



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



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www.wheelrights.org.uk

What can we expect from Plaid Cymru?



These bluebells, photo'd in May 2022 in Green Cwm (near Parc le Breos) when the period of the Labour administration whose enlightened Transport Ministers Julie James and Lee Waters achieved so much for active travel had just ended, remind me of those happier days. The Labour administration which followed did little to follow up the good work. We have still to see the sought after North Gower link (NGAP) and the completion of the South Gower Access Path across Clyne Common (GAP), although this is purportedly in the pipeline.

So, will Plaid deliver these much needed links? And more, in particular the provision of an off-road alternative along Walter and Sketty Roads. This and other *Wheelrights* priorities had been ignored by the previous administration. Instead an expensive (£8m) path on the west side of the Tawe has been proposed. While this might make sense if it was accessible to properties in that area, apparently it would not be; in any case there is the existing SUP along the east side of Morfa Road which is readily accessible.

A priority for *Wheelrights* is to find an effective way of working with the new administration.

This issue

First: an article which makes a strong case for active travel; then our Secretary takes us cycling in Hungary.

On p. 6 I highlight critical mass rides, noting two which we held a decade ago, implying that it is perhaps time for another one.

On p.7 Brenda raises a bus stop safety issue.

As always correspondence is welcome; eg: a response to the issue Brenda raises in her article.

David Naylor

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Copy deadline

Material for the next issue should be sent to David Naylor by mid August.

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On Active Travel

Who could object to 'active travel'? Who could possibly deny its health, environmental and economic benefits? Who could be in favour of being unfit or overweight, or encouraging unsafe roads, traffic jams, potholes and pollution?

So, if it's so obvious a virtue, why is active travel – walking and cycling as the natural mode of choice for short everyday journeys – having such a hard time? In Wales the government legislated for it in the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, the first such legislation anywhere in the world. The Act set up a national Active Travel Fund, and an Active Travel Board to give the government advice on policy. And yet hardly any progress has been made in the 13 years since, with one exception: the introduction of a 20mph limit on residential roads. In some areas things have gone backwards: even fewer children walk or cycle to school now than in 2021.

Recently (on 23 March) I attended a meeting about active travel organised by *Wheelrights*, Swansea's cycling campaign group. Kirsty James, chair of the Active Travel Board, and Mike Hedges MS, both spoke, and they were followed by a lively discussion. I left feeling that, despite the speakers' diplomatic language and efforts to be positive, much of what energy there was behind the active travel agenda in Welsh government has dissipated.

Why has that happened? First, consider the power of the road and car lobby. It's massive compared with the influence of promoters of active travel. Car manufacturers flood the airwaves and 'social' networks with persuasive advertising (which never features pedestrians or gridlocked roads). Planners stick to the same assumptions about the primacy of vehicles that have reigned supreme since the 1960s. Governments almost invariably bow to car interests, for example by continuing to freeze petrol taxes.

That power could be seen at work in the reaction to Lee Waters's brave introduction of the 20mph speed limit in Wales in 2023. It's true that the preparation of the public for the change was poor, but the reaction was fast, furious and irrational. It resulted in the government backtracking and conceding that local authorities could have the authority to reassess routes and reimpose the higher 30mph limit. Since then ministers have been very reluctant to sing the praises of a policy that saves lives and prevents serious injuries – casualties in residential areas fell by a quarter in two years – and that has attracted favourable attention in other countries.

This 'shamefaced' approach to its own pioneering policy seems to have made the Welsh government nervous and jittery about further moves to improve the position of non-car travellers. In August 2024 the Active Travel Board, then chaired by Dafydd Trystan, issued an initial report, but the Government didn't make an official response to it, or act explicitly on its nine recommendations. The Active Travel Fund has been suspended, with serious effects, for example, on the making of new cycle tracks. The Welsh government pulled out of the National Travel Survey in 2013, and has failed so far to establish an adequate replacement survey for Wales. As a result, it's now very difficult to judge progress or failure of a travel policy in the absence of a baseline of secure data.

Taking their lead from the Welsh government, local authorities have slackened the pace of progress. Astonishingly, Swansea Council doesn't have its own transport strategy. It seems quite content to let the roads clog with ever-increasing quantities of motorised traffic, while devoting a pittance to other forms of transport.



It's hard to avoid the conclusion that the Welsh government, frozen in the harsh headlights of Reform and other anti-active travel interests, has lost the will to continue in any serious way the agenda set out in 2013. Without firm strategic leadership the impetus behind active travel can't be sustained.

In a report published in a September 2024 Audit Wales concluded that 'despite increased spending through its Active Travel Fund and a new, wide-ranging, delivery plan, the Welsh

Government remains a long way from achieving the step change in active travel intended through the Act'. In December last year the Senedd's Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, of which Mike Hedges is a member, published its report on active travel. It called progress 'painfully slow'. The government's stated target of 45% of journeys to be made by sustainable modes by 2040 looks unattainable on current trends. The Committee asked for a commitment to long-term funding, stronger leadership, and a renewed focus on behaviour change and inclusivity.

This all looks bleak enough. What about the future? Senedd elections took place on 7 May 2026. With Plaid Cymru now forming a minority government, there's a chance that a fresh start can be made.

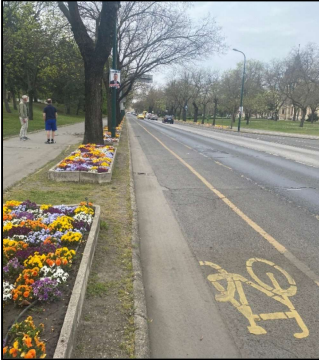
There's no lack of advice and models for improvement. The Active Travel Board issued its second report in 2025, and made six fresh recommendations, with an accent on restoring ring-fenced funding, increasing inclusivity and removing barriers. Members of the Senedd Public Accounts Committee visited Slovenia, where strong leadership from government, European Union grants and multi-year funding settlements have built an energetic active travel system, including an impressive cycling network.

What's also needed is new thinking on calming the car and improving provision for buses, a key ally of active travel. In the *Wheelrights* meeting someone pointed out that if the new Highway Code established the idea of a priority hierarchy on roads, with pedestrians and cyclists at the top, why is it that pedestrian and cycle crossing lights almost always give priority to motor vehicles? The bus system in Wales has been in continuous decline for many years. It needs more than increased public intervention in route-planning, already planned for Transport for Wales. More frequent and more reliable buses are essential if people are going to be persuaded to leave their cars behind, and if we're to avoid the permanent gridlock that faces us as more and more vehicles are added to our roads every year.

Andrew Green

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A Hungarian Rhapsody



Three friends and I spent a week in Budapest recently, ostensibly to watch some local football matches. This has now become an annual pilgrimage trip to various European football grounds where local rivalries make for exciting games against historic, and often scenic, backdrops. And of course we cannot resist sampling (and re-sampling) the local beers and wines which never disappoint!

Two of the friends, including John Britton, a fellow *Wheelrights* member, are keen cyclists so our trips always include a cycling adventure. Based on our, admittedly limited, experience there is much to commend, and recommend about cycling in Hungary.

Finding a cycle shop within walking distance of our accommodation was easy enough. The shop had a large stock of good quality bikes (and e-bikes) for hire at very reasonable prices: €18 per day, or €28 for two days, for 18-gear touring bikes. The hiring process was quick and within 10 minutes of arriving at the bike shop we were off on our adventure.

Budapest is a busy, bustling city like any major European capital city and as someone who is not entirely confident cycling on busy roads I was somewhat apprehensive, but most major roads have bike lanes painted in conspicuous yellow with dedicated controlled crossings, etc. Motorists seemed well accustomed to sharing with cyclists and I found them to be generally patient and considerate.

For our first cycle tour, John picked a country route from Biai-to reservoir back to Budapest; a distance of 36 km, almost entirely off road. We took the train from Budapest-Déli station to Biatorbágy station and, although the train station itself was not particularly bike-friendly (we had to carry our bikes up the entrance stairs), getting the bikes on the train was straightforward with plenty of bike storage on dedicated carriages and no pre-booking needed.



I must digress here and say how well-organised, efficient and cheap public transport is in Hungary. All public transport is entirely free for over-65's and adult fares are a fraction of what we pay in the UK. A three-day city pass was £15, and our train journey to Biatorbágy cost £1.15 per person. A ticket is needed for bikes; it costs £1.25 and is valid for 24 hours.

The ride back to Budapest was delightful and scenic, mostly through beautiful forests with occasional villages and settlements along the way. There has obviously been considerable investment in cycling infrastructure and it is interesting that the funding stretches to routes largely for leisure such as this.

The second day John picked a route along the river Danube to the ancient city of Visegrád, complete with an impressive mountain-top castle. The stunning views of the Danube, with frequent river cruise ships going back and forth, made for a very scenic and enjoyable ride. There were noticeably more cyclists, many of them tourists like us on this route and we passed areas filled with hotels and restaurants which, although quiet at this time of the year, must be teeming with visitors in the summer. My admiration for the cheap and efficient Hungarian public transport was somewhat dented in Visegrád when we had to cross the Danube to catch our train back to Budapest. In the absence of a bridge, crossings are made on a ferry captained by the most grumpy man in the country who charged a (relatively speaking) extortionate fare of £3.50 per person for the 10-minute boat ride.

An unexpected bonus at the end of our very enjoyable trip to Hungary was witnessing wild celebrations, mainly by young people, on the evening of the general election in which a long-awaited change of government took place. The beautiful parliament building was lit up and loud music played as thousands of young people partied in the large Parliament Square. Another excuse for the four of us to sample yet more wine at every bar on our way back to our accommodation!



Dareyoush Rassi

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About Critical Mass Rides

Wheelrights member, Jai Fear, has recently provided critical mass rides in Swansea on the first Friday of each month. (See: <https://www.cyclinguk.org/local-groups/wheelrights>.)

Back in 2011 and 2013, *Wheelrights* organised one in each of those years. So it seems timely to add a note about CM rides: their purpose and what they involve.

They have been provided in major cities in the UK: London, Bristol, Worcester; Inverness and some 300 cities worldwide. They are however something of a novelty for Swansea.

So what are they for and what do they consist of? They aim to celebrate cycling, promote it as a form of sustainable transport and assert cyclists' right to use the road.

To achieve this a time and a route is pre-chosen. Most of the route needs to be on roads used by cars so that drivers are aware that the peloton of cyclists they are overtaking are cycling on the road to pass the message that roads are also for cyclists and that a bike has a utilitarian role, it is not just a leisure item. Below I explain how we sought to get this message across.

To attract a decent turn out of cyclists the rides should be advertised well in advance. They have conventionally been held monthly, eg (as with Jai's rides) on the first Friday of the month. They may be leaderless, but will need a coordinator and will usually require marshals to keep the peloton together, guide the cyclists across junctions and deal with any incidents. While informal and fun, participants need to be aware that a key purpose is to communicate the message that cycling is an effective and enjoyable way of achieving a modal shift from car to sustainable transport.

In Swansea the 2011 and 2013 CM rides were held on a Saturday in Bike Week. Both started in Black Pill where the Clyne Valley path (NCR 4) joins Mumbles road. They then followed Mumbles Road ending up in Castle Gardens. The then Cycling Officer, Rob Wachowski, who was also a WR member, had, on one of these rides, arranged for traffic lights on Mumbles Road to change in favour of the peloton. We were pleased with the turn out which was between 25 and 30 for both rides – not bad for Swansea!



To let passing motorists know what we were about we had prepared a number of A4 sheets with messages which were safety-pinned on the backs of some of the riders. One is illustrated. Another was "One less car"; and there were other pithy eye-catching messages. On both rides we were joined by Byron Davies, then a Welsh AM and shadow Transport Minister, subsequently MP for Gower he later became a Lord. At the finish in Castle Square he said a few words in support of cycling. As an MP he always supported cycling.

A lesson for future rides is that a Saturday morning is a good time for a CM ride. Drivers are likely to be more relaxed and approachable than on a Friday evening when, it being the end of the working week, they are likely to be more stressed. And it helps to have Council Support – we need a "Rob Wachowski"!

David Naylor

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Safe Cycling vs “Inclusivity”?

Is it possible that safe cycling infrastructure is incompatible with inclusivity for the visually impaired? Specifically, do floating bus stops mean that some visually impaired people will never be able to catch a bus? (The picture is of one such bus stop on Mayals Road.) This is what is being said on social media. And not just on social media. Mike Hedges, long-standing member of the Welsh Assembly now re-elected, speaking at the *Wheelrights* public meeting in March emphasised

the importance of “inclusivity” to all future active travel facilities and criticised a cycleway in Cardiff which people have to cross to get to a floating bus stop. He said, with great force and feeling, “**This. Must. Never. Happen. Again.**” Additionally, in the consultation held towards the end of 2025 on changes to the Welsh Active Travel Act Guidance one of the proposals was to avoid the need for floating bus stops by, whenever possible, not having cycle routes on roads which are bus routes.

The Welsh Active Travel Act inspiringly envisages a coherent network of safe, direct, comfortable, attractive cycle routes. The hope of such a network may seem distant at the moment but if floating bus stops are outlawed there can be no protected cycling infrastructure on bus routes (can anyone think of a better way of dealing with bus/cycle/pedestrian interactions at bus stops?). Which means no protected cycling infrastructure on main roads – which have captured the most direct routes (and in Swansea the ones with the least challenging gradients). Which means no coherent network of protected direct routes to make cycling the easy choice for short local trips. Ever.

There has been plenty of research showing that people won't choose to cycle with fast and heavy flows of motor traffic. We can see this in Swansea – crowds of people, with children, enjoying cycling along the sea front and almost no-one on main roads. It's hard to get protected cycleways built in the teeth of noisy campaigns against any changes in the use of road space, as we have seen with the Walter Road plans. Even without the proposed change to the guidance demonising floating bus stops will provide the anti's with another argument. Local authorities, weary of dealing with real or confected outrage at proposals for safe cycle routes, will probably be more reluctant even to make such proposals.

The argument is a difficult one, who can be against inclusivity? It must take enormous courage and resolve for those with little or no vision to venture out onto traffic filled streets. It's understandable that a novel form of perceived hazard is worrying. But the argument for floating bus stops is one that cycle campaigners must be ready to make. As we all know, significant modal shift in the long term would mean fewer cars on the road, quieter streets that are more pleasant and safer for everyone, less air pollution, with improved general and mental health reducing the load on the NHS.

We need to be reminding decision makers that protected cycling infrastructure isn't mainly for people like us who already cycle and have made our accommodations with the current conditions. It's for everyone who, because they fear being hurt or killed, are currently excluded from the fun and freedom of choosing cycling for everyday local journeys.

See the Welsh Active Travel Act Guidance diagram DE502 (bus stop island). You can read a detailed discussion of floating bus stops by a highways engineer at <https://tinyurl.com/2w6x7esb> and <https://tinyurl.com/mrnpzjj4>.

**Brenda
Lilliput**

Forthcoming events

(This information and more is provided on the 'Events' page of www.wheelrights.org.uk .)

Wheelrights Routes Group meetings.

These are held most months; usually at 10.00am on a Saturday in Ripples Café in West Cross.

U3A and Cappuccino Rides.

The U3A rides take place monthly. The Cappuccino rides are under review. See the Events page for both.

Other

Swansea and Gower Cycling Festival runs from 27 to 31 May: <https://www.cyclinguk.org/group/page/swansea-gower-cycling-festival>.

Bike week is from 9 to 15 June.

BikeAbility Wales Family Day

10.00-14.00 on Sat. 13 June at BikeAbility's HQ in the Duvant Rugby Club. Details (including a poster) are on the Events page.

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