

BWA comments on Bristol Bath Railway Path (BBRP) proposals

Bristol Walking Alliance makes the following comments on the proposals for changes to the inner Bristol section of the BBRP published in December 2019.

The wider context: is this the right project ?

- the proposed interventions will go nowhere near solving the problems created by the success of BBRP. There are just too many people trying to use the same space for two main incompatible activities: purposeful journeys versus relaxation and enjoyment. Any measure that improves one is likely to be to the detriment of the other. This is largely independent of whether the activities are undertaken on foot or on bike (though the difference of speed between the two modes of travel is a problem for either kind of activity).
- by any of the accepted measures, the number of journeys at peak times implies there should be segregation between pedestrians and cyclists. But there is insufficient width for this in many places, and even where possible it would be to the detriment of the natural environment.
- therefore investment should go towards identifying and improving separate walking and cycling routes and parks/green spaces in the surrounding areas to help spread the load rather than potentially bring more conflict into the same space.

The different users

- we have sympathy for those walking, wheelchair and pushchair users of the path who feel unsafe in the face of large swathes of commuting cyclists, and fast cyclists at all times. We accept that fear is a big issue on the path.
- we have sympathy for those who use the path as a park and as a place for quiet reflection.
- we have sympathy for Bristol Cycling Campaign's position. The Railway Path is a natural cycle route, and alternative routes of reasonable quality are not available. Even if/when better road-based cycle routes are built, they will never match the BBRP experience. The demand in numbers of commuter cyclists can only increase over time. It would be possible to provide greater width and segregation for the cycle route, but at greater expense and at the loss of greening. The proposed changes do not add anything for the benefit of cyclists.
- to be fair to all viewpoints, we suggest it would be helpful to give a proper explanation of the alternative approach of widening/segregation to accommodate the high volumes of cyclists, and to show the impact of this on the needs of other users.

The approach

- subject to the comments above, we support the multi-user approach and the other key principles
- we do not think the changes by themselves will make much difference to the cycle speed of many of the commuters. The physical changes need to be accompanied by other initiatives to address cycle speed. If there is no improvement in the cycle speed issue, there is even a danger that some will see the £1m scheme to be largely cosmetic and of little value.
- the current proposals focus on crossing points and pocket places. This is fine, but more attention needs to be given to how to communicate the different nature of the whole inner city section of the path.
- we think prototyping is important, but we realise that some changes cannot be prototyped without making the actual changes. We look forward to hearing more about the promised prototype testing.

- the consultation consists of drop-in sessions, a separate stakeholder group, a Facebook page, a website page, and not much by way of e-communications in between. We wonder if this is sufficient for a scheme for which it is so difficult to balance the different user needs.

The draft designs

- the first-pass design interventions at 6 points along the path are generally OK
- there are 4 places (Russell Town Avenue, The Parklet, Whitehall, Clay Bottom) where designs encourage people to stop and enjoy the place, which between them probably absorb quite a large proportion of the funds. These are a good idea in principle. It will be interesting to see how much they get used.
- in several places, contrasted colour and texture surface are proposed to indicate access and slow down speed. This is a good idea in principle. We prefer simple, durable surface treatment designs.
- we would not support signage that clutters, but a single prominent sign to signal the gateway to a speed-moderated section might help.

Comments site by site

St Philips Causeway bridge/Newtown Park	no comment - the proposals seem OK
Russell Town Avenue	The proposed parklet/seating would seem to replace the existing 'slip' for bike and foot traffic on to the path at this junction, which works well. Otherwise, the proposals seem OK.
Easton Community Centre	the proposed cycle route wiggle seems OK. It could help reduce cycle speed and should not increase risk of collision as long as sight-lines are not impaired. It requires a grass mound to be removed, so is not feasible to prototype before implementing, which is a pity. The surface treatment design should be kept simple, and the cycle route be very clear, which design A does better.
The Parklet	The design should be kept simple, and the cycle route be very clear, which design A does better.
Whitehall	no comment - the proposals seem OK
Clay Bottom wiggle	Improvement in sight-lines will help reduce the risk of collision and should be the priority here. Any place-making should not impede that. Unfortunately it isn't possible to prototype the design without adding tarmac. The design should be kept simple, and the cycle route be very clear, which design A does better. We tend to agree with Bristol Cycling Campaign's comment that a more appropriate siting for seating could be the bridge over Rose Green.