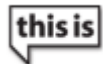


It should be full steam ahead with plan to create cycle path

Monday, May 30, 2011



This is Plymouth

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THE conversion of disused railway tracks into cycle paths has been successfully exploited throughout the UK with truly traffic-free cycling being the happy result, often in naturally stunning environments.

This has greatly enhanced the growing National Cycle Network and is, in the grand scheme of things, wholly economically viable as the fundamental structure is already there.



NEW DEVELOPMENT: The new Redhayes bridge shows there is money available for cycle-related projects

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The Bath-Bristol cycle path was one of the first examples of this to happen and was created by the cycling charity Sustrans between 1979 and 1986. It is a 15-mile, three-metre wide, asphalt surface, traffic-free cycle path. It forms part of the National Cycle Network Route 4. As a measure of its success, the path was used for 2.4 million trips in 2007 and its usage is estimated to be growing by at least ten per cent a year. Sustrans having a determined vision and enlisting volunteers helped to make this path possible.

This brings me to proposals to convert a section of disused railway line between Willand and Hemyock. The scheme would link four villages and perhaps, most importantly, provide a traffic-free route for children cycling to school. Presently the children use the busy B3440 Uffculme Straight for their journey. Obviously if this project was given the go-ahead and eventually came to fruition, not only would it provide a safe alternative for schoolchildren commuting at times when the volume of road traffic is high, it would also provide a scenic leisure route for walkers and cyclists alike.

The scheme has the support of parish councils and was included in the Liberal Democrats, manifesto in the recent Mid Devon District Council elections.

Unfortunately, there are complications involved as some parts of the route have already been built on. However, if this plan were to be taken seriously then one would like to think there could be solutions found if the Government is as committed to its sustainable transport plan as it would like us to believe.

Yes, we are all painfully aware how scarce public funding is at the moment, and that what money there is available should be spent wisely. Strange then that it was deemed possible to release the around £5.5 million to build the "bridge to nowhere". Devon County Council was able to receive a grant from the Central Government's Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF) to build the impressive Redhayes Bridge, which spans the M5 to the north of Junction 29. This will provide a necessary traffic-free link to the proposed Exeter Science Park and the Cranbrook and Monkerton housing developments. While this green thinking is highly commendable, it does seem sensible to me to wait until these developments are actually seen to be taking place before spending vast amounts of public money on a structure that will receive no practical use whatsoever for the foreseeable future.

It seems then that there are pockets of funding available for the building of sustainable transport infrastructure but the art of

unlocking these little nest eggs requires a prolonged, concentrated effort from all interested parties to get the wheels of progress turning.

If planning approval were accepted perhaps there could be a variety of community-led projects to help get some of the initial clearance work done. With the cycle path bringing such clear benefits, perhaps it's time people galvanised themselves to try to make this happen.

As a regular user of our cycle paths I know how successful they are and what a difference it makes to many journeys undertaken within the environs of our city.

Let's hope for a positive outcome.