

Evidence for the Greater London Assembly
Transport Committee Scrutiny Panel on the
use of Bus Lanes by Motorcycles

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Introduction

This proof of evidence has been prepared to give an overview of the advantages of permitting the continued use by motorcycles of the three experimental bus lanes in Greater London, and to argue for the extension of that experiment.

In this document the term motorcycle is used to cover all powered two wheeled vehicles and therefore excludes tricycles and motorcycle-sidecar combinations.

We will examine the policy background in relation to motorcycles, and argue that encouraging modal shift from cars to motorcycles is to be encouraged.

We will examine the road safety and other issues associated with permitting the use of bus lanes by motorcycles.

Because of a lack of published data relating to the roads where the experimental use of bus lanes by motorcycles has been permitted, it is difficult for outside bodies to reach any firm conclusions, and therefore some are drawn from anecdotal evidence. It would perhaps be useful if we could be provided with base-line data relating to vehicle flows and accident rates in the periods preceding and following the introduction of the experiment.

Finally, we will examine use of other cycle facilities by motorcycles.

MAG's position on the use of bus lanes by motorcycles is included as Appendix 1.

The Policy Background

The Transport White Paper¹ states that,

'Mopeds and motorcycles can provide an alternative means of transport for many trips. Where public transport is limited and walking unrealistic, for example in rural areas, motorcycling can provide an affordable alternative to the car, bring benefits to the individual and widen their employment opportunities.

'Whether there are benefits for the environment and for congestion from motorcycling depends on the purpose of the journey, the size of motorcycle used and the type of transport that the rider has switched from. Mopeds and small motorcycles may produce benefits if they substitute for car use but not if people switch from walking, cycling or public transport.'²

MAG has interpreted this statement as meaning that motorcycles are to be given a higher status in the transport hierarchy than the private car.

MAG recognises that the aim of the White Paper is to encourage a modal shift towards the upper end of this hierarchy. Therefore, we consider policies which discourage unnecessary private car use in favour of more sustainable transport solutions are not only desirable but also essential in helping to achieve sustainable development.

The Mayor's Transport Strategy³, follows a similar approach to motorcycles to the Transport White Paper.

In this Strategy, paragraph 4G.26 notes that,

'Motorcycles, mopeds and scooters can offer quick, relatively low cost private transport and are more space and fuel efficient than cars, although they can generate relatively more pollution and noise.

This is augmented by Proposal 4G.1, which states,

'A London Motorcycle Working Group will be established by Transport for London to include user groups, the police and the boroughs. This group's work will include measures to enhance and extend the provision of parking for motorcycles and mopeds, particularly in areas of high demand. Opportunities will be explored to improve road safety and reduce emissions and noise pollution. *It will also review the evidence and if appropriate consider experiments to allow motorcycles and mopeds to share bus lanes.*' (emphasis added)

¹ DETR (1998)

² p43

³ GLA (2001)

The Current Situation

Motorcycles are currently permitted to use some bus lanes in various towns and cities in England, including Bristol, Bath, Swindon, Birmingham, Colchester and Hull. The Northern Ireland Roads Division has also introduced an experimental scheme to permit motorcycles, including mopeds and scooters, to use certain bus lanes from 22 March 2004.

There has also been the successful use of the M4 bus lane by motorcycles and in the City of London motorcycles, along with buses, taxis and cycles, are able to proceed southbound on Moorgate while cars must turn right into London Wall.

Because a bus lane is a separate vehicle lane, it is possible for vehicles in that lane to pass a queue of slower-moving, or even stationary, traffic on the left hand side.

Motorcycles are able to 'filter' through traffic. This means taking advantage of the gap that exists between two traffic lanes to make progress past slower-moving traffic. If motorcycles are able to use the left-hand bus lane, then this filtering will be between lanes of traffic travelling in the same direction rather than coming into potential conflict with on-coming traffic.

Since 2002, the experimental use of bus lanes by motorcycles on parts of the A13, the A23 and the A41 has been permitted. As noted above, there is a lack of clear evidence as to what effect this has had on accidents involving motorcycles in those locations.

Conflict with Other Road Users

There have been concerns expressed, most notably by the cycle lobby, about potential conflicts between motorcycles and other users of bus lanes. Pedal cycles and motorcycles are both narrow and manoeuvrable, their riders share a common understanding of the need to give each other room. It is less hazardous for a pedal cycle to be overtaken in a bus lane by a motorcycle than by a bus or a

taxi as the manoeuvre can be completed within the space of the lane and with no vehicle having to encroach onto another lane. Although buses, and to a lesser extent taxis, are potentially slow moving vehicles that stop frequently, it is the duty of all road users to take account of prevailing road and traffic conditions, and motorcyclists are fully capable of overtaking, where it is safe to do so, a stationary bus or taxi.

At the time when taxis were permitted use of bus lanes fears of conflict then proved unfounded.

Where there is a potential for conflict is in vehicles either emerging from a junction on the left or turning left from the regular slow of traffic who fail to spot a motorcycle, or even a bicycle. This issue can be addressed by better driver and rider training and greater publicity of motorcycles using bus lanes.

Road Safety Considerations

Provisional statistics produced by TfL (2003) do not paint the safety record of motorcycles in a very good light. Whilst there has been a fall in accidents for both bicycles (down 0.7%) and motorcycles (down 7.6%), compared to the similar period in 2002, there has been an increase in fatal accidents for both modes of transport (up 25% and 11% respectively).

What these figures cannot take account of is the increase in motorcycle use over the same period, and the effect that the use of bus lanes by motorcycles has on accident statistics in those locations.

MAG recognises, and is concerned that, increased motorcycle use has resulted in an increase in motorcycle casualties.

MAG would welcome more research into the contributing factors of accidents involving motorcycles and, in this instance, would also welcome the statistics being analysed according to the type and size of motorcycle. Such research has been carried out by Essex County Council, and can be seen in ECC (2001: 15-16)

MAG welcomes the Government's target for a reduction in road traffic accident casualties by 40% by the year 2010.

MAG is of the opinion that this target can, in part, be achieved through better highway design and management and increased driver awareness. By driver awareness we recognise that both car and motorcycle drivers need to be made aware of the issues surrounding road safety.

Role of motorcycles in beating congestion

For people who live more than a comfortable bicycle ride away from places of employment, entertainment or shops, the motorcycle can provide a relatively low cost and convenient commuting and transport solution.

Motorcycles are exempted from the Congestion Charge. One of the main arguments presented to TfL by MAG, and others, was that, whilst being outwardly less 'environmentally friendly' than bicycles, the motorcycle can cause less congestion than a bicycle. Whilst it is possible for a line of traffic to be held up by a slow-moving bicycle on a narrow road, this situation does not arise with a motorcycle. When moving, a group of motorcycles can achieve higher vehicle flow rates than a line of cars, and when parked it is possible to fit as many as six or eight vehicles into the space required for one car. It is also possible to utilise spaces for motorcycle parking that would be unsuitable for car parking, thus freeing-up road-space for other uses.

Use by PTW of Cycling Facilities and potential measures for mitigation of problems

As well as the unauthorised use of bus lanes by motorcycles⁴, some motorcyclists use advanced stop lanes (ASLs, also known as cycle reservoirs). These ASLs are designed to allow cyclists to wait in safety ahead of motorised traffic before moving off. Motorcyclists also use these reservoirs for the same reason. Because of the greater acceleration of motorcycles compared to cars it means that the potential for conflict in the sense of being rammed from behind, is reduced. What

⁴ Although these problems are not restricted to motorcycles, cars are also known to use bus lanes and advanced stop lanes.

they do not prevent is flouting of traffic lights by any road user. There has been an experimental use in the London Borough of Newham of the use of ASLs by motorcycles. Reports from Newham suggest that at the ground level cyclists had no real conflict with motorcyclists' use of this safety area.

MAG is not aware of any issues surrounding the use of bicycle only lanes by motorcycles. This could, therefore, represent a way to increase cycle safety by encouraging cyclists to use cycle lanes where provided.

Some motorcyclists use bicycle parking spaces because of the security measures these provide. A resolution to this issue could be the introduction of more secure motorcycle parking facilities, namely those where some form of rail is provided to lock a motorcycle to.

Conclusion

MAG urges TfL to release their accident and vehicle flow data with respect to the experimental use of bus lanes by motorcycles. To halt these trials before the data can be properly and independently analysed would be detrimental to the needs and aspirations of motorcyclists. Schemes elsewhere in the country show that they can be successful.

MAG therefore urges Transport for London to continue with these trials, and to extend the trials on a rolling basis. It also urges TfL to allow use of Advanced Stop Lanes by motorcycles.

References

DETR (1998) *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*, Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London.

ECC (2001) *Essex Powered Two Wheeler Strategy*, Essex County Council, Chelmsford.

GLA (2001) *The Mayor's Transport Strategy*, Greater London Authority, London

TfL (2003) *London Road Safety Unit Half Yearly Summary: Accidents and casualties in Greater London during the first six months of 2003*, Transport for London, London.

Appendix 1



Motorcycles and Bus Lanes. Supporting the Idea

In the early 90s the Motorcycle Action Group and other motorcycle organisations mooted the idea of motorcycle access to bus lanes in the County of Avon. The idea was approved as part of the strategy of the Avon Motorcycle Forum and gained the support of local councillors and highway engineers.

This led, in June 95, to the introduction of a six-month experimental scheme in Bristol. The scheme was granted permanent status at the end of the experimental period, during which, no accidents or adverse road safety effects had been observed. There are no current plans to review the scheme.

Since 1995 other councils have introduced experimental Bus Lanes or no car lanes trials in Swindon, Reading, Bath, M4, London (3 bus lane trials) and Sunderland (no car lane).

Concerns continue to be raised about further plans for motorcycle access to urban bus lanes. MAG contends that these concerns can be resolved by dialogue between interested groups. MAG is concerned that arguments against motorcycles in bus lanes appear to be based more on poorly informed conservative reactions than on any firm evidence. Indeed, articles that have appeared on the issue from some quarters are often badly researched and contain an alarmist element that is entirely unacceptable in the context of rational debate.

Support and opposition to bikes in bus lanes generally comes from three main sources:

- Highways officers (engineers or road safety staff) working for the local authority.
- Local police force traffic management officers.
- Other bus-lane users or would-be users (cyclists, pedestrians, taxi or bus companies).

However, MAG has found that any or all of them can be very supportive, either from the start or after dialogue. This is because concerns about motorcycle use can be addressed, simply by the interested parties entering into discussions with an open mind.

Some of the objections that have been raised are outlined below.

The Department of Transport won't allow it.

The Department of Transport guidance referred to was issued some years ago. Although it does advise motorcycles should not normally be among those vehicles permitted, it also says that local authorities are able to allow any type of vehicle. This point was confirmed by John Bowis the Minister for Road Safety. In a letter to Sir David Knox MP, dated 6th November 1996 he said:

'Local authorities already have the power in law to introduce bus lanes, and allow them to be used in addition by other types of traffic. They must use their judgement of local circumstances as to what is appropriate in a given situation.'

There is no Government Policy.

The Secretary of State for Transport in May 2003 was asked in the House of Commons if he would make it the policy of the Government to have consistent rules governing the use of bus lanes by motorcyclists.

David Jamieson answered: *“My Department has published guidelines for the introduction and use of bus lanes, but it is for the local highway authority to decide whether other vehicles should use bus lanes.*

We are monitoring the effects of motorcycling in bus lanes in trials being carried out in conjunction with highway authorities. This will allow the Department to provide more clear cut advice about motorcycling in bus lanes to authorities.”

There's no suitable road sign in the. official traffic signs manual

The Department of Transport gave its backing to the original experiment in Bristol and approved a revised version of the standard road signs used to advise which vehicles may use a bus lane.

Motorcycles are dangerous; we don't want to encourage them

The common assumption is that because motorcycle users, pedestrians and cyclists are vulnerable, they - and not the vehicles that hit them - are dangerous. The perversity of this argument is that most motorcycle user casualties arise from collisions with other vehicles, usually cars, in built-up areas, where the motorcycle has right-of way and is travelling below the speed limit. Allowing motorcycles to travel independently of these other vehicles helps reduce potential conflicts.

Pedestrians would be put in danger.

Allowing motorcycles to travel outside the main traffic stream would make them more visible to people crossing the road. This is more likely to improve pedestrian safety.

Cyclists would be put in danger.

Pedal cycles and motorcycles are both narrow and manoeuvrable, their riders share a common understanding of the need to give each other room. Added to this, being overtaken by a motorcycle is less hazardous than is the case with buses, taxis, etc.

Bus schedules will be disrupted.

Given the manoeuvrability and space efficiency of motorcycles, adverse effects should not be experienced, indeed motorcycles in bus lanes are not adding to congestion elsewhere on bus routes.

Enforcement will be more difficult

Seeing motorcycles in bus lanes does not encourage drivers of other vehicle types, e.g.: cars and goods vehicles to invade the bus lanes. Road signs used to designate bus lanes clearly identify which vehicles are permitted.

Motorcycles break speed limits, allowing them to use bus lanes would encourage this.

A lot has been made about the problems of speeding motorcyclists, with some commentators painting a picture of out of control motorcyclists creating urban chaos. The reality is somewhat different.

Motorcyclists are all too often on the receiving end of the results of bad driving (Over 60 % of urban motorcycle accidents are caused by other road users). Because of this, motorcyclists have a keen sense of self-preservation. This is supported by practical and theory novice motorcycle training that is of a higher standard than that of most other road users. Riders are aware that a rogue car or erratically ridden cycle could pull into their path at any time and, in the main, ride defensively and at a sensible speed.



The speed of commuter traffic tends to be self-regulating, with the speed of all bus lane users further regulated by the speed of the buses that use them.

Department of Transport figures have shown that motorcycles are more likely to comply with urban speed limits than cars. 1995 figures show that the average speed of motorcycles in urban areas was 30 mph, whereas the average for cars was 33 mph. 48% of motorcycles complied with 30 mph limits as opposed to 28 % of cars. This does not mean that motorcyclists can avoid their responsibilities on the overall speeding issue, but given that a massive 72 percent of cars are driven over the 30 mph limit, worries about speeding motorcyclists should be put in context with the overall picture before alarmists views are propagated.

"The attractions of motorcycling as both a safe and reliable way of beating ever increasing traffic jams and an exhilarating leisure activity are becoming obvious to a wider public than ever. Anyone who rides, or even takes a close interest in motorcycling matters, knows that there is a lot more to choosing and owning a machine than considerations of high performance or top speed."

Lord Falkland, Secretary to the Parliamentary All Party Motorcycle Group

Problems with speeding motorists of all classes should be solved by a combination of education and more effective enforcement measures.

Further information on motorcycles in bus lanes can be obtained from: MAG UK, PO Box
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