

SAFER GREENER JOURNEYS

A CYCLING PLAN FOR SEVENOAKS

A Response To The Sevenoaks District Transport Strategy





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An outline response by Sevenoaks Cycle Forum to the
Sevenoaks District Transport Strategy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sevenoaks Cycle Forum believes the draft Transport Strategy should include a commitment to a comprehensive Cycling Plan for the district. Sevenoaks is deciding its transport strategy at a time when carbon reduction is moving higher up the agenda of central government and local authorities are under pressure to deliver it. As a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration our district must meet its obligations and adapt to a new situation in which transport funding will increasingly be linked to carbon reduction. Cycling should be put at the centre of the district's efforts to promote more sustainable types of transport and healthier lifestyles, to reduce traffic congestion, improve road safety and reverse the decline in air quality. At present this is not happening. **Sevenoaks has lagged behind all other districts in Kent and is the only place with no cycling plan. The rarest sight of all is a child on a bicycle, and it is time for that to change. We need a fresh start.**

A Cycling Plan should be part of a more active involvement by the District Council in transport policy. For the Transport Strategy to succeed, it must set the long term goal of making Sevenoaks district a safe place for children to cycle. Short term aims should include:

- Doubling the number of commuters cycling to Sevenoaks station by making the roads safer and providing more secure cycle parking
- Creating a network of safe routes to school to enable more pupils to get to school by bike as recommended by Sevenoaks Youth Council
- Improving cycle parking in Sevenoaks town and other urban centres
- Making cycling safer by enforcing existing speed limits and consulting on 20 mph limits in residential streets
- Organising a Family Cycling Day in Sevenoaks in 2010

The Sevenoaks Transport Strategy is flawed, but it provides an opportunity for decisive action to improve the environment for all.

PART ONE

1. Introduction

'What is the rarest sight in Sevenoaks? A child on a bicycle.'

Part One of this document is an attempt by cyclists from Sevenoaks to look afresh at issues raised by Kent County Council's Transport Strategy for the district. We hope it will provide the basis for a constructive long term dialogue with SDC and KCC councillors and officials. This document is an initial outline written as a response to the public consultation, but we intend to develop it in more detail as a basis for this dialogue. Part Two of our response contains our detailed comments on the September 2009 SDST draft, which we believe can be greatly improved. **We believe it is time for Sevenoaks District to develop a more active transport policy across the board and follow the example of other Kent councils by developing a cycling plan.** Our approach is not to seek exclusive privileges for cyclists at the expense of other transport users but to show how making Sevenoaks a more cycle-friendly place will benefit everybody by improving air quality, reducing congestion and pressure on parking, and contributing to better public health. Rather than seeking a definitive solution at one fell swoop, we believe that developing a coherent transport strategy in which cycling is a mainstream element should be a process rather than an event. **Although our suggestions and comments refer mostly to Sevenoaks Town and the immediate area, we believe that our approach can easily be applied to other parts of the district.**

2. The international and national context

i. The government's *Low Carbon Transport: A Greener Future (DfT 2009)* explains why decarbonising transport is essential and urgent if the UK is to meet its goal of cutting its carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 compared to 1990 levels. The government recognises that the UK, a wealthy country with high carbon use, has to cut its emissions more deeply than the global average to meet the urgent global challenge of climate change. **We believe that the same principle should apply on a local level, which means that Sevenoaks should aim to make bigger emissions cuts than districts in Kent where private car use is lower.**

ii. Sevenoaks has rightly committed itself to playing its part by signing the Nottingham Declaration in October 2007 and publishing its own Carbon Reduction Plan in 2008. But our district has a lot of catching up to do:

- The LDF Baseline Review says Sevenoaks is performing poorly in terms of total CO₂ emissions per capita, which are 10.4 tonnes compared to 10.03 tonnes in Kent and 8.7 tonnes for the southeast overall. A large part of these emissions come from transport.
- The 2001 census identified our district as having the highest car ownership and the lowest use of alternatives such as buses and cycling in Kent.
- According to the *Sevenoaks Transport Study (2008)* only 0.9% of people in our district cycle to work compared to an average 3.1% for southeast England.

iii. **The UK has had a national cycling strategy since 1996 but cyclists in Sevenoaks feel it has yet to reach our district.** By contrast, elsewhere in England cycling is attracting increasing investment as a cost-effective strategy for reducing congestion, easing parking pressures and improving public health. Promoting cycling is now a major goal of government policy in England, as *Low Carbon Transport* makes clear: *'Cycling is a viable alternative to car journeys for many short trips. As well as reducing emissions, cycling can bring additional benefits to health, reduced congestion on our roads and improved local air quality, making our towns and cities more pleasant places to live.'*

- There are now 18 Cycling Demonstration Towns across England with a £50m budget spread over three years. District councils such as Aylesbury have shown they can bid successfully for funding for cycling projects in competition with larger urban areas. Between 2004 and 2009 the government's three Sustainable Travel pilot towns, Darlington, Peterborough and Worcester, have reported car trips falling by up to 9%, while walking and cycling have increased.
- The DfT is channelling money through Sustrans and Cycling England to fund a variety of initiatives including the *Bikeability* scheme for schools. An updated government cycling strategy for England and Wales has been promised by the end of 2009.
- In September 2009 the government announced a £14m package to improve facilities for cyclists at railway stations by adding 10,000 extra cycle parking spaces. According to *Delivering a Sustainable Railway (DfT 2007)* some 60% of the population lives within a 15-minute cycle ride of a railway station, but only 2% of journeys to and from stations are made by bike. Surbiton station, which recently won the Best Cycle Facility award, has built covered spaces for 175 cycles, avoiding the need to build an extra station car park. Other commuter towns in the southeast have shown that promoting cycle-rail links can be a 'quick win' for all concerned.
- Other schemes which receive generous funding are *Connect2*, which is getting £50 million of lottery money to bring down barriers which prevent people getting around on foot and by bike, and *Travelsmart*, which helps individual households change their travel habits.
- If a Conservative government is elected in 2010, it will create a Transport Carbon Reduction Fund and councils will bid for money to promote green transport initiatives such as cycle schemes.

iv. Elsewhere in Kent, councils have been developing cycling plans and strategies since the 1990s.

Thanet district council introduced its first cycling plan in 1995 and a second plan in 2003

Tonbridge and Malling borough council introduced its first cycling strategy in 1998 and approved a second version in 2007

Dover district council introduced a cycling plan in 2007

Maidstone borough council introduced a five-year cycling strategy in 2007

Ashford borough council has a Cycling and Walking Strategy which has delivered a 77% rise in children cycling to school

Canterbury city council has had a cycling strategy since 1993 and published a new plan in 2004. Over £1m has been spent on cycling since 1994

Medway council published a cycling action plan in 2006

Swale borough council has a network of country cycle routes and has issued a master plan for cycle paths in Sittingbourne town

Shepway district council is working on a cycling plan with KCC

Dartford and Gravesham are included in a cycling master plan for the Thames Gateway which began in 2003

Tunbridge Wells is working with KCC on a network of safe cycling routes, particularly for use by schools

3. Cycling in Sevenoaks in 2009

i. Sevenoaks is the only district in Kent with no cycling plan of any kind.

With the exception of a section of the six-mile path between Tonbridge and Penshurst, Sevenoaks district does not feature at all in the network of National Cycle Routes, although the district's roads link Kent and East Sussex to London. Cyclists from London and from East Kent complain of a blank area on the map between Maidstone to the east and Caterham to the west, and between Dartford to the north and Tonbridge to the south. In the early 1990s Sustrans suggested a number of possible cycle routes for the district but these were not implemented. Sevenoaks has a bold minority of experienced adult cyclists, but the rarest sight of all, even in the summer holidays, is a child on a bicycle. In the words of one teacher involved in cycling tuition for Year 6 pupils: *'I don't know why we're doing this. We're teaching them to go out on roads which are far too busy and dangerous for them. I wouldn't ride these roads, much less encourage primary children to.'* A lack of signposted routes and cycle lanes, illegal parking and unfriendly road design combine to make parents very reluctant to allow their children to cycle. Who is to say that they are wrong? Even adult cyclists feel vulnerable and unsafe when faced with widespread hostility from motorists who often tell them they have no right to be on the road at all. The coordinator of a cycling group in East Kent who visited Sevenoaks in 2009 encountered repeated complaints from motorists of a kind he had never met elsewhere and commented: 'I can only presume it's simply because the motorists aren't used to encountering cyclists.'

ii Speed limits in urban areas are widely ignored, particularly at night, because motorists know they are not enforced. Many motorists drive at 50 or 60 mph instead of 30 mph, well aware that despite the presence of signs denoting speed cameras, there are no actual cameras on the roadside. High traffic speeds are a particular barrier to allowing children to cycle.

iii Sevenoaks District council has traditionally adopted a low profile on transport issues other than parking and left them to Kent Highways to tackle. This passive attitude has meant that our district has been left at the back of the queue while other districts have received a higher level of funding from KCC for traffic improvements. We believe the District Council is failing to argue its case through lack of cabinet representation at meetings of the Joint Transportation Board. **The weaknesses of the current Transport Strategy draft can be attributed largely to a lack of creative input and initiative at the district level. We believe this has to change.**

iv. Air pollution from road traffic in Sevenoaks is getting steadily worse, though this is glossed over in the Transport Strategy. The *Air Quality Action Plan 2009* for Sevenoaks clearly shows that pollution from nitrogen dioxide is rising. This affects not only areas adjacent to the M25, M26 and A21 but also the congested routes through Sevenoaks town centre, Seal, Riverhead, Westerham, Dunton Green and Bat and Ball. However no solutions are proposed and the title of '*Action Plan*' seems inappropriate. Of the 17 proposed measures to reduce air pollution in the district, most are unlikely to have any effect. They include committing the council to being 'an active participant in consultation processes' over the future of the M25 and increasing public awareness of air pollution. **It is extraordinary that the list omits cycling altogether, even though this is a key element in Kent County Council's Local Transport Plan for reducing congestion.**

v. Sevenoaks faces special problems as one of the two busiest commuter railway stations in Kent, with increasing numbers of commuters to the City driving here from further east. Commuters to and from Sevenoaks station probably make up the largest single group of regular cyclists in the district. A recent survey by the Sevenoaks Cycle Forum and Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association showed that far more commuters cycled to the station than took the bus, and that most of them came from between one and four miles away. The survey indicated that the number of cyclists could be doubled. Cyclists are put off not by hills but by congestion, high traffic speeds, and the shortage and insecurity of cycle parking at the station. There are 528 car parking spaces at Sevenoaks station and an annual car park season ticket now costs over £1000. **Enabling 100 motorists to switch to cycling would significantly reduce parking pressures, congestion and the number of 'kiss and ride' dropoffs and pickups around the station.** At present the station has four small cycle racks and scores of mostly battered bikes are attached to railings in a way that is unsightly and insecure. No banker who spends his bonus on an £800 bike would dream of leaving it all day at Sevenoaks station because of the risk of theft. The SCF/SRTA survey was carried out at halfterm and did not include the hundreds of schoolchildren who catch trains to Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, many of whom are delivered and fetched by car.

vi. Schools and cycling. We regret that neither the Transport Strategy nor its predecessor the Transport Study collected any data on how children get to school in the district, nor on how many receive cycle instruction. The Cycle Forum has begun to research this issue and our preliminary finding is that out of 3048 children of primary and secondary age surveyed in Sevenoaks town, a mere 45 or 1.5% go to school by bike. With one or two exceptions such as Sevenoaks Primary, most schools report no children cycling even where they receive instruction. With plans for an Academy in Sevenoaks on the Wildernesse site next to the A25 now far advanced, there is a pressing need for safer cycle routes to school in the northern part of town.

vii. Workplaces and cycling. This is another area where more information is needed on which employers have introduced KCC Travel Plans and signed up to the government's *Cycle To Work* incentive scheme for their employees.

viii. Sevenoaks town centre and other urban shopping areas have very poor provision for cycle parking, forcing cyclists to impede pedestrians and shoppers by attaching their bikes to lampposts and railings. There are no signposted urban cycle routes or lanes and very few junctions have stop areas for cyclists. In Sevenoaks town centre the only place with adequate cycle parking is the Sencio leisure centre. The remaining cycle stands can be counted in single figures.

4. Setting new objectives and dispelling urban myths

i. We believe it is time for Sevenoaks District Council to take more interest in transport issues and to recognise that it needs a stepchange in policy to catch up with other areas in Kent. In order to look afresh at the problem, we believe some urban myths need to be dispelled:

- 'The bicycle is like the horse – it's out of date' *Not true; cycling is on the increase everywhere in the UK, even in Sevenoaks*
- 'Cycling is too difficult in Sevenoaks because it has too many hills' *Not true; with the exception of Riverhill to the south, most gradients in Sevenoaks are easily manageable, even by cyclists over 60. The real obstacles to cycling lie elsewhere.*
- 'Sevenoaks is different from everywhere else in Kent' *Partly true; it may have higher wealth, higher car ownership and more 4x4s than other districts but climate change and obesity pose the same challenges as elsewhere. Even here an estimated 15% of households do not have access to a car and need alternatives. So do teenagers.*
- 'Better facilities for cyclists will be at the expense of pedestrians' *Not true; the latest guidelines for infrastructure address the needs of cyclists and pedestrians together. This isn't a zero-sum game where somebody has to lose.*
- 'Cyclists should go out into the countryside at weekends if they want to get exercise. They should stay out of urban areas' *Not true; though the countryside around Sevenoaks is great for cycling at weekends, cycling should be seen not just as a sport or leisure activity but as an alternative and environmentally friendly means of daily travel.*
- 'District councils like Sevenoaks can't do anything because we don't have responsibility for transport' *Not true; the examples of Thanet and Dover prove that district councils can have a highly effective pro-cycling policy. Sevenoaks is now well placed to learn from them.*
- 'People want to use their cars and the job of local government is to respond to what people want' *Not true; this view contradicts government policy which is to reduce car use and the Nottingham Declaration on reducing carbon emissions.*
- 'Cyclists are a fringe movement of politically motivated leftwing extremists' *Not true; most cyclists are also motorists and they have widely differing political views. Prominent Conservative cyclists include David Cameron, George Osborne and Boris Johnson.*
- 'We have a budget squeeze and there's no money available' *Not true; there is increased government and KCC funding for cycling, but only councils which get a grip on transport issues will get it.*

ii. Sevenoaks Cycle Forum believes that a Cycling Plan for the district should be:

- based on clear principles and goals
- realistic about what local government can achieve
- clear in distinguishing long term and short term priorities
- comprehensive rather than piecemeal

The ultimate goal should be to make Sevenoaks a district in which parents can confidently allow their children to cycle on the roads. Our objective is to make sure all children in the district not only get the chance to learn to cycle but are then able to use their training to get around safely by bike. Roads that are safe for children to cycle will be safe for adults as well. Contrary to widespread belief, this does **not** necessarily require the widespread construction of either off-road cycle tracks or of dedicated cycle lanes. The latest government guidance lays down a 'hierarchy of provision' in which dedicated cycle lanes are not the first option. They include:

- signposting alternative routes
- limiting parking on main roads
- enforcement of 30 mph and 40 mph speed limits
- traffic calming and 20 mph limits in residential areas
- cycle lanes and segregated cycle tracks.

This process requires wide public consultation and local involvement. The DfT's *Cycle Infrastructure Design 2008* sets out five core principles for the design of cycling networks; a lot of detailed work will be needed to apply these to Sevenoaks, but the important thing is to demonstrate the political will to make a start. We want our county and district councillors to back a commitment to prioritise cycling and other low-carbon forms of transport over the private car, as Thanet District Council did as far back as 2003:

'All traffic management and calming schemes will aim to make the road network more cycle friendly. There will be a presumption in favour of incorporating facilities to benefit cyclists in all schemes. So:

- a) *Schemes involving signalled junctions will generally incorporate facilities such as cycle lanes and advanced stop lines, while pelican crossing schemes will be assessed as potential "toucans".*
- b) *Segregated facilities or cycle lanes will be provided as part of all new road schemes, ensuring safe passage through junctions.*
- c) *Traffic calming will use cycle friendly measures.*
- d) *Cyclists will generally be exempted from all new road closures, one-way restrictions and banned turns, except where there is a technical or safety case for not doing so.*
- e) *Cycle parking will be provided in appropriate locations.*

We hope to work with county and district councillors and officials to apply these principles, starting in Sevenoaks town, the urban area with the worst congestion and air pollution. We believe that Sevenoaks should aspire to join the list of 'cycling towns' in the future. This would open the door to extra funding to improve facilities.

5. Achieving the new objectives

i. The DfT's guidance distinguishes between different types of cyclist – 'fast commuters', 'utility cyclists', inexperienced and leisure cyclists, children and

users of more specialised equipment including tandems and trailer-cycles. **We believe the priority in Sevenoaks should be to help 'fast commuters' and 'utility cyclists'. The first objective should be to double cycle use by commuters at Sevenoaks station.** This means targeting rail commuters who drive to the station from between one and five miles away. Cycle parking must be extended and improved at Sevenoaks and other train stations in the district. We welcome efforts by our councillors to ensure a fair share of the DfT funding promised for cycle-rail improvements. We need to make the A25 and the roads from Otford, Seal and Dunton Green into Sevenoaks more cycle-friendly. Commuters from south Sevenoaks would also benefit from a safe cycle route to the station avoiding the High Street bottleneck.

ii. Better cycle parking is also needed in shopping centres, workplaces and public buildings. The government is now urging employers to sign up to a *Cycle to Work Guarantee* scheme including cycle parking, lockers, changing and shower facilities, tax incentives for bike purchases, access to repairs and training programmes. **As Communities Secretary John Denham said recently, 'Councils, as local leaders, major employers and climate change champions, have a real responsibility to encourage residents and staff to cycle to work.'** We welcome plans to install more cycle parking in the Blighs development as a first step in signalling that cyclists are to be made welcome rather than marginalised in Sevenoaks town centre.

iii. Based on proper research and consultation with schools, parents and groups such as the Sevenoaks Youth Council, a cycling plan should include a network of safe routes to school and realistic targets for increased cycle use by children. Sevenoaks secondary pupils who commute south by rail should also be considered. Cycling should be integrated into planning for the new Academy in Sevenoaks. Because cycle use in the district is low, a lot of children in Sevenoaks have parents who have never cycled themselves and do not own a bike, so it is also important to introduce adult instruction.

iv. We would like to see Sevenoaks town and district councils cooperating with West Kent NHS to mark Bike Week from 12-20 June 2010 with a Family Cycling Day in Sevenoaks town centre to coincide with the Summer Festival.

v. **Consistent enforcement of 30 and 40 mph speed limits is long overdue.** It is also time for KCC to follow government policy and introduce 20 mph limits on residential streets where residents want them, as is already happening in Oxford, Portsmouth and other places.

6. Conclusion

We believe it is time for Sevenoaks District Council to develop a more active transport policy with cycling as a mainstream element and to make better use of the Joint Transportation Board with KCC. We believe the existing Transport Strategy draft is weak but provides a good basis for a fresh start. We look forward to a continuing dialogue with KCC and SDC and to the support of elected councillors for our objectives. A cycling plan for Sevenoaks will bring benefits to all in the shape of safer roads, cleaner air, reduced congestion and a healthier population.

PART TWO

The Transport Strategy contains some excellent points but is far too long and inconsistent; some sections of the document are much 'greener' than others. It reads as though it is written largely from the motorist's point of view. It does not take account of the latest government policies on climate change and carbon reduction and it fails to recognise the scale of the radical shift away from private car use which is required to tackle these problems. Nor does it provide a benchmark to compare Sevenoaks with what is happening elsewhere in Kent and in England. The document concentrates too little on the district's existing severe problems and too much on the transport aspects of future developments; with one or two exceptions such as Dunton Green, these are likely to be on a modest scale. The document lacks a 'joined-up' approach; tourism and public health are ignored, even though transport policy is very relevant to both. Proper research is lacking on schools and transport. The section on rail services needs more work and fails to reflect the importance of Sevenoaks as a commuter railhead. **Because of a lack of real local input from Sevenoaks this is a 'top-down' document that fails to reflect the specific needs and character of the district. Cycling is treated more as an afterthought than as a mainstream mode of transport and a potential solution to congestion and pollution.** Some of the data in the document is flawed and incomplete and there are passages which clearly have not been proofread properly (Appendix 13). Our section-by-section comments reflect the pattern of the document and therefore inevitably contain some repetition.

1.0 Foreword. This section is particularly confused and badly written; it makes no reference to the wider environmental context of climate change and the UK's targets for carbon emission cuts, which are now driving transport policy. It implies that a transport strategy for the district is merely an aspect of the Local Development Framework. Of course it is important to say that future developments should be more sustainably located, but this should not be seen as the principal goal of a Transport Strategy for Sevenoaks. Rapid changes in energy and fuel prices are certainly to be expected, but they are merely one symptom of wider environmental challenges. The foreword should reaffirm the commitment of Sevenoaks to carbon reduction and to the Nottingham Declaration. To state that the transport network has to be 'appropriate for the users' is a very narrow and inadequate definition; it is self-evident that transport has a range of impacts on non-users as well. It might be 'appropriate for the users' to extend the M25 and M26 to six lanes in each direction but this would inevitably increase pollution, noise and other impacts on local residents. **We see the fact that the Strategy does not set out solutions to specific problems as a weakness rather than a strength. To 'give guidance on suitable alternatives and options' is an inadequate definition of a transport strategy.**

2.0 Table 1 The ranked priority objectives include a commitment to cycle friendly infrastructure, which we welcome. We believe however that the links between reducing congestion and air pollution and the promotion of

cycling are not explicit enough. Nor is the need for better cycle storage and parking at rail stations, even though this is now a DfT priority. We wish to see a clear commitment to a cycling plan for Sevenoaks district, beginning with Sevenoaks town and the immediate area and moving on to Swanley and Edenbridge and the rest of the district.

- 3.0 Introduction We welcome the commitment to promote 'green transport' options but we do not see evidence that this strategy document will achieve its stated aim. We believe sustainable travel behaviour should not just be a 'long term goal' but a short term priority as well. It requires strong signals at district council level that the existing over-reliance on car use has to change. This section of the document is cut-and-paste material which could refer to anywhere; it needs a more specific focus on Sevenoaks and a comparison with other districts in Kent. For example, the issue of regeneration is marginal to most parts of Sevenoaks district, which are suffering the problems of prosperity rather than deprivation.
- 4.0 Consultation. Most people in Sevenoaks would challenge the rosy picture painted here of a high level of community involvement and stakeholder participation over the past few years. There were only two consultation meetings during the preparation of the Transport Study in 2006 and 2007. Cycling stakeholders were either not invited or were not able to speak. When the Transport Study was published in 2008 no attempt was made to initiate any public debate on its contents. Sevenoaks District Council seems to have taken a largely passive approach to the preparation of the Transport Strategy despite the long time spent on its development. We are particularly concerned by the fact that the SDC cabinet member responsible for transport has not attended recent meetings of the Joint Transportation Board.
- 5.0 Context. This section emphasises the important impact of future housing developments for transport in the district, including the knock-on effects of what is planned for Maidstone, Ashford and Medway, but it underplays the acute problems which already exist. It should highlight more clearly that Sevenoaks is one of the two busiest commuter rail stations in Kent. We welcome the recognition of the need for a 'fresh proactive approach' but feel this is not followed through. **Given the widening gap between cycle provision in Sevenoaks and elsewhere in Kent, it is not enough to say that 'opportunities exist' to improve cycle infrastructure.**
- 6.0 Strategy Development, Aims and Objectives. Our view is that the SDST fails to take into account the latest government policies, including the Climate Change Act 2008 and the DfT's 2009 *Low Carbon Transport – A Greener Future*, which highlights the importance of local authorities in achieving carbon reduction goals, particularly by promoting integrated travel schemes and by encouraging cycling.
- 7.0 Key Transport Issues & Development Pressures. We agree with the suggestion that continuing with the status quo is not an option, though we believe it may be misleading to refer to 'relatively limited' increased travel

demand in Sevenoaks. We endorse the analysis of ‘tremendous pressure on the strategic and local road network’ and believe radical solutions are necessary. **It should be clearly stated that air quality is not only poor but is getting worse.**

8.0 Roads, Traffic and Congestion. We do not believe that either a one-way system in Sevenoaks Town or a proposed traffic management system will have more than a marginal effect on the existing severe congestion problems. **We would like to see a clear recognition that the existing level of private car use is unsustainable and has to be reduced.** This section of the Transport Strategy is written entirely from the motorist’s perspective and does not supply any analysis of the road network from the cyclist’s point of view. This lack should be rectified as soon as possible with a proper cycling survey of the kind undertaken in other Kent districts. The other aspect which is not addressed is the widespread flouting of existing speed limits and the introduction of 20 mph limits in residential streets, as now explicitly recommended by the government.

9.0 Bus, Community Transport and Taxi. We support these goals but believe that in the light of carbon reduction targets, investing in cycle infrastructure will give a much better and faster return.

10.0 Rail Travel. We endorse the comments of the SRTA and believe that the problem of improving cycle-rail links should be made a priority, particularly in view of recent government funding announcements. Sevenoaks District Council should lobby Network Rail and Southeastern to make sure that Sevenoaks station, where cycle parking problems are acute, gets a fair share of the new funds made available by the DfT. We believe that improving road access for cyclists to Sevenoaks station and the installation of secure lockers and other storage could persuade a significant number of motorists within a five-mile distance to switch from cars to bikes. Experience from elsewhere in the southeast suggests this would avoid the need for additional station car parking. We feel strongly that this section of the document should be revised to make clear that additional station car parking and the building of a multi-storey should be an ultimate last resort, to be considered in Sevenoaks only after improvements in access by bus and cycling have been introduced. **Our view is that to provide more car parking would merely increase road congestion and pollution by encouraging still more commuters from central Kent to drive to Sevenoaks.** To state that ‘additional station car parking will need to be provided’ directly contradicts the SDST’s other commitments to more sustainable transport, lower congestion and lower carbon emissions.

11.0 Walking. This section is the only one which refers to the role of schools in the district and their role in generating trips by private car, but it seems to be something of an afterthought. It would have been far more useful to see a comprehensive survey carried out on how primary and secondary children in the district get to school. Without such data, it is impossible to draw up a strategy to promote alternatives.

- 12.0 Cycling. **We believe the fact that cycling is given one page out of 73 reflects very poorly on the quality of analysis behind the SDST.** The section is weakly worded. Instead of saying 'there is scope to improve cycle infrastructure' the document should set this as a priority and should highlight the growing gap between Sevenoaks and other Kent districts. **We endorse the list of improvements suggested but believe that in order to avoid a piecemeal approach the SDST should contain a commitment to draw up a comprehensive cycling plan for Sevenoaks.** This should begin with Sevenoaks Town and the immediate area and then tackle Swanley and Edenbridge.
- 13.0 Powered Two-Wheelers. We point out that while two-wheelers may be more environmentally friendly than cars and take up less parking space, the same is true to a far greater extent of bikes.
- 14.0 Smarter Choices. We are disappointed to see no specific mention of cycling in this section.
- 15.0 Disability Access. We endorse the goal of improving mobility and access for those who cannot use a car.
- 16.0 Freight and Heavy Goods Vehicle Movement. We believe the time has come to restrict the movement of HGVs in Sevenoaks High Street.
- 17.0 Car Parking. This section fails to recognise that growing car parking demand is merely a symptom of excessive reliance on private car use. Nor does it recognise cycling as part of the solution. There is no analysis of existing cycle parking provision, which is badly needed if provision is to be improved. To refer in passing to the need for convenient and safe cycling parking without any data or proposal for improvement is inadequate.
- 18.0 Kent's Airports. This section should also include international rail links via Eurostar. For Sevenoaks travellers this means supporting other Kent local authorities in seeking more Eurostar connections at Ashford, which unlike Ebbsfleet is accessible by rail and does not generate extra traffic on the M25.
- 19.0 Climate Change and Transport Planning. This important section should be at the start of the SDST rather than tacked on as an afterthought. We believe this section should follow the LPT by specifically referring to cycling.
- 20.0 Air Quality Management. **We are seriously concerned at the weakness of this section, which skates around the data in the 2009 Air Quality Action Plan for Sevenoaks showing that air quality in the district is getting worse.** This issue should be given much greater prominence. We suggest that the joint SDC/KCC air quality working group should put the promotion of cycling on its agenda as a priority.

- 21.0 Travel Safety. We endorse the view of the House of Commons Transport Committee that ‘danger reduction’ would be better than ‘casualty reduction’ as a way of assessing the safety of the road network. **A low level of injuries to cyclists may simply reflect that the road or junction in question is so unsafe that cyclists avoid it.** The government now endorses 20 mph limits in residential areas and this should be KCC policy as well. Existing 30 and 40 mph limits should be consistently enforced by Kent Constabulary as they are in Thames Valley and other parts of the country.
- 22.0 Development Planning and Transport Assessments. We believe more detailed research is needed to find out how many schools and businesses have travel plans, and whether they include cycling. The location of the proposed new Academy for Sevenoaks should be a trigger for efforts to improve cycle access along the A25.
- 23.0 Setting, Achieving and Monitoring Targets. **We believe this section of the SDST needs extensive revision because its targets are far too low.** Although the section on congestion refers to ‘reductions in car use’ the unambitious targets set for non-car use do not reflect the scale of the changes needed. Sevenoaks is at the bottom of the class for sustainable transport in Kent, so if it simply adopts the same county-wide targets as elsewhere it will fall even further behind. Instead of expecting annual growth in road traffic to 2026, the target should be for a significant overall reduction. An increase in daily cycle trips by 2% per annum from a low base is far too unambitious a target when other areas are achieving much higher rates. Appendix 14 shows that the cycle count for Sevenoaks rose 4.5% between 2007 and 2008 so a 2% growth rate would actually be a step backwards. During the same period Tunbridge Wells recorded a growth of 19.9% and Dover 42.2%. It is not clear why employers with over 100 staff should be allowed another six years – the time it took to win World War Two -- to come up with Travel Plans. While reducing the road casualty rate is a laudable aim, it is a poor indicator of progress in other areas. If the A25 is completely gridlocked and traffic slows to 5 miles per hour, it is quite possible that the casualty rate will drop to zero, but this will hardly be a sign of progress towards a more sustainable transport policy. As cyclists we find some of the assumptions underlying the section on Travel Safety in the appendices (pp 39-43) to be deeply flawed. It is quite wrong to assume that an absence of cycle accidents means that a road is safe for cycling; all it means is that cyclists avoid it. We also find it unacceptable that KCC refuses to install safety cameras unless at least three serious or fatal casualties have been recorded. Cycle use will only increase in our district when speed limits are observed. More safety cameras and interactive speed signs are needed to achieve this.

24.0 Key Background Documents. We are surprised by the omission of the DfT's guidance on cycle infrastructure and the 2009 paper on Low Carbon Transport, and to cycling plans in other Kent districts such as Thanet.

[Cycle Infrastructure Design \(DfT\)](#)

[Low Carbon Transport – A Greener Future \(DfT\)](#)

[Thanet Cycling Plan](#)

[Travelsmart](#)

[Bikeability](#)

[20 mph zones \(DfT\)](#)

[Cycle to Work Guarantee scheme](#)

[Workplace Cycle Parking Guide](#)

[Cycling for Better Health \(DfT\)](#)

[Connect2](#)

[Adult cycle training in London](#)

[Institute of Advanced Motorists study on motorists and cycling](#)

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