

## **Why the motorcycles in bus lanes consultation outcome needs to be reversed.**

In its outcome decision the following arguments are made for adopting Option 1 (Do nothing) as opposed to Option 2 (Allow motorcycles to access bus lanes by default).

1. The safety benefits of allowing motorcycles into bus lanes are not clear.
2. The response rate from local authorities and stakeholder organisations was low and did not provide a robust evidence base on which to amend the current policy.
3. Research on the potential safety impacts for cyclists, and the impact on bus services would be needed to form the evidence base for any change in policy.
4. The cost to local authorities in new traffic signs and Traffic Regulation Orders of mandating such a change for existing bus lanes would be considerable.
5. At present, the government has no policy to encourage greater use of motorcycles.
6. The existing position - that local authorities can allow motorcycles into bus lanes at their discretion - aligns with wider government policy on bus service improvements, encouraging walking and cycling and devolving powers to local authorities.
7. DfT is strongly convinced that local authorities are best placed to understand the needs of their local road network rather than central government.
8. In the absence of robust data from the consultation, there is little justification for moving away from a position of local authority choice to one in which allowing motorcycles to use bus lanes is the default.

In this paper we will address each of these arguments in detail.

## 1. Safety benefits not clear.

Road safety is a vastly complex subject with large numbers of variables contributing to the probability and outcome of any given collision. The variables can be circumstantial based on time of day, lighting conditions, weather, road surface quality, traffic density, traffic speed, vehicle speed differentials, proximity to other vehicles, competence of road users, hazard awareness of road users, compliance with relevant rules and regulations, physical vulnerability of the road user, etc. Improved safety can rarely be attributed to a specific road safety mitigation as all other variables continue to change independently of the designed intervention.

Robust statistical evidence to support the safety benefit or disbenefit of motorcycle access in bus lanes is proven to be virtually impossible by the lack of conclusive evidence from UK trials of motorcycle access in bus lanes over three decades in over 55 local authority areas.

Policymakers must be prepared to make decisions based on a balance of probabilities. The option to reverse policies always remains open.

The fact that so many trials have very rarely resulted in a decision against permanent access should be viewed as very clear aggregate evidence that motorcycle access provides a net benefit.

The case for default access for pedal cycles is well established but is not based on robust statistical evidence, nor faced such prolonged scrutiny. Acceptance of the default position for pedal cycles is based on an entirely reasonable understanding of the principle of separation. Vulnerable Road Users are best protected from harm from larger, heavier vehicles by creating space between VRUs and those larger vehicles. When it comes to cycling, this basic principle is axiomatic and has never been challenged as requiring proof of statistical evidence.

The principle of Speed, Surprise, Space and Consequence - described by Stephen Haley in the book *Mind Driving* - is clearly applied in the pedal cycle access. There is no logical reason that it should not apply equally to motorcycles.

The fact that motorcyclists and cyclists are both vulnerable road users is axiomatic, though sadly often ignored. Indeed, fatality statistics would suggest the motorcyclists are the single most vulnerable road user group.

It is reasonable therefore to demand that the accepted default access for pedal cyclists would, as a minimum, be equally beneficial to motorcyclists and cyclists.

Denying the benefit of separation from one vulnerable road user group whilst permitting it for another without robust justification should be regarded as morally questionable.

## 2. Response rate from local authorities and stakeholder organisations

Claiming that response rate was quantitatively low is irrelevant. As previously discussed, real world evidence of motorcycles already sharing access in bus lanes is prolific, but sadly not measured. Almost 50% of the UK bus lane network currently allows motorcycle access and the decision-making process has been spread between over 55 separate local authorities. This is evidence.

This evidence was presented to the Department in the consultation response supplied by MAG.

The range of organisations and their areas of interest was broad and there can be no claims that the public response was low with 14,107 individual respondents demonstrating over 98% support for Option 2. Whilst a consultation is not a poll, the weight of public opinion is an evidential element for policy decisions.

From a qualitative perspective multiple submissions of the same evidence have no value. At the very least there should be an advance agreement on how much evidence is enough evidence.

## 3. Need for research on the potential safety impacts for cyclists, and the impact on bus services

Again, the research on these questions has been repeated in trials resulting in over 55 local authorities allowing bus lane access. To suggest that repeating this research will yield different or more robust results is fatuous.

The Government has already confirmed in answer to a Parliamentary Question that it has no plans to carry out such research.

If there is a methodology that would achieve a conclusive outcome, then refusal to carry out that research in pursuit of reducing vulnerable road user casualties is morally indefensible. If we are to accept the moral integrity of the Government, we must conclude that further research has no significant chance of yielding a meaningful result for policy decision making.

The decision must therefore be made on the available evidence which by any measure is heavily in favour of default access.

## 4. The cost to local authorities

It is true that the cost of changing signage and new Traffic Regulation Orders is significant. Indeed, it is this cost that is often pointed to as a reason for not pursuing a policy to allow motorcycle access in existing bus lanes.

The argument however does not bear scrutiny.

In the case of new bus lanes, the cost of signage and TROs will be the same as it currently stands under a policy of default access.

The cost argument can therefore only be logically invoked for the remaining already operational bus lanes that do not allow motorcycle access. This applies to around 50% of the current bus lane network by length.

The cost of trials, investigations, consultations and endless meetings to discuss the issue would be greatly reduced under a national default policy.

The need to alter existing signage could be largely removed by one-time changes to The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD). By changing the default policy to permitting access there is no need to add the motorcycle icon to existing signs. There would simply be a need to introduce a “no motorcycles” (motorcycle in a red circle) symbol in the minority of cases where it is deemed unsafe to allow motorcycle access.

This proposal has been made by MAG in the consultation process but has been ignored.

The ongoing cost of motorcycle casualties and the potential reduction as a result of this default policy has not been investigated on any level.

## 5. The government has no policy to encourage greater use of motorcycles

This justification for deciding against adopting the default access policy is the most meaningless and potentially sinister of all the stated reasons.

The Government should be promoting the benefits that motorcycles offer in terms of reduced congestion, emissions, wear and tear on the road network, parking space requirements, and increased flexibility and transport options for the UK population. The motorcycle is a legitimate and beneficial part of a multi-modal transport system, which aligns with all the core policy ambitions for the future of transport in the UK.

The very fact that encouraging modal shift from cars to pedal cycles has become such a key policy, accounts for the lack of scrutiny or dissent on default access for pedal cycles in bus lanes. If the government is neutral or places any level of support on modal shift from cars to motorcycles the outcome of the consultation is clearly unjustified.

It would seem from the outcome that the actual policy position is to reduce use of motorcycles.

If the default access policy - promoted and recognised as a potential safety benefit - is rejected due to a risk of increased safety inadvertently encouraging the use of motorcycles, the ethics of policymakers need to be called out.

## 6. Alignment with wider government policy on bus service improvements, encouraging walking and cycling and devolving powers to local authorities.

As has been shown in many trials and in the real-world evidence supplied in this consultation, the presence of motorcycles in bus lanes has no measurable impact on bus services.

Vast sums are being ploughed into segregated cycling infrastructure and cyclists consider access to bus lanes to be inferior to entirely segregated cycle lanes. There is no evidence to suggest that uptake of walking and cycling is reduced when motorcycles are given access to bus lanes.

The default policy is a default, not a mandate. There is no erosion of authority or removal of devolved powers involved if the policy is not mis-represented.

Some consultation responses point to the fact that the consultation was launched as a part of the Conservative Government's Plan for Drivers. The commitment to introduce default access was also a specific policy in the Conservative general election manifesto. These commitments were not matched in the Labour party general election manifesto. The fact that the outcome decision was made after the general election by the new administration, combined with an obvious political disagreement on the role of cars in transport policy suggests a potentially partisan political motivation rather than unbiased consideration of the evidence presented in the consultation responses.

## 7. Local authorities are best placed to understand the needs of their local road network rather than central government

Default policies do not equal mandates: A default policy allows motorcycles access to bus lanes unless specific safety concerns or local circumstances justify restrictions. This framework still leaves room for LTAs to make case-by-case decisions based on evidence, ensuring local autonomy.

Local authorities can introduce exemptions to the default policy if data demonstrate that allowing motorcycles in certain bus lanes would pose safety risks or operational issues.

A default policy establishes a presumption of safety, meaning that motorcycles are allowed access unless clear evidence suggests otherwise. This aligns with the existing framework used for cycling, where access is presumed safe unless proven otherwise.

The policy does not mandate access but instead promotes evidence-led decision-making, requiring LTAs to provide valid reasons if they wish to restrict motorcycle access in specific cases.

Cycling policies already follow a default approach: Cyclists have a presumptive right to use bus lanes unless specific circumstances prevent it. A similar approach for motorcycles is consistent with current road management practices.

This default approach does not erode LTA authority for cyclists and similarly would not do so for motorcyclists.

A default policy inherently allows for exceptions based on local conditions. If a specific bus lane is deemed unsafe for motorcycles the LTA can implement localized restrictions without violating the default policy framework.

By comparison, a mandate would force access in all cases regardless of evidence or local context, which is not what a default policy entails.

A default policy for motorcycle access reduces bureaucratic burden on LTAs, as they do not need to conduct repetitive, unnecessary assessments for every bus lane where access is unlikely to be controversial.

LTAs can focus resources on assessing specific bus lanes where there are legitimate concerns, instead of needing to justify why motorcycles should be allowed in every case.

Default policies aim to provide consistency for road users across regions, avoiding confusion caused by highly variable rules from one area to another. Motorcyclists traveling across jurisdictions benefit from knowing that they generally have access to bus lanes unless explicitly restricted.

Consistency improves road safety and compliance, as motorcyclists are more likely to follow the rules when they are predictable and understandable.

Default access supports national road safety goals by reducing the likelihood of motorcycle accidents in general traffic lanes, where risks from congestion and interactions with larger vehicles are higher.

A mandate would impose uniform access regardless of circumstances, whereas a default policy allows the balance between national safety objectives and local flexibility.

Without a default policy, there is a risk that some LTAs may arbitrarily exclude motorcycles from bus lanes, even when there is no evidence that access would be unsafe or detrimental. A default policy prevents such arbitrary exclusions by requiring justification for restrictions, ensuring fair treatment of motorcyclists.

This approach ensures that decisions are based on objective criteria rather than potential biases against motorcycles as a mode of transport.

## **8. Little justification for moving away from a position of local authority choice to motorcycle access as the default.**

This statement is a misrepresentation of both the volume of readily available real-world evidence and the definition of a default policy. The argument only makes sense if the default is viewed as a mandate.

There is no need for further abstract or statistical evidence when the direct real-world evidence is so readily available specifically for motorcycle access.

Both cyclists and motorcyclists are vulnerable road users. The default access for cyclists provides additional evidence that bus lane access for vulnerable road users is a safety benefit for vulnerable road users.

Withholding the benefit of bus lane access from motorcyclists—despite the evidence that bus lanes can improve safety for vulnerable road users like cyclists—is biased and inconsistent with the principles of road safety and equity.

Cyclists and motorcyclists are both vulnerable road users (VRUs), and many of the same factors that contribute to cyclist safety in bus lanes—such as reduced traffic interaction, better visibility, and spatial separation from larger vehicles—also apply to motorcyclists.

By allowing cyclists access to bus lanes, authorities implicitly recognise the importance of giving VRUs safer routes. Motorcyclists face similar challenges and hazards, yet the benefits of bus lane access are often denied to them, even when there is evidence suggesting it could improve their safety as well.

Trials and ongoing operational evidence from places including London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Northern Ireland, show that motorcycles are safer when they use bus lanes. The separation from general traffic lanes reduces the chances of accidents involving motorcyclists and other vehicles.

By withholding the benefit of bus lane access, local authorities might be preventing motorcyclists from accessing a safer route. Given the shared safety outcomes observed for cyclists, this is unjustifiably limiting the safety options available for motorcyclists.

If the reasoning behind allowing cyclists access to bus lanes is based on the principle of providing a safer space for vulnerable road users, the same rationale should apply to motorcyclists.

Policies should be consistent in addressing the safety of vulnerable road users. If it is recognised that bus lanes provide a safer environment for cyclists, excluding motorcyclists from this benefit creates an inconsistent policy that does not fully address the safety needs of all vulnerable road users.

Equity in road safety means ensuring that all vulnerable road users—whether they are cyclists, motorcyclists, or pedestrians—have access to safe infrastructure and are treated fairly.

If the primary goal of traffic policies is to ensure safety for all road users, then withholding a proven benefit like bus lane access from one group (motorcyclists) without a strong evidence-based rationale is biased or discriminatory.

Transport policies should be based on objective evidence and designed to improve road safety for all users. The evidence that suggests bus lanes improve safety for cyclists should similarly be applied to motorcyclists. Denying motorcyclists access to bus lanes despite the evidence risks undermining the goal of reducing road traffic accidents and promoting safer road use.

Excluding motorcyclists from bus lanes leads to increased risks of accidents, as motorcyclists will be forced to navigate busy general traffic lanes with less protection. This creates a scenario

where motorcyclists are at a higher risk of being involved in collisions, not because of their own behaviour, but due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure to safely accommodate them.

By offering bus lane access, motorcyclists would be more likely to remain in a safer, more predictable environment, reducing the overall danger to themselves and other road users.

## Conclusion

The decision to do nothing with respect to adopting a national default motorcycle access policy was biased and discriminatory. Overwhelming empirical and abstract evidence shows that a default policy of allowing motorcycles to use bus lanes is the right outcome.

The validity of this statement is even demonstrated in the outcome document which states:

“This consultation did highlight issues regarding the current approach to permitting access. In urban areas permissions can change frequently at borough boundaries and this can lead to uncertainty.

To help address this, DfT will update TAL1/24 to include advice that local authorities should work with neighbouring authorities to achieve consistency of provision across boundaries, particularly in urban areas.

DfT will also consider how best to work with the metro mayors, combined authorities and Transport for London, to encourage a more joined up approach to motorcycle access in these areas.

The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions are amended from time to time. Although there are no current plans to do so, the responses to this consultation will be taken into account if DfT makes future regulatory changes.”

These promised actions amount to a virtual default policy in all but name. The Department for Transport should drop the pretence that default policy is a mandate and prevent further confusion and misguided debate on this issue. The published and publicised outcome should be in favour of consultation Option 2 **“Allow motorcycles to access bus lanes by default”**