

Bike boom: the unexpected resurgence of cycling. Carlton Reid. 2017. Island Press: Washington 978-1-61091-816-9

Books are wonderful when they help complete a jigsaw of knowledge: such is Carlton Reid's book that contextualises so well the current day contention that remains around provision for cycling, and the act of cycling itself. Providing for, and taking part in cycling should be so simple, but Reid reveals that the antipathies to cycling as a mode of transport run deep and stretch far back.

Bike boom is billed as the second in a trilogy, and picks up where 'Roads were not built for cars' ended. He switches back and forth between developments in the United States and the United Kingdom broadly between the First World War and the 1970s. All the while the reader knows that the final chapter 8 beckons the reader on to find out 'how the Dutch really got their cycleways'. So, not only is the book a well-researched historical documentary, it is also a book of suspense that keeps the reader turning the pages. More than that, it provides very fresh analysis that is possible only because of the use of primary sources and interviews with some of the key players.

There is a useful discussion of definitions in the introduction, which sets the scene for the use of the term cycleway throughout the book. A cycle track, Reid suggests, has connotations of speed, but a 'way' has useful equivalence with the carriageway. Equivalence in standing between cycle traffic and motor traffic is something which is patently absent in cycling's history.

The core, and revealing, thread throughout the book concerns the provision of 'cycle tracks' separate from carriageways. The antagonisms of English lords in the 1930s to proletarian cyclists getting in the way of their motoring lordships culminated in the Alness Report of 1939 recommending cycle tracks that cyclists should be forced to use. That the evidence given by G H Stancer, the Secretary to the Cyclists' Touring Club recognised the deficiencies of the cycle tracks, especially at junctions, was of no consequence. Only the war prevented further construction. A 1944 Ministry of Transport report goes some way to setting the record straight by stating that cyclists were not being obstinate, but had genuine concerns about the inadequacy and safety of the cycle tracks.

The contentions resurfaced in North America with vehicular cycling advocates such as John Forester opposing any provision for cycle traffic outside the carriageway for fear of the reduction in status of cycling on all remaining roads. Cycling was already fighting a rear-guard action: even on the carriageway, United States laws required cyclists to remain 'far to the right' (right hand rule of the road) with consequences for liability when collisions occurred if they did not.

The rhetoric and actions of the lawmakers was clear: for the benefit of motor traffic, cycle traffic should be separated from motor traffic. It is only when we enter the final chapter do we understand how the discourse could be different. The modern day discourse in the Netherlands began from a rather different starting place, through a well-supported campaign to 'stop the child murder' by drivers of motor vehicles. This morally incontrovertible position, coupled with a politics that was more participatory and proportionate meant that the Nirvana of both restrictive policies for motor traffic as well as provision for cycle traffic were put in place.

Reid has the easy and familiar style of the journalist, and the ability to help the reader form patterns with both cycle specific and general knowledge. My one gripe is his penchant for the slightly-too-colloquial, such as his insistence on using the shortening 'infra' for infrastructure. Despite this minor shortcoming, this book is essential reading for any student on cycling.

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