisure. Cycling infrastructure, facilities and training/ support to encourage cycling etc. needs to account for this.

Currently, there is a lack of data regarding these 'utility' journeys; they are not included in commuter journeys and are difficult to distinguish from leisure journeys in the Active People survey. The Cycling Strategy should be identifying how Bristol will be looking to collect data on these journeys in order to evidence the reality of cycling participation in the city.

It is important that investment in cycling infrastructure is prioritised correctly and does not focus solely on commuting routes into the city-centre over safe cycling routes and support within neighbourhoods. The failure in particular to prioritise spending in the outlying and more deprived communities of Bristol (where currently there is a very limited cycling infrastructure) would exclude those living in poverty from the benefits of cycling, and will disproportionately impact on women (as they are more likely to live in poverty). The potential benefits in terms of financial and health inequalities are substantial and will potentially deliver increased 'pay back' to the public purse.

3. Similarly women are more likely to be impacted by the journey choices of other dependents.

The proposed target for 20% of children cycling to secondary school is very positive. But it is likely to have more impact on women who are mothers; this could be a positive impact if other accompanied journeys are not required. However, mothers need to be engaged effectively to support this initiative, particularly if the 'habit' of cycling to primary school is to be established first where children are less likely to travel unaccompanied.

4. Women are more likely to be working part-time and to earn less than the average Bristol wage; women are more likely to live in poverty and women who are single parents are significantly more likely to live in poverty.

Traveling by bicycle has the potential for massive positive financial impact on women as cheap transport that can get them to employment. It is essential that any initiatives to support residents to purchase/ maintain bikes target women. It is also critical in achieving the 20% secondary school journeys target that children in low-income and single-parent households are not excluded from this initiative because they are unable to afford a bike.

However, poverty brings with it additional challenges of poor housing and therefore lack of / unsafe bike storage that need to be addressed to harness this potential for positive impact.

5. Women appear more likely to cite 'lack of confidence' as a barrier to cycling

While the strategy proposes active 'travel advisors' in communities, encouraging cycling for some women (and other communities) will take more community-based support than just travel advice. More focused initiatives that help build confidence in supportive and leisure based environments, and are based on the needs of the particular individuals are essential to make a real impact on changing the habits of communities who may not have cycled for generations. It is probable that this more supportive environment (advice on routes, bike maintenance, coaching in core skills, buddying etc) could be required more by women to build confidence. More research on needs is required here to ensure the right kind of support is provided.

6. Life transition points are very important for behavioural change – as the Strategy acknowledges. However, the current strategy does not appear to prioritise starting and raising a family which is key for many women's life choices.

The research of Dr Aldred suggests that women's cycling experiences a decline in their mid-30s. This is likely to be related to having and raising children, and the impact of not working (there is no empirical evidence that they stop cycling necessarily but they may cease commuting – see above re: lack of data for 'utility journeys'). This would suggest that targeting women and families when starting a family could be critical to ensure that women are supported to continue, or take up, cycling with their children and on a return to work (where as above they are likely not to be just commuting in and out but transporting children to nursery or school). Targeting at this point will also impact on men who have recently become fathers.

Greater emphasis is generally required than currently demonstrated within the strategy on leisure and sport aspects of cycling; these are important in encouraging cycling habits for fun and fitness and may encourage commuting. As women are more likely to be taking time out of the paid/employed workforce cycling activities and initiatives that are focused outside of commuting/ the workplace, including the provision of leisure-based cycling, could be important in having an impact on cycling rates in this group.

For example from the perspective of women who are mothers access to leisure cycling activities through children's younger years and with families will be massively important to encouraging cycling behaviour and building confidence, as well as supporting the outcomes of health and happiness.

7. Research shows that women's active lifestyles are more likely to impact positively on the active lifestyles of children in the family than that of men.

Targeting women to achieve regular cycling habits could therefore be suggested to have greater impact on the habits that are established by children. This is one reason that the 8-80 tag-line of the strategy is inappropriate and unfortunately limiting; encouraging cycling from a very young age is essential, regardless of whether this is independently undertaken or not. There are a host of excellent initiatives (e.g. Mums & Toddlers groups, kids cycling groups) that could potentially fall outside of the remit of this strategy and any funding as a result of this focus. It should be noted that this is also discriminatory against those residents of Bristol over the age of 80 who could still be cycling.

8. Girls (and women's) participation in sport and 'active pursuits' is lagging behind that of boys and men.

Pervasive negative attitudes of the 'attractiveness' and 'suitability' of sporting activities persist within a highly sexualised popular culture that judges women on their appearance. Not only does this result in significant reporting of 'body-image' issues, but impacts on participation and unfortunately, this is on the increase amongst girls at a very young age. Encouraging cycling amongst girls, is therefore likely to be challenged with the same/ similar attitudes. While all children/ teenagers struggle to 'fit in' this is potentially a more critical factor in the behaviour of teenage girls; e.g. cycling to school will not be taken up if it is seen as 'uncool' or 'different' or becomes a further means to bully girls on the grounds of appearance or their gender. There are practical issues of cycling that need to be addressed – e.g. in skirts or for some girls aspect of religious/ cultural dress such as headscarves.

However, as a positive impact on girls and gender equality cycling offers a great potential that the strategy should actively be promoting and encouraging. Encouraging girls to cycle has the potential to build high degrees of independence, self-confidence and the benefits of regular exercise as part of daily routine that would be excellent.

This further emphasises the case for targeted interventions for girls that address their specific requirements (e.g. support on how to cycle in certain clothing, schools providing appropriate facilities to do dress, hair and make-up). There is a case also for specific girls only activity and that potentially leisure based activities with girls could be important to encouraging the take-up of regular commuting once confidence in a friendly girls / women only group has been established. Engaging young women in the design and delivery of these initiatives directly will be essential to making sure needs and barriers are properly understood. The implementation of the strategy should also be looking to prioritise finding appropriate high-profile role models that girls and women can identify with.

In summary we would ask for the following to be addressed in the revision/ implementation of the Cycling Strategy:

1. A clear, published plan on how activities to 'encourage' cycling will be funded and prioritised that targets girls and women specifically. To be successful this plan must engage all stakeholders transparently (cycling orgs, other VCS groups, cycling clubs and residents) in planning and delivery.
2. Identification of how additional data will be gathered to understand cycling participation that is not commuting or leisure, in order to support success and prioritise investment.
3. The ambitions of the Cycling Strategy to make a positive impact on addressing poverty within the city should be strengthened. Cycling offers a real opportunity to address financial, employment and health inequalities that could be at the core of the strategy. This would require greater prioritising of infrastructure and support within and to/from those areas of deprivation and increased understanding/ recognition of the additional barriers to cycling that are faced by certain groups and how these can be addressed.
4. Within the 'encouragement plan' specific initiatives that target girls and women need to be included, and pro-actively engage them in the design and delivery of these initiatives to secure success. This includes girls in primary and secondary schools in order to achieve the 20% target; it would be helpful to set an expectation that this is achieved with a 50:50 boy: girl participation rate.
5. Investment in neighbourhood infrastructure that recognises the day to day reality of women's lives and journeys.

6. Greater emphasis on the importance of cycling as a leisure activity for individuals and families, and one that delivers benefits of physical, emotional and social well-being (fun and happiness!)

Bristol Fawcett Local Group
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