

# PEDALLING POLITICS

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*While helping to organise the pre-election 'Big Cycling Debate', CTC's **Sam Jones** quizzed the UK's 12 main parties on their cycling commitments, in preparation for our Vote Bike campaign*

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**The general election will soon be upon us. While the big-ticket questions such as immigration, the future of the NHS, and the economy will take up the headlines, many CTC members will be just as keen to know how the political parties perceive cycling – and what their plans are for it.**

Five years ago, cycling got scarcely a nod in the three lead parties' manifestos. This time, it looks a safe bet that cycling will feature when those manifestos are published.

The political climate in five years has changed. Cycling will not play a pivotal role in this year's election, but its importance has grown. Representatives from the three main parties all acknowledged the relevance of the 'cycling vote' through their participation in the Big Cycling Debate on 2 March.

The debate, sponsored by News UK (parent company to The Times and The Sun) and Halfords, was organised by CTC as part

of our ongoing work with the UK Cycling Alliance. The alliance, made up of the Bicycle Association, British Cycling, Cyclenation, London Cycling Campaign and Sustrans as well as CTC, has been campaigning to influence party manifestos and make them 'think cycle'. The way they approached the debate suggests we have succeeded in that.

### THE QUESTION OF CASH

The debate was a useful opportunity to press the three main parties on what they would do to Get Britain Cycling and, crucially, how much they were prepared to spend on it. It was chaired by John Humphrys, presenter of BBC's Today programme and Mastermind, and the panel was made up of three politicians who also cycle: Local Transport Minister Robert Goodwill MP (Con), Shadow Minister for Transport Lilian Greenwood MP (Lab), and Vice Chair of the Lib Dem Federal

Policy Committee Dr Julian Huppert MP (LD).

Unsurprisingly, no new developments were mentioned, and although Humphrys pressed the panel with a Paxman-like tenacity on key areas such as funding commitments, the politicians towed their respective party lines, giving little new away.

'It remains to be seen whether the debate will deliver the manifesto commitments we are seeking,' said CTC Campaigns and Policy Director Roger Geffen. 'However, the party representatives have already said useful things that we can now hold them to account for – whoever forms the next government.'

With an investment strategy for cycling now legally in place thanks to the Infrastructure Act (see page 8), the exact amount of funding will be the next big issue. This will be a core focus of CTC's upcoming campaigns both during and beyond the election. As ever, member and public support will play an active part in

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## “The debate was an opportunity to press the three main parties on what they would do to Get Britain Cycling – and how much they would spend on it”

» maintaining the momentum generated during the past five years.

### CYCLING ANSWERS

Separately from the Big Cycling Debate, I asked all 12 of the UK's political parties to comment on their commitment to cycling. I've quoted them verbatim so that you can judge them by their own words. So as not to give the party PR machines carte blanche to write crowd-pleasing statements, I also quizzed them on five key policy areas:

- funding
- comprehensive networks of high quality cycle routes
- high design standards for cycling
- cycle safety
- positive promotion and training

Five parties didn't answer these questions. The Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Respect Party, and Sinn Fein all replied but said they were unable to respond in time for our deadline. Of these four, only the SDLP supplied a statement on cycling. The fifth party that didn't respond to my questions was the Conservative Party.

The Conservatives did supply a statement on cycling but declined multiple requests to answer my five questions. I was told they declined 'requests for participation in survey/questionnaires' because they receive so many

of them near to the general election.

You can see the parties' responses in the table 'Yes or no, will your party commit to...'. Many sought to explain their positions further. Where appropriate, I've added this information under their party statement. I've left out those parties that didn't provide a statement, and used the letters NR (for No Response) where my questions went unanswered.

### UK-WIDE PARTIES



#### Conservatives

**'Investment in infrastructure has been a vital part of our long-term economic plan, and cycling has been a big part of that. Over the past five years, we have more than doubled spending on cycling schemes, ensured that new strategic roads are cycle-proofed, and committed to delivering properly funded and targeted investment strategies for cycling and walking for England.'**

**'We are helping to deliver safer junctions on road networks, traffic-free cycle links, and cycle training in schools.'**

**'Conservatives have shown that we are serious about cycling. If re-elected, we will continue to ensure that cyclists benefit from improved infrastructure as we invest in the**

**good transport links that our towns and cities need.'**

While the Conservatives did not supply a response to the survey, it is worth noting that David Cameron personally backed the aim of 'a cycling revolution' and the idea of cycle-proofing (that is, 'thinking bike' in the design of all highway schemes), while Robert Goodwill has championed the aim to spend at least £10 per person annually on cycling by 2025. There is also strong backbench support for cycling, led by Sarah Wollaston MP, who was praised for her work by Lib Dem Dr Huppert in the Big Cycling Debate.



#### Green Party

**'We must create a transport system that is socially just and addresses health inequality by prioritising access to services by walking, cycling and public transport. This means reallocating road space, reducing road danger, and cleaning up our air to make our towns, cities and villages into more livable, socially inclusive places.'**

The Green Party has a clear pro-cycling position. They were keen to emphasise that, when it came to funding, they would commit beyond £10 per head in cycling investment, seeing such a sum as 'a drop in the ocean'.

The Greens were disappointed not to be invited to The Big Cycling Debate, and no doubt many CTC members and other cycling advocates would have wanted them to be



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» there. However, under Electoral Commission rules, the UK Cycling Alliance could not invite them without opening the doors to other parties as well, which would have detracted from the aim of the event to press the main parties on their cycling commitments.



### Labour

**'Britain's roads are for everyone. Labour wants to give everyone the choice to cycle and walk safely on them – to cut congestion, deliver huge benefits for our environment, and improve people's quality of life. A Labour government will deliver a long-term strategy to increase cycling and walking rates, with clarity over funding.'**

**'We will improve HGV safety, cycle-proof transport infrastructure, educate children in cycle safety, and restore targets to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads too. Making cycling a safe and easy option for all is a Labour transport priority.'**

Like the Conservatives, Labour have yet to put a cash or percentage figure on their level of cycling investment. They say they are keen to end stop-start funding announcements, and in the Big Cycling Debate they said that they were prepared to allocate a proportion of the transport budget to cycling. There is also strong backbench support for cycling, from both Ian Austin and Ben Bradshaw MPs, whose activities were again recognised by Dr Huppert during the debate.

In a subsequent speech to the Campaign for Better Transport, Labour's Michael Dugher

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promised to set up an Active Travel Board, which he'd chair as Transport Secretary. It would include ministers from key departments, such as health, education, and planning, as well as groups like CTC. This could either be a talking shop or a useful forum, depending on whether those ministers genuinely engage and whether the board has money to spend.



### Liberal Democrats

**'Getting Britain cycling is a core Liberal Democrat priority. We know that having more people cycling is a win-win situation: well-being increases, public health improves, roads are safer and less congested, and the environment benefits.'**

**'In government, we've made progress in promoting cycling. We delivered the Local Sustainable Travel Funding, and Nick Clegg announced the biggest single investment in cycling: £241 million. A campaign led by Julian Huppert MP secured a legal requirement for a Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy for the first time.'**

**'We are the first party that committed to the Get Britain Cycling report's recommendations. We will give cycling the vital funding it needs of £10 per head to hit**

**the target of 10% of journeys by bike by 2025, and 25% by 2050.'**

Cycling made real progress during Norman Baker MP's time as cycling minister, and Nick Clegg has since continued to champion more cycle spending. During the Big Cycling Debate, only Julian Huppert highlighted the cross-party consensus of cycling's importance, praising people outside his party.



### UK Independence Party

**'Britain needs a sustainable transport policy which is fair to all and serves the needs of our country. We wish to encourage cycling, and improve access and safety for cyclists.'**

**'We would seek to introduce inter-urban cycle tracks by utilising the network of closed railway lines and, where possible, increase extra cycling lanes. These would be high-quality paved surfaces, lit at night.'**

**'We would encourage participation in a cycling proficiency test to ensure an understanding of the Highway Code and the rules of the road. Cycling is an enjoyable and efficient way of travelling, and we want to make it as safe and pleasant as possible.'**

UKIP are best-known for their policies that capture the public zeitgeist, such as

immigration. The positive and conciliatory noises they have made on cycling are encouraging, if double-edged. We were told part of their manifesto 'specifically spotlights the importance of making more use of the existing infrastructure, such as disused railway lines'. That leaves open the question of what will be done to improve facilities on the roads.

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC PARTIES

# Alliance

## Alliance Party (Northern Ireland)

'Cycling has grown in popularity in recent years, both as a means of commuting to work and for recreation. There are clear benefits to be gained by increasing the number of cyclists on our roads, such as the reduction in congestion and harmful carbon emissions, and improvements to people's health. If we are to do this, then we must also see a change in attitude towards cyclists from other road users.'

The Alliance Party did not expand on this statement. Their willingness to engage in this exercise, however, suggests that while cycling might not be a key part of their transport policy, they do recognise its growing importance. Significantly, they did commit to funding for cycling of £10 per head.

**"The party representatives have said useful things about cycling that we can now hold them to account for – whoever forms the next government"**



## Plaid Cymru (Wales)

'Wales has passed legislation on Active Travel, which Plaid Cymru supported. While Plaid Cymru rejects austerity across the whole of the UK, it is still possible to prioritise resources towards sustainable travel. [We] would ensure that local authorities are given a fair chance to deliver what our communities need for walking and cycling. We will support any initiatives at the UK level which help make cycling safer.'

English cycle campaigners can only look with envy at The Active Travel (Wales) Act, which aims to promote a high standard of cycle networks and infrastructure. The act in its bill form was introduced by the Welsh wing of the Labour Party, but Plaid Cymru's support is noted, as is their recognition for making sure it is properly implemented.



## Scottish National Party (Scotland)

'In this 20th anniversary year of the National Cycle Network, the SNP Government is proud to be delivering the largest ever investment in cycling and walking in

Scotland. Investment, of almost £40million, will help support delivery of our ambition to see 10% of all everyday journeys made by bicycle by 2020. We are taking a number of steps to encourage cycling in Scotland and to promote the benefits of active travel.'

The SNP said that they would support policies that would increase funding for cycling, although this support came with a caveat due to the Scottish Government's limited revenue-raising powers. Any increase would come through 'Barnett consequentials from Westminster'. In other words: without a funding lead from central government, there would be no increase in cycling funding under the SNP. It's not a very dynamic position. On the other hand, the SNP does support a target for cycle growth in line with the Get Britain Cycling recommendations.



## Social Democratic and Labour Party (Northern Ireland)

'The SDLP is very sympathetic to the needs of cyclists and the necessity to create a sustainable transport system for the whole of Northern Ireland. The growing cycling culture in Northern Ireland must be supported by the Department of Regional Development (DRD) and the NI Executive if it is to grow and flourish. Cycle use cannot significantly develop without the right infrastructure and safety measures in place. The SDLP believes that Northern Ireland needs a long-term and dedicated strategy to improve cycling provision.'

Although the SDLP did not supply answers to five 'yes or no' policy questions, the party provided welcome support for one of its backbenchers' bills to make 20mph the default limit for most built-up streets. The recognition of the importance of infrastructure and safety for cycle growth is valid, but only if the SDLP recognises the need for funding them.

## TAKE ACTION

CTC is calling on members and supporters to contact constituency candidates via our easy-to-use Vote Bike website. You can ask candidates to show support for CTC's five key campaigning aims for the coming years: targets and ambition; funding; cycle-friendly design standards; safety improvements; and positive promotion of cycling (for example, through cycle training) for people of all ages and abilities. You'll also be able to see what commitments they've already made – so you can help us hold them to account if they get elected! – as well as helping us identify allies for the new Parliament. ●

Go online to demand support for cycling: visit [VoteBike.org.uk](http://VoteBike.org.uk).

### Yes or no, will your party commit to...

|   | ALLIANCE PARTY | CONSERVATIVE PARTY | DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY | GREEN PARTY | LABOUR PARTY | LIBERAL DEMOCRAT PARTY | PLAID CYMRU | RESPECT PARTY | SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY | SINN FEIN | SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY | UK INDEPENDENCE PARTY |
|---|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| transport spending of at least £10 per person annually on cycling?  | Yes            | NR                 | NR                        | Yes         | No           | Yes                    | Yes         | NR            | No                      | NR        | NR                                 | No                    |
| drawing up plans for a comprehensive network of high quality cycle routes?  | Yes            | NR                 | NR                        | Yes         | Yes          | Yes                    | Yes         | NR            | Yes                     | NR        | NR                                 | Yes                   |
| consistently high design standards for cycling for all highway and traffic schemes, new developments and planned maintenance? | Yes            | NR                 | NR                        | Yes         | Yes          | Yes                    | Yes         | NR            | Yes                     | NR        | NR                                 | Yes                   |
| improving cycle safety by revising the Highway Code and strengthening road traffic law and its enforcement?                   | Yes            | NR                 | NR                        | Yes         | Yes          | Yes                    | Yes         | NR            | Yes                     | NR        | NR                                 | Yes                   |
| positive promotion of cycling, including training for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities?                          | Yes            | NR                 | NR                        | Yes         | Yes          | Yes                    | Yes         | NR            | Yes                     | NR        | NR                                 | Yes                   |