

***The Times* of London's 'Cities Fit for Cycling' safety campaign**

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ABSTRACT

An outline of the nationwide cycle safety campaign launched in the United Kingdom by national daily newspaper *The Times*, detailing its conception, its launch, its aims and its progress. The campaign is lobbying central and local government and all relevant transport authorities to overhaul the way cyclists are provided for and protected on British streets.

Keywords: cycle safety, campaign, media

1 INTRODUCTION

On November 4, 2011, 27-year-old *Times* reporter Mary Bowers was cycling to work at the *Times* offices in East London. She was only 50 metres from arriving at her destination when she cycled across a junction at a green light and was struck by a large lorry, which was turning left at the same junction. Miss Bowers suffered extremely serious, near-fatal injuries and remains largely unconscious in hospital a year later. Prompted by so awful an accident to such a talented and well-loved colleague, *The Times* started to research the situation for cyclists and cycle safety in the United Kingdom. Examining injury rates, accident black-spots, cyclist numbers, government spending, public opinion and political will in the UK demonstrated a huge shortfall in the provisions made to encourage and protect cyclists in Britain, prompting *The Times* to launch a major nationwide campaign to call for a drastic improvement in these provisions.

2 CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

The 'Cities Fit for Cycling' campaign was launched on February 2, 2012 on the front page of *The Times* newspaper [figures 1 and 2]. The campaign contains a manifesto of eight demands, which were drawn up in consultation with experts, road safety groups, cycling charities and the bereaved relatives of cyclists killed on the roads [figure 3]. Within days, six Olympic champion cyclists joined more than 30,000 readers in pledging their support to the campaign and more than 3,500 people wrote to their local Member of Parliament asking them to support the campaign. More than 30,000 tweets were written with the #cyclesafe hashtag, instituted by *The Times*. More than 10,000 submissions were made to an interactive map plotting dangerous blackspots for cyclists across the UK [figure 4].

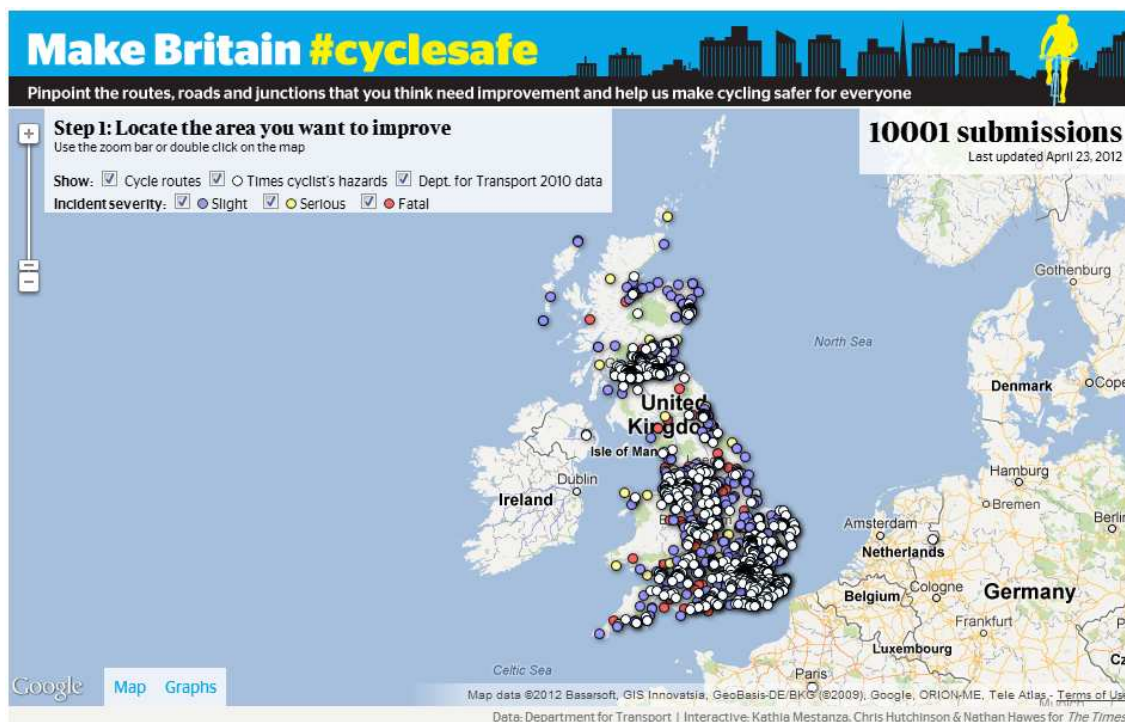


Figure 4 Reader submissions and Government data on a map of dangerous spots for cyclists [2]

3 POLITICAL RESPONSE

Prime Minister David Cameron joined with Opposition Leader Ed Miliband and Mayor of London Boris Johnson in pledging support to the campaign, while a debate was convened in Westminster Hall, attended by 77 Members of Parliament from all over the UK. The candidates for the London mayoral elections met for an unprecedented hustings focusing solely on cycling. The Department for Transport agreed to discuss insurance incentives for lorries who fit cycle sensors. Transport ministers pledged to use the *Times* blackspot map to assess dangerous junctions. The creation and maintenance of safe cycle lanes is to be made law in Wales. Local councils no longer need to seek individual governmental permission to fit safety mirrors at junctions. More than £30million in extra funding has been made available to fix dangerous junctions, while the Transport for London authority has agreed to renovate 50 dangerous stretches of road. The Labour Party has pledged to adopt the entire campaign manifesto into their own party manifesto for the 2015 general election. *The Times* was given a transport industry award for a “relentless, informed and passionate” campaign on cycle safety.

4 MEDIA AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Other newspapers in the UK, including *The Guardian*, *The Evening Standard*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Daily Mail* have increased their coverage of cycle safety issues in the wake of the campaign, while the campaign has been featured on BBC News, Sky News and on more than 30 local and regional radio stations. The campaign has also been adopted by newspapers in Austria and also the *Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Corriere della Sera* newspapers in Italy, and has received praise from the embassies of the Netherlands and Denmark within the UK.

5 CURRENT STATUS OF CYCLING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

More than 40 per cent of all Britons own a bike, but many are too wary of the dangers of cycling on the roads to use their bicycles on the streets. By the end of September 2012, 91 cyclists had been killed so far in 2012 on Britain's streets. The month of September saw 17 deaths and was the most deadly month so far this year for cyclists, coming in the month after Great Britain dominated the medals in cycling events at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games [figure 5]. Provisions for cyclists do exist in parts of the UK - including the Cycle Superhighways installed in London and cycle lanes on many stretches of road - but they are often poorly installed, poorly interconnected, poorly maintained and their sanctity is poorly enforced by police and local authorities. The United Kingdom government spends only around £1 per capita per year on cycling, which is far below the spending in countries like the Netherlands and Denmark.

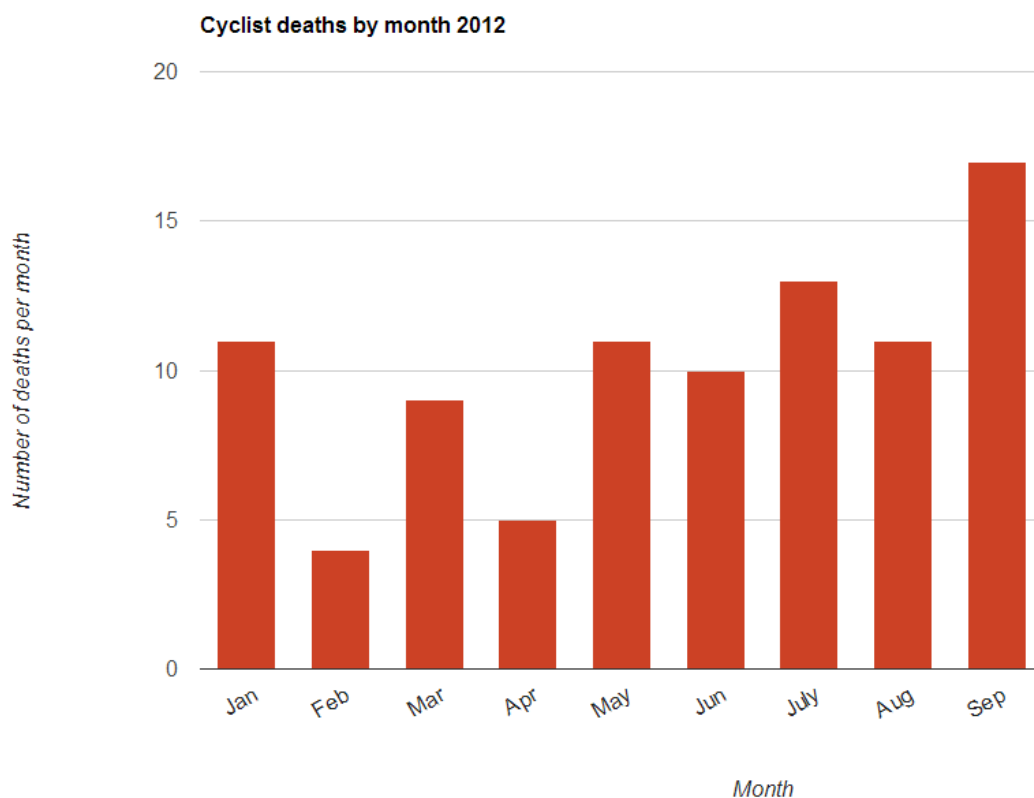


Figure 5 Cyclist deaths per month in the United Kingdom from January to September 2012 [3]

6 FUTURE PROGRESS OF THE CAMPAIGN

Last month, 40 Members of Parliament wrote to Prime Minister David Cameron to demand that he take personal leadership in promoting the measures necessary to encourage and protect cyclists in the UK. Prompted by the *Times* campaign and funded by *The Times's* parent company, a cross-party inquiry has been launched into cycle safety in Britain, in which a panel of MPs and peers will hear evidence from engineers, rail companies, council officials, road safety groups, cycling charities and representatives from the departments for transport, health, education and the Treasury. Government ministers have pledged to implement any innovative measures that emerge as part of the inquiry's findings.

7 CONCLUSIONS

With such an increase in political will and verbal support from key figures since the campaign's launch, *The Times* will now be pushing for policy makers, town planners and architects to be more ambitious in the scope of their provisions for cyclists. Inspired by the model set by the Municipality of Copenhagen, whose Lord Mayor Frank Jensen kindly invited *The Times* to accompany him on a cycling tour of his city and exploration of Copenhagen's cycling culture, *The Times* will examine ways in which planning laws and regulations can be amended to ensure that all public transport developments must, by law, take steps to encourage and protect cyclists, and that these measures must meet a minimum standard. The campaign will examine ways in which cycle paths can be constructed alongside rail or river corridors, providing safe routes through busy urban areas or away from treacherous rural carriageways. The campaign will continue to put pressure on politicians and policy-makers from all political parties to honour their pledges to provide greater support to cycling. And, above all, the campaign will continue tirelessly to argue that cyclists deserve greater respect, more space and more consideration as part of the British transport network and the British way of life.

REFERENCES

- [1] *The Times* Cities Fit for Cycling campaign, thetimes.co.uk/cyclesafety
- [2] *The Times's* interactive cycle hazard map, thetim.es/cyclesafemap
- [3] *The death toll in the UK so far in 2012*, thetim.es/cycledeaths2012