

## **THE PATH TO SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY** **(The peculiar rant of a lone cyclist)**

Gone are the days when thousands of people used paths, rather than roads, to get about their daily lives. The quiet, monotonous routines of work, school, and shops are no longer interlaced by invigorating and healthy exercise.

All that are left are a few 'diehards', generally regarded as too poor, too stupid, or too weird to give up what has become an anachronistic activity. These lonely warriors from an earlier age face almost insuperable odds: poorly maintained routes covered in potholes; bad weather; inadequate lighting; and, perhaps worst of all, conflicts with others who think the paths belong to them thereby placing everybody in more danger.

If we are to bring back sustainable mobility, we have to reclaim the right to use paths in the manner for which they are intended and best suited. We have to stop the joy-riders, parking and burning their stolen Ford Fiestas. We have to stop the scooter riders screaming along in a plume of noise and blue smoke. And we have to ban pedestrians.

Admittedly, at first this might appear as a drastic, even draconian step. One can almost hear the outraged howls of protest from those people who claim to care: usually comfortable motorists and their passengers who have a fond self-image of strolling down a gentle path on a sunny, misty morning but who frankly and in reality think that a walk is something that is done to get from the house to the car.

Careful observation has revealed that there are in general three types of people that walk on paths, thereby causing danger to cyclists and making them slow down:

a) Old people. These are a real hazard, they never hear a cyclist coming, even when a bell is used; they totter in an unpredictable manner; and they wave walking sticks and related paraphernalia in a manner calculated to instil trepidation and worry into the passing populace. Being old, and in some fear for their safety in the

contemporary urban environment, they also come out in pairs, often in menacing gaggles (or perhaps more accurately shuffles) of self-righteousness, geriatric 'hoodies' intent on forcing all other path users out of their way.

b) Young people. These are a real hazard. They also never hear a cyclist coming because either they have their iPod belting out Coldplay or, and this is probably worse, they are in love. Young people in love, especially when they are actually in the company of 'the special one' that is the focus of their dreams, are a danger to themselves and all around them. Young people in love should be locked into a small room and left there until they feel better. They should definitely not operate heavy machinery, or even be allowed onto public paths. They moon about the place, they cavort, they gambol, they might even cartwheel, and they are unable to see anything, hear anything, or even think anything. They float with a smug, complacent and vacuous smile into the path of every cyclist that goes by.

c) Middle-aged people. These are a real hazard, because they are the ones with attitude. Usually, the trouble with middle-aged people is that they are accompanied by their dogs. Sometimes, they are having an affair with their secretary, or the man that came to fit the boiler, and then they unfortunately also fall into category b) above. Mostly, however, they have dogs. The typical scenario is that, as the intrepid cyclist approaches intent on getting to do an honest day's work (and why are all these middle-aged people drifting about the paths of our parks and gardens, don't they have work to do?), the dog owner goes to the left, the dog goes to the right. The dog owner then says something helpful to the dog like 'watch out for the cyclist, Bonzo'. This of course is not an instruction the dog has ever heard or understands. The cyclist is then faced with a dilemma, because it is inevitable that the dog will decide to cross over to the owner at exactly the moment that is least helpful. Any sort of accident is of course the fault of the cyclist.

Inevitably, there are a few other impediments to sustainable mobility. The list might include mothers with young children or prams, joggers, stray squirrels, smokers for whom urban pathways are one of the last places on the planet where it is possible to indulge their art, assorted utilities vehicles collecting rubbish, mowing grass, repairing electricity pylons, etc. etc., school trips,

politicians proving that their green credentials are still intact (along with PA, PR staff, television camera team, press reporters, wife – yes the marriage is still intact and we do embody wholesome family values – and junior politicians trying to win favour), and of course other cyclists.

This latter category is full of threats to sustainable mobility. There are of course the amateur leisure cyclists, usually family groups, who are on holiday in the area and decide, in a moment of madness, to ‘go for a bike ride along the Taff Trail’. Of course, the irresponsible local council encourage this sort of thing, little realising the disruption caused by having these dawdling, gawping, meandering two-wheel hazards cluttering up valuable path space. Then there is urban youth, skiving off proper education in order to bounce along on stunt bikes and dirt bikes, leaping unannounced into the path of responsible commuter cyclists. Then there are the professional leisure cyclists, tastefully combining sweat, Lycra and shaved legs in a flurry of post-Modernist angst that sweeps aside all others in their way. Then there are those going too slowly. Then there are those going too quickly. Then there are those going the other way, those with a nicer bicycle than me, those who are younger, fitter, better looking, and richer. And of course, there are those who are the same as me, and therefore a challenge to my individuality.

That is it, of course. Sustainable mobility: get rid of everybody else. Well, either that or learn to live with each other!