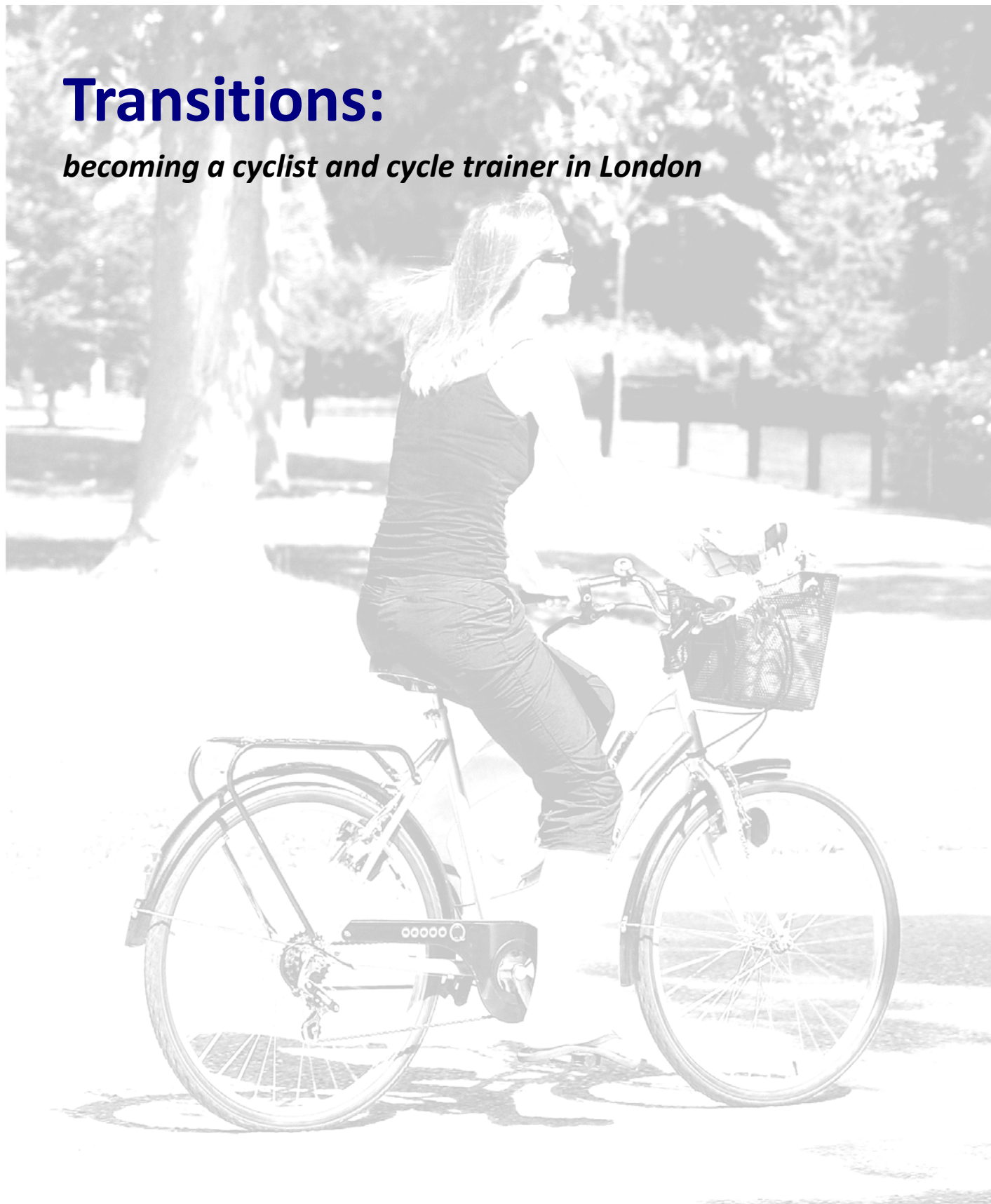


Transitions:

becoming a cyclist and cycle trainer in London



A report by Rachel Aldred and Kim Kullman
UEL Sustainable Mobilities Research Group



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Introduction

This report discusses findings from a pilot research project entitled *Transitions: becoming a cyclist and cycle trainer in London*. The purpose was to investigate experiences of cycle training in London, also forming preparation for a further larger-scale national project. We were particularly interested in exploring how cycle training affects the perceptions of cycling and everyday traffic among different groups of trainees. We also wanted to find out more about the actual practices of cycle training, and how the day-to-day experiences of trainers are shaped in relation to different trainees as well as the shifting organisational contexts in which they work.

The research reflects a diversity of opinions on cycle training. It is based on eight focus group interviews with experienced and less experienced trainees and trainers, including professional Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers, who have taken on-bike cycle awareness training to gain their Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC). We also carried out one individual interview with a cycling co-ordinator in a London borough to learn more about the organisation of training.

The project was conducted by Rachel Aldred, Kim Kullman, and Justin Spinney. Rachel planned the overall project and carried out one interview, Kim organised, transcribed, and analysed the focus groups, and Justin co-moderated two of the focus groups. The study was funded by the University of East London's Research Development Fund. Transport for London (TfL) helped us access some participants while others were recruited via specialist online forums or cycle training companies. We would like to thank the participants and everyone else who helped with the research.

The research was carried out in London, in an organisational and transport context differing from the rest of the UK, and the sample size (34 participants in total) further limits the generalisability of our findings. We did not interview commissioners or people running cycle training organisations, so the research expresses primarily the views of those trainers and adult trainees who participated in the focus groups interviews. We also concentrate on interpersonal training interactions rather than on broader social implications related to cycle training programmes.

Key findings

- 🚲 Interviewees felt that training affects cyclists in a positive way, adding to their confidence and safety in traffic, as well as making cycling more enjoyable. Training also allows other road users to experience traffic from the viewpoint of cyclists, and some of the HGV drivers argued that they had begun to understand cyclists better because of the training.
- 🚲 We have identified six key areas where cycle training affects people's experiences of cycling in London: *awareness, communication, skill, emotion, identity and reflection*. All these areas can potentially contribute to changes in broader traffic environments.
- 🚲 Interviewees argued that the quality and organisation of cycle training could be further improved although with different opinions between and within groups:
 - Trainees felt that new cyclists might need extra support during training and that more male cyclists should be encouraged to take part.
 - HGV drivers argued that all cyclists could be obliged to attend training to make roads safer both for cyclists and other road users.
 - Trainers and the borough co-ordinator argued that cycle training needs further standardisation to ensure its quality, and that the working conditions of people involved in the industry require standardisation and improvement.

Contexts

The UK now has a substantial cycle training industry. £11 million was allocated to the training of school children in England in 2011-2¹ with support pledged for the rest of the current Parliament, and £2.1 million allocated for support services. Cycle training, re-branded as 'Bikeability', plays a key role in cycling promotion, and the free or subsidised training most London boroughs offer for adults has sought to further increase the visibility of cycling. Once seen exclusively as a road safety policy, cycle training is now also positioned as teaching sustainable transport practices, healthy lifestyles and even 'transmitting the joy of cycling', as one interviewed cycle instructor put it.

On-bike cycle training is also used as a contribution to training professional drivers—including bus and Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers—to interact with cyclists on the roads. It is now offered as part of the 35 hours of periodic training that professional drivers need to undertake every five years to retain their Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC)—a qualification based on an EU directive that seeks to sustain high driving and safety standards among professional bus, coach and HGV drivers. TfL has been promoting cycle awareness as part of its voluntary Freight Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS).

Much cycle training in England—and increasingly in other countries of the UK—is governed by the National Standard for Cycle Training (NSCT), launched in 2005. The NSCT was developed by the now abolished Cycling England in collaboration with over 20 organisations. It lists various training outcomes, mostly targeting road positioning and technique, and aims to standardise and professionalise training. Eighteen Instructor Training Organisations (ITOs) were accredited in 2010 and are now the only organisations entitled to train NSCT instructors. 342 scheme providers in England are listed on the Bikeability website, including 20-30 major providers.

¹ This does not include local funding for adult or child training or London, where funding is separately allocated, or additional funding allocated through, for example, the Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

There are currently some 6,000 registered NSCT instructors, although not all of them are active. Instructors work through an ITO, through another training provider, and/or directly for clients. Cycle training work is usually flexible, self-employed and part-time. Core funded work is seasonal: playground and then on-road training in primary schools with small groups of children. Many instructors train adults and young people on a one-to-one basis to any of the three Bikeability levels, which cover, roughly speaking, basic riding skills, riding on quiet streets and riding on busy roads. Some instructors also work on various projects that offer training to specific communities, groups or organisations, as well as provide training as part of summer activities.

Methodology

As Transitions was an exploratory pilot project, we used semi-structured interviews to find out more about the experiences and perceptions among different groups of trainees and trainers. We decided to arrange focus group interviews to allow participants the possibility to explore their experiences in a supportive environment together with others who shared their knowledge of cycle training practices. Group interviews were structured using a topic guide to cover specific issues of interest, such as the everyday cycling habits of participants and their views on urban traffic. The guide left plenty of space for participants to raise themes that they personally felt to be relevant, thereby inviting them to contribute in the shaping of the interview process.

Altogether 33 people took part in the group interviews, divided into eight focus groups, each containing an average of four people.² We conducted three focus groups containing trainees with different cycling skills. For analytical reasons, we divided them into two rough categories. 'Experienced trainees' had been cycling actively on-road for at least a few years before taking part in a training session, and were often commuting by bike during the time of the interview. 'Less experienced trainees' had little experience of cycling or were not cycling actively on the roads before the training session. Some of the people in this group became regular commuters by bike after training while others cycled irregularly.³

We also arranged three focus groups with trainers, containing 'experienced instructors', who had been working some four years on average, and 'recently trained instructors', who had done their instructor training within the last year at the time of the interview. Two further group interviews were conducted with professional Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers, who had participated in on-bike cycle awareness training to gain their Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC). Both companies that took part in the research are members of the voluntary Freight Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS) run by TfL.

In addition to the eight focus groups, an individual semi-structured interview was carried out with a cycling officer who had substantial experience of organising cycle training in a London borough. This offered us detailed insight into organisational aspects of cycle training provision. The research material also includes brief written commentaries from four trainees, who were unable to take part in the focus groups interviews, but wanted to express their opinions of the training via email.

² The project has the approval of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of East London. Participants were initially contacted by e-mail or telephone. They were informed about (1) how their contact details were obtained, (2) the purpose of the study, (3) the confidentiality of the research and (4) their right to refuse to participate.

³ It is difficult to define exactly what constitutes an 'experienced' cyclist, as people judge their own skills differently. Relying on quantitative measures can also be misleading, as a person's frequency of cycling may vary throughout the year, and some people with plenty of cycling experience in other places may feel nervous about cycling in London.

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. After erasing personal information from the data to protect the anonymity of participants, we carried out a content analysis, involving a detailed reading of the interviews for common themes and differences as well as for issues that require further exploration in future research. At the same time, we collated informative quotes for presentation purposes and wrote analytical notes.

Findings

This section presents main research findings from the interviews with trainees, trainers, the borough cycling co-ordinator and the HGV drivers. We discuss each of these groups separately, paying attention to specific topics and concerns raised during the interviews. At the end of this report, we discuss important common themes across the focus groups, as well as explore their broader implications for the organisation and provision of cycle training.

Trainees

Cycling identity

Less experienced and more experienced trainees offered different explanations for attending cycle training. Less experienced cyclists often wanted to start commuting by bike. Many of them had cycled as a child but subsequently given it up, whereas some already cycled but felt unprepared to move in urban traffic. For this group, training was an exercise in confidence building, and people reported discomfort and sometimes outright fear in traffic as the main reason for taking part. This discomfort was caused by a combination of factors, including a perceived lack of skills, previous unpleasant encounters with other road users and a sense of vulnerability as a cyclist:

‘...the roads petrified me, basically, that’s why I though, yeah it would be good to kind of figure out how people can assert themselves as cyclists on the road, and...how they get about more safely. I thought, you know, that any extra...you know, benefits I can get to staying alive, then yes...so much the better’. (Tim, 30s)

‘I hadn’t cycled in London...I hadn’t cycled since I was kind of teenager, and I had a really bad accident and I hadn’t cycled for years...since then...But I started, I was working in Elephant and Castle, which is one of the most notorious roundabouts in London for cyclist deaths, so...I thought if I was going to do it, I needed to do it, but know how to do it safely.’ (Emma, 30s)

While many participants argued that the traffic in London intimidated them, some of the less experienced trainees also felt encouraged by what they regarded as changing public attitudes towards cycling. They said that the increasing visibility of cycling in London—mostly in the shape of growing numbers of cyclists on the road, the Barclays Cycle Hire Scheme and the availability of cycling infrastructure—had made them take part in the cycle training course in the first place:

‘...it seems to me that more people seem to be cycling in London, and I just thought, well...if people are cycling, then maybe it’s safer than I think it is.’ (Judith, 50s)

‘One of the things that made me more confident when I started cycling a year ago was the launch of the Boris Bike Scheme, because then there’s many more cyclists...’ (Nadifa, 30s)

‘And on A13, there’s a blue band, the Cycle Superhighway belt. And that was the inspiration for me...to cycle from home to the leisure centre, which is quite close by.’ (Kumar, 30s)

Experienced cyclists had been cycling for some time in urban traffic, usually 3-6 days a week, and were commuting by bike. For them, the primary reason for taking part in training was the

willingness to get an expert's view on their cycling and to become aware of possible flaws in their technique. The experienced cyclists were looking for confirmation that they were not doing things entirely wrong and they also hoped to get useful tips from an experienced fellow cyclist:

'...actually, after 20 years on the cycle, how do I know that I'm cycling the right way. How do I know that I just haven't completely perpetuated the bad things that I'm doing, so I thought, well actually if I took cycle training on, I could use it as a foundation...whether I'm doing the right thing or wrong thing, and get some guidance.' (Carl, 30s)

'I needed to validate that some of the stuff I was doing right, some of the stuff I was doing wrong...There's people who've been cycling for 10 or 15 years, saying it's probably valuable, then...why not.' (Savir, 30s)

'They set, set up that specific sub-forum [on an online cycling forum], dedicated to cycle training ...So, people started talking about it, and quite a lot of people said how useful it was even if they were sort of fairly experienced cyclists, and...No matter your ability, people got something out of it, so I thought, you know, why not.' (Marc, 20s)

A majority of the participants had heard about the availability of cycle training through informal channels, such as friends, colleagues from work or online forums for cyclists. In order to find out more about the lessons, participants had visited the web pages of Transport for London or their local council, either registering for a training session online or by calling the training provider.

Experiences of training

All participants felt that they had learned valuable skills during their training session. Less experienced cyclists stressed that the training had transformed them from a novice to a more regular and confident cyclist. Sara, one of the participants who responded by email, wrote that 'My life as a cyclist divides into before and after training.' The increased confidence among less experienced cyclists was the direct consequence of learning specific techniques for handling different traffic environments and communicating effectively with other road users:

'I think what the cycle training does, is kind of enable you to think and process "I'm in this situation, therefore this is what should be coming next...or what I should do next, where I should place myself..." And also, I think it kind of, by doing that, it kind of frees you up to really notice what's going on...around you...' (Jeffrey, 30s)

'And the whole thing about making eye contact to people behind you, you know, because that's very...You know, because what you're saying is "I'm here" and...you know, once you know you've...locked eyes with someone, they can't forget that, you know, you're somewhere around there. That's very...empowering I suppose as well, yeah.' (Linda, 30s)

'when I'm turning, so when I'm turning say right or left...instead of going up the side, I'll be in the middle, you know, I'll be in the middle of that lane...making clear hand signals to show where I'm going...so that the car behind can't overtake me while I'm going round the corner'. (Judith, 50s)

More experienced cyclists were equally positive about their lessons, and said that they were surprised by how much there still was to learn about cycling. Experienced cyclists like Savir felt that the training 'reinforced good behaviour' by teaching them to communicate with other road users more clearly and by expanding their awareness of the traffic environment around them:

'The main thing for me was like about awareness. She [the trainer] was always telling me to look over my shoulder...just being really aware of what's around you. And that's like the biggest change

in my cycling. I mean I do that all the time now, it's like a second nature to look over my shoulder.' (Marc, 20s)

'The key take away I took was that I was signaling...I don't actually signal at times, especially if everything you're doing is stick your hand out like that, and put that straight back in again, no one is gonna pay any attention' (Carl, 30s)

Several participants linked cycling technique with the emotional experience of cycling. Learning to respond effectively to specific situations in traffic and to constantly and critically assess the traffic environment had made participants more confident, and had thereby helped them to deal with their sense of vulnerability. Confidence was accompanied by growing enjoyment:

'Yeah, I think the increased confidence I got certainly made the cycling more enjoyable, because, you know, I could relax more and...yeah...knowing what I'm doing and stuff.' (Nadifa, 30s)

'It just makes you more relaxed, you know, knowing how to navigate on the road. And you're like, "Oh yeah, it's quite...fun..." (Zoe, 30s)

Participants felt that they had started to view their surroundings in a different light—'It totally opened up London for me', as Saul explained. And Judith talked about cycling to work along canal towpaths: 'I just think "My god, you know, if you were on a holiday and you're cycling down here you would just think it's the best holiday ever."' Some of the participants had even developed a critical interest in the implementation of cycling policies and infrastructures:

'I wouldn't even care about it a year ago. I mean I genuinely wouldn't even have thought about it, and I *do* find myself kind of...looking at junctions and things and thinking "Oh, I wonder how you could change the layout there and things like that".' (Jeffrey, 30s)

Other benefits of cycle training included improved social relations. Kumar, who had cycled briefly as a child, valued the newfound possibility 'to go out with other friends and family members, and cycle with them.' And Saskia, who had trained with her colleagues, argued that the experience had improved the team spirit at work and had turned many of her colleagues into fellow cyclists.

Both less experienced and more experienced cyclists praised their trainers for being able to point out mistakes and suggest ways to improve their cycling as well as explain new ideas in easy language without being patronising. Less experienced participants especially stressed that their trainers were both confident and encouraging, which had a positive effect on their cycling:

'Yeah, it was a nice balance of...firmness, you know, like...because you meet somebody...If you're frightened, you meet somebody who says "You're gonna do this" and is quite firm with you, but not...is, is, doesn't get you to back off something. And I thought he got a nice balance and he seemed to know what he was doing'. (Judith, 50s)

'...she was very encouraging as well and sort of...pointed out what I was doing right as well what I was doing wrong, which sort of then, you know, helped build your confidence...' (Linda, 30s)

'She didn't use any jargon, like, like at no point did I have to say "Wait, what does that word mean?" She didn't...she explained things even about traffic flow...and stuff that I still have no vocabulary for, but said "In this situation do this, for this reason..." And there was never some arbitrary set of instructions, there was always...a reason and an explanation for it.' (Saul, 30s)

Experienced cyclists especially appreciated the skills required to train people who might not feel in need of training—as Zoe explained, ‘He sort of pitched the lessons, he was like “I know you know how it is, but...here’s a couple of tips”’. The general feeling among the participants was that the trainers were capable of adapting their teaching to the special requirements of the trainees.

Suggestions for improvement

The participants also discussed further ways to improve the delivery of cycle training. While all stressed the importance for councils to continue offering free cycle training, some thought it would be essential for providers to pay special attention to those beginners who have only taken part in one lesson and may need extra support. Several less experienced trainees explained that they wanted to cycle a bit before taking another lesson, but had not yet booked one:

‘they [cycle training providers] wanted a booking quite close to my first one, et cetera, and like a week after...It wasn’t convenient, I just let it go...But...I wish I could go back or...I hope to go back.’ (Kumar, 30s)

‘I think for me, I was hoping to get a bit more experience by myself and then make, make a potential second lesson a bit more...valuable, but haven’t got around to it yet...’ (Tim, 30s)

‘Maybe it would have been useful for you if somebody had rung you up and said...like, just a phone call, “How are you getting on?” Then they know how to come out with little...come and take you out again...’ (Judith, 50s)

Most trainees praised the booking process, but a few said that arranging a lesson had taken longer than expected. As Marc explained, ‘I remember I had to make like 3 or 4 calls, which I thought was like a bit...it was a bit tiresome’ Participants also discussed alternative ways to broaden the uptake of cycle training, for instance by marketing it more widely on cycling-related online forums, at the docking stations for Cycle Hire bikes and through the Cycle to Work Scheme. Some argued that cycle training could be made more attractive to men by including an element of action and competitiveness, for instance through re-branding it as ‘Speed Cycling’ or, as Saul suggested, by using a points system similar to the TfL Cycle Challenge, as this gives people ‘a sense of reward’.

One final point raised by trainees was that asking people to complete a TfL survey less than a year after their lesson might result in levels of cycling being suppressed. For instance, Judith explained that she had done her training in the autumn but then received her follow-up survey in the winter, and she does not cycle to work when it rains. Judith said she had felt de-motivated because her level of cycling was being recorded as lower than it was during the rest of the year.

Trainers

Professional identity

Recently trained and more experienced instructors mentioned various reasons for undertaking instructor training to eventually become trainers themselves. One common response was that cycling had always been an important part of their identity and everyday life, and that working as an instructor was therefore a natural choice for them. The trainers came from varied professional backgrounds and were usually looking for an alternative means of income:

‘Decided to do it because I was bored of working in an office... and when [a cycle training provider] had set up... they’d leave postcards in the building I was working in and I was just thinking what a fantastic idea, what a great scheme they’re doing and so on... then I knew somebody else who’d done it and it seemed like a good thing to do’. (Christopher, 50s)

'I've been a freelance IT consultant for quite a bit and the market's quite tricky at the moment. I don't need to earn too much...so I was looking for something more flexible, less pressured'. (Keith, 60s)

'I saw it as an ideal way to earn a living, especially through the summer where in the past I've done security work, been in hot stuffy buildings or been in an office environment, when I'd rather be outside in the fresh air and do something I enjoy.' (Jacob, 30s)

During the time of the interview, most instructors worked for private cycle training providers. Recently trained ones were usually working or about to be working as assistant instructors at schools, and did not rely on cycle training as their main means of income. More experienced instructors worked with both school groups and adults, and they viewed cycle training as a full time job, although some of them had to look for other work during the quieter winter months of December, January and February:

'in terms of how often I work, as time's gone on, I've become more regular. I'd say now, I'm working 40 weeks of the year, I'd say, on average.' (Ralph, 60s)

'I train *now* pretty much 5 days a week, sometimes 6 days a week, unless I've got other freelance work'. (Graham, 50s)

'I tend to do a school course every week and a couple of individuals...I'm just teaching full time...' (Alan, 40s)

Both recently trained instructors and more experienced ones spoke at length about the instructor training course they had attended. They felt that it had turned them into better cyclists and teachers, and had further encouraged them to become instructors themselves:

'I trained with [company] and...and thought they delivered an absolutely blinding training course, it was really excellent...Really well structured, laid out...certainly made me reappraise elements of cycling.' (Christopher, 50s)

'I've changed the way I cycle because of the training we did and really, I suppose I thought I knew how to cycle but there were many little points...' (Malcolm, 60s)

'I had to change my habits completely, basically...And...that was a good thing...in many ways, to know that, okay, "I've changed my habits, now I'm gonna be asking other people to change their habits."' (Graham, 50s)

More advanced instructors often referred to their day-to-day experiences as trainers, and said that positive encounters with different kinds of trainees strengthened their professional identity and also gave them plenty of enjoyment. All instructors took great pleasure in cycling around the city, meeting new people and teaching them a valuable and potentially life saving skill:

'you can see the progression of the person, whether it's a child or an adult. Whatever you're teaching. With cycling, especially, because it has actually to do with themselves, at the end of the day, and it gives them such esteem, and they feel so good about it when they can actually do it...and when they can stop safely, you can see the excitement on their faces...' (Sally, 60s)

'You know, people enjoy the training...The children feel like, feel like grown-ups from doing it, you know. We use the road, they're on the road and, you know, they love it. And...adults always, at the

end of it, they always say the same sort of things, like “Why, I didn’t know I had so much to learn, it’s great, I feel much more confident.”” (Alan, 40s)

By passing on the ability to cycle, the instructors were, Jacob argued, ‘taking part in doing something responsible to help others on the road’ by fostering safer and more collaborative traffic environments’. Graham said that it ‘makes the street a happier place if people communicate well. Friendlier place...’ Cycle training adds to the wellbeing of the city. Sally stressed that teaching cycling is about ‘everything’, ‘fresh air and healthy living’. And Alan argued that cycle trainers are ‘agents of positive change’, ‘improving the health outcomes of the entire city in a very small way’.

Experiences of training

The experienced instructors spoke a lot about the actual practice of training, and especially the skills required by a successful trainer. A good teacher needs to be highly flexible in order to deliver lessons effectively to different kinds of people in varying environments. The instructors defined flexibility as the ability to assess the trainees and adapt the lesson to their skill levels:

‘it depends on the individual. Some person, they might just see it as “Oh, this is just a bit of fun”, you know, “I don’t want to take it too seriously.” So you have to kind of pitch it at that level. Other people...they’re all business the want to know exactly the right way to do things...’ (Jacob, 30s)

‘...Everyday is a bit different, even though you’re teaching the same thing, the people you meet are different, the schools you go in are different...the...you know, how it, how you have to engage with different people, is a challenge’. (Graham, 50s)

Flexibility was helpful when looking for the right teaching environment. As the lessons often unfolded in actual traffic, where circumstances were shifting all the time, the trainers had to develop a broader awareness of the varied factors that shaped the training situation:

‘you know, it’s not just thinking in two dimensions it’s really all-round thinking: “okay, the rush hour’s coming, we must really get this done before that happens...”’ (Emily, 50s)

‘every risk assessment you do...is like constant and constantly changing when you’re out there with people. You might be cycling behind someone...and you’re having to risk assess. “How can I, how can I deal with this situation?” Not just me on the road, them on the road too.’ (Graham, 50s)

The instructors mentioned planning and preparation as essential features of cycle training. Some said they started to plan their lesson by calling the clients to learn about their preferences and skills. Instructors also discussed how they used maps to find a good training environment and how they always performed a risk assessment by visiting the location before the session:

‘I personally would have a phone interview with them where I would have...I’d print my own lists of questions and ask the questions about their cycle experiences, their ability levels and what their aims and objectives are for cycle training.’ (Jacob, 30s)

‘It depends on the session, but at the very minimum, I do a sort of risk assessment of roads and routes that we’re gonna use, which usually is done on paper, to begin with, with a map and then I ride it before the session’. (Alan, 40s)

‘...route planning, risk assessments and so on, so there’s a fair amount of preparation that goes on before and you also need to have a reasonably well structured...plan of what you’re going to teach and the order you’re going to teach it in, in your own mind.’ (Malcolm, 60s)

Instructors often stressed the importance of being 'confident' and 'assertive' with the trainees, as this encouraged them to be more proactive in traffic. The instructors felt that that cycling is primarily about keeping safe, even if this involves telling clients things 'that they don't want to hear' (Alan) about their cycling. For this reason, confidence and assertiveness were among the most essential qualities of a cyclist that the instructors hoped to transmit to their trainees:

'It is assertive cycling, which simply means that you...you know, it's like a right isn't there unless it's exercised, right. So, so, you know...you occupy the road where you need to, but that doesn't mean that you're foolishly pushing yourself in front of traffic and stuff.' (Alan, 40s)

'as soon as they [trainees] start to become scared or intimidated by a road user, the road user will take advantage of that scenario and they will pass you...put you in danger. So, a lot of the time you have to put across to the client that actually self-confidence, them being assertive on the road is very important, particularly when they're nervous.' (Jacob, 30s)

Suggestions for improvement

While the instructors talked a lot about their positive experiences, they also made it clear that further changes are required to improve the provision and quality of cycle training. A majority of their comments had to do with the practical organisation of cycle training work. For instance, some instructors had experienced initial difficulties in getting into the industry:

'I worked part time for an independent cycle shop and they were going to launch cycle training, as a "have some cycle training with your new bike". And they looked for people to do it, I volunteered. I did the course and shortly after we'd completed the course, the company decided they weren't going to launch and put the whole thing on hold [...] And I've been trying to find friends and acquaintances...but I've had no response in 3 months...' (Malcolm, 60s)

'I think the training we received is pretty good. What I felt was lacking was...any career path during the training about how, how you go out and get a job...'. (Graham, 50s)

Many instructors liked the flexibility of being self-employed as it allowed them to combine work with other private and professional commitments. While they also accepted that freelance work requires constant networking and promoting of one's services, they felt that the job sometimes involves too much uncertainty. Work opportunities vary throughout the year and instructors may have to bear the cancellation risk. Several instructors discussed these less encouraging aspects:

'you have to have other means of income as well, possibly in the long term. I mean, for myself, during next winter, I certainly don't want to have this as my only means of income, because it's going to be very limited at that time.' (Jacob, 30s)

'you get sent an email saying "Can you do this work?" And, and you have to...respond as quick as you can if you want that work, otherwise you might miss it." If you're on holiday, you might miss...the booking up for the whole of the autumn term, during holiday in August, you know...Because the emails might go out and you don't reply for 2 weeks...' (Graham, 50s)

'I work full time at it, and...earn enough to get by...I don't earn a fortune, but I earn enough to get by, but over the last 3 years, it's just gone down and down and down, because of inflation, and we've had, there's no pay rise...we're paid less than football coaches...for most districts, by most local authorities, and we're taking children out onto the street...right?' (Alan, 40s)

Experienced instructors especially felt that more could be done to standardise training practices to strengthen the quality of teaching, particularly in the context of the country as a whole, because 'everybody is doing slightly different things' (Alan). Some of the recently trained instructors cited confusion over the boundaries of their work, for example, the extent to which an instructor would be expected or allowed to fix mechanical problems on the bike of a client. Instructors also said they would like to have more teaching and reading materials available:

'But in terms of actually learning materials and things you can use with clients, like you were mentioning flash cards for rainy days, we don't really have anything like that and we're left to our own devices really to kind of...to do things when there's wet weather or can't make use of that training time outside...' (Jacob, 30s)

'I mean I had to do a sheet at one point, which highlighted...you know, sort of...rules of the roads stuff, so a link to the Highway Code website...bike maintenance, link to Park Tools, and to Bicycle Tutor.com, which is a very good source of information...LCC [London Cycling Campaign], local groups...So, sort of again...But, to the best of my knowledge...none of the training organizations provide this.' (Christopher, 50s)

Further professionalisation was often seen as being in the interests of both trainers and the industry: 'It's about professionalizing the whole industry, not just in terms of remuneration but in terms of rigour' (Alan). This was seen as requiring more commitment from both cycle training providers and local authorities, and hiring full time staff and investing in equipment.

Drivers

Professional identity

The Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers we interviewed had been working as professional drivers for different lengths of time, on average some 20 years. During the time of the interview, they drove vehicles of different sizes within London, from delivery vehicles of 7.5 tonnes to 8 wheel tipper lorries of 32 tonnes. The drivers stressed the difficulty of the job, especially having to operate a large vehicle in congested urban spaces while interacting with other road users:

'The problem is London roads...When they first built them...there wasn't even lorries...' (Trevor, 50s)

'It's a nightmare...There's a lot more traffic on the roads, you know what I mean...' (Gavin, 50s)

'the number of traffic on the road has increased, which...puts more pressure on the people. And the road layout has improved. Numerous markings on the road, numerous lightings as well, so...And the vehicle itself has become bigger and bigger'. (Rufus, 30s)

The interviewees felt that driving had become more difficult partly because of the growing number of cyclists on the roads. According to the drivers, many of the cyclists they encountered on a daily basis were unpredictable on the bike, not communicating clearly enough their intentions to other road users, and sometimes even behaving in a confrontational manner:

'It was a male cyclist. I was sitting in the traffic. He's come down and there's a van alongside me. He misjudged it and hit the back of the lorry with the handlebar. And then...he said to me "You hit me." And I said "Why, I was standing still."' (Ian, 50s)

'[When] we go down New Kings Road we've got to do a left inward turn there...We're turning and just can't get...you know, you've got to stay there, because...there's a bike lane there, you know, they just keep coming all the time, you just don't have a break...' (Roger, 50s)

'How many cyclists bother to even see if the driver has noticed that they're there...' (Rufus, 30s)

The drivers discussed their professional training, saying that it had prepared them for encounters with various road users and had given them ability to anticipate others' actions. However, they also argued that they were sometimes expected to carry a disproportionate amount of responsibility for events in traffic, especially for the mistakes of other road users. For this reason, they felt that the general public often puts the blame directly on drivers in the case of accidents:

'So, if you have an accident, automatically, it's the drivers fault...If it's a heavy goods, it's the driver's fault...straight away...' (Ian, 50s)

'...we don't go out wanting to hurt anyone. We want to go out and do our work and come home. We'll be a little bit tired, but with a bit of money in the back pocket for doing it...And that's it, you know, there's no malice'. (Barry, 40s)

'It's only...lack of awareness that makes them think that way. If they get to understand how the truck drivers are...seeing things, they would know that it's not really about going about whacking people'. (Rufus, 30s)

The drivers thought that they had been unreasonably 'stigmatised as sort of cycle killers' (Barry). They spoke about the close calls and accidents they and their colleagues had experienced, and stressed how tragic and traumatising such incidents are for all parties involved. At the same time, they felt that something needed to be done in order to organise traffic in a safer way, and also to make different types of road users respect and understand one another a little better.

Experiences of training

All the drivers we interviewed had taken part in cycle training to gain their certificate of professional competence (CPC). They had trained in a group with their colleagues, initially practicing basic bike handling skills in a safe setting, and then moving onto quiet roads, where they would try out various turns and moving through less congested junctions:

'Yeah, it was there in the yard. They showed you how to get on the bike, get off the bike.....Use your brake, look over your shoulder when you're turning right, look over your shoulder before you put your hand out...' (Henry, 60s)

'What they did...they...the initial thing, because people hadn't ridden on a bike...we...rode to the park and we went round the park. And, they wanted to make sure that we could do a controlled stop...on the bike. Basically driving with one hand on the handlebars. It's just basics, because I don't think they wanted us to go out on the road without that. And of course as soon as we could do that...we then did lots of kind of junction maneuvers and things like that...right hand turns where you're taking your one hand off and where there was all wobbly...' (Trevor, 50s)

Most HGV drivers praised the cycle training they had received. They said it had made them more aware of cyclists and that they had gained deeper insight into the actual experience of cycling in urban spaces. Drivers mentioned that they had started to understand why cyclists act in certain ways in traffic, for instance occupying the primary position on the road and seeking eye contact:

'...you tend to wonder why do bikers all of a sudden come riding in front of you...Why do you even have a bike...bay [Advanced Stop Lines] right in front of the lorry...To some, that looks stupid. But then [during] the training, you guys [instructors] were able to explain the reason...Sometimes it's about you, taking, you know...like standing your ground, "This is where I'm going"'. (Rufus, 30s)

'And the guy [instructor] said to us, you know, "You're on a cycle, you look back, make eye contact with that [HGV driver]. You're a little bit safer and he's seen you. He knows you've seen him. And there's a little bit of interaction there. And you both go off and do your own thing, and you both know you're each...you're both there.'" (Trevor, 50s)

Some interviewees thought that the on-bike awareness training was highly educational in terms of making them realise the sense of vulnerability that cyclists experience as they navigate among vehicles of different sizes in the everyday urban traffic:

'It opened your eyes to the dangers they [cyclists] do actually have and...when you [were] on it, on the bike itself...You think...imagine that tipper [lorry] coming beside you and you're wobbly.' (Ian, 50s)

'There was, bear in mind, only cars and little vans, but they're coming at you and you're right over in the middle of the road. And then you've got cars coming up on the left hand side of you. So, you know, you're in no man's land. I felt vulnerable'. (Trevor, 50s)

The interviewees felt that the instructors were skilled and effective teachers. They were especially pleased with the instructors' balanced view on the interaction between cyclists and other road users, and thought that they were able to relate to the needs of professional drivers as well:

'They didn't defend just the cyclists...They knew exactly our position as HGV drivers...' (Gavin, 50s)

'They knew what they were talking about....They were professional cyclists.' (Richard, 50s)

'I think everyone enjoyed it. It was fun, it was a challenge...and it was...a good bit of banter between the instructors and...our guys'. (Barry, 40s)

Although most drivers had cycled sporadically before, the training did not encourage them to pick up cycling. One driver said he cycled occasionally for pleasure, but others felt it was too dangerous to cycle on roads, especially in London. Another driver, Ray, commented that based on 'what we found out just on a [small] road like that...God knows what it's like in the middle of London'.

Suggestions for improvement

Some of the interviewees discussed ideas on how the cycle training for HGV drivers could be further improved, for instance, by taking drivers out to a busy junction to examine interactions between cyclists and different road users. The drivers also argued that making traffic a better place for everyone requires a widespread education of the general public about the presence of HGVs in traffic. There was debate about to what extent HGV drivers actually need cycle training and drivers said that all cyclists should be encouraged or even compelled to undergo training:

'if you're talking about...lecturing the people, the professionals and then to stop it...it would not really help that much...as...you going into the heart of the problem, which is then [the] public.' (Rufus, 30s)

'What I'm saying is that it's no good teaching us to ride a bike, it's to teach the people to ride the bikes, because...They need a copper, you need a copper...stop them and fine them...or make them

go through the test'. (Roger, 50s)

'if you had sensible retailers that said, we're going to run a...proficiency course for first time... [cycle] buyers or something to give them a bit of road sense on day one or...you know...give you a little certificate to take away...and when you buy the next bike you don't need to do another course...And in that way, we can advise you of the hazards and dangers that are out there, but...how do you capture all of the cyclists...without license and registration and bikes and stuff like that....Yeah, a big job...' (Barry, 40s)

The drivers argued that the HGV perspective could be incorporated into the cycle training, so that cyclists would begin to understand how drivers perceive traffic. Both of the companies that the interviewees worked for were actively involved with TfL in the development of cycle training. One of the companies took part in the 'Exchanging places' programme that enables cyclists to sit in an HGV and experience traffic from the limited perspective of the driver. Trevor said: 'when we get the cyclists in, they sit in the lorry, and they're amazed by the fact that there is a blind spot'.

The drivers talked about cycle-friendly technologies, such as LED lighting, cameras, sensors and warning noises. They felt that these technologies should be a legal requirement. A lot of the bigger companies use them, but not all, yet the cost is small considered in proportion to other costs: 'we spend 130 000 pounds typically on a dustcart...So, a couple of thousands...over the life of the contract which could be 7, 10, 14 years...it's not a great deal' (Barry). These technologies were however described as limited and sometimes even distracting for the drivers:

'even with that camera, if they're [cyclists] not wearing something shiny and bright and visible...you're not always going to see them, because they can camouflage themselves quite easily on a dark wet morning...and blend in with everything else if they're not wearing sort of wearing high visibility clothing...' (Barry, 40s)

'how I think it has actually gotten, there's too much information. You can't, you really can't take it all in. We've put the mirrors on, we got the side sensors on...on the vehicles...to warn of anyone in close proximity. We've got the audible warning to say the vehicle's turning left...' (Trevor, 50s)

The interviewees also commented on the traffic infrastructure, and how it shapes their perception of cyclists. For the drivers, being able to see cyclists and anticipate their actions is important. One driver praised the Advanced Stop Lines (ASLs) because '[cyclists] all come in front of you. You know that they're there'. Nevertheless, other drivers were less certain of their positive impact:

'[Cyclists] all dive about in front of you...They all push in front of you, they all come and go like that, in front of you...When you go and turn off, they're wobbling off up the road like that...I'm like sitting there and waiting for them to go...' (Roger, 50s)

Drivers stressed that cyclists should be treated like other transport modes, for example fined if they break traffic laws. They commented upon the fact that cyclists do not always use cycle lanes, saying that this often led to ambiguous and potentially dangerous situations. Finally, some argued that cyclists should be separated from motor traffic, to increase traffic safety by minimising encounters between cyclists and motor vehicles.

Cycling co-ordinator

The cycling co-ordinator came from a borough in London that had trained large numbers of cyclists. Whereas some boroughs contract cycle training out to various training organisations, the borough he worked for directly organises the provision of training:

'We offer them [instructors] work, they do the work, they file an invoice for the work they've done. [...] it's more cost effective and, I mean, I've always done it in-house but I think there's, you can build up a better relationship with schools and other organisations because you are the face of it. You're not just some organisation that comes in and books this.'

The co-ordinator was on a short-term contract and the instructors he managed were working on a self-employed basis, both of which created specific challenges for managing training and improving its quality. This borough primarily manages quality through a mentoring process and through pairing less and more experienced instructors together:

'I try and work at least one course with all new instructors that come in so I can see what they're like, and also I pair them off. So, if you've got a new instructor, you pair them off with an experienced instructor and you get feedback that way and you kind of mentor them through the process, and some people, it's just a case of they're, you know, they're a good communicator, they're great working with kids, they just need to remember, brush up on the syllabus, so they'll be fine'.

The co-ordinator expressed concern that the devolution of funding decisions on cycle training meant large differences between boroughs were likely to develop based on local attitudes towards cycling. He also felt that councillors were confused about the process:

'They've changed the way the funding process happens. Previously, cycle training money was ring-fenced. They said, "You've got three million pounds for London, apply to us, tell us how much you want" but then they changed the process, [Mayor] Boris [Johnson], as part of his sort of devolution to the Boroughs, so now cycle training money comes as just a bulk package. It's one scheme under a massive pot of money, and if the Borough decided they don't want to do it, they don't have to do it. So, it's kind of an internal bidding process within the Borough to decide how much you get, so you need the support of Councillors and senior management and er... yeah, that's not always there.'

Other challenges included not having a roadworthy bike, which is a big issue for many schools, especially in poorer areas. Another equity concern is that middle class parents may find it easier to seek out information about cycle training, meaning that when less well-off parents find out about it, the places are already gone. Schools having pool bikes and delivering their own training might be one way of addressing this problem, and the co-ordinator emphasised in particular the importance of individual adults within schools in shaping take-up of cycling among pupils:

'she's [teacher at a primary school] not a massive cyclist herself but she's just, she's really passionate about the kids and she wants to give all the kids who haven't got a bike a chance, and it's, it needs that person. But there's always one cyclist in a school. Out of the whole school population, there's bound to be one. And most cyclists believe in it and are really keen about it and would love more people to do it so, erm... it's just finding that person.'

The co-ordinator also mentioned a scheme for secondary school students, which works on a one-to-one basis, with two sessions, one focused on riding and the other on route planning. The co-ordinator saw the one-to-one approach as improving effectiveness with this age group and also as enhancing take-up by schools, because only one young person at a time would be leaving class. Take-up of one-to-one lessons at schools is primarily by boys whereas adult cycle training predominantly attracts women, though the co-ordinator had lately seen a change in attitudes:

‘Over the years, more and more men have signed up, beginners and more and more men are doing it. I think its become more widespread and the knowledge about cycle training and what it is, and it’s not some patronising session, it’s just some really, really useful information for a city that hasn’t been designed for cyclists’.

The co-ordinator felt the Cycle Hire scheme and the TfL advertising campaign ‘Catch up with the bicycle’ had contributed to increased demand for adult lessons over the summer. He thought there was potential for Boroughs to target businesses, particularly where companies might be bidding for public sector contracts or where organisations presented themselves as green. Businesses were a potential additional source of income identified along with a variety of other streams, such as the National Lottery. Finally, the borough co-ordinator believed that health funding should be available to support cycle training, because getting children to cycle to school can help protect against health problems further down the line.

How Training Works

This section discusses the broader implications of our research findings. The experiences of cycle training among trainees, trainers and HGV drivers have led us to tentatively identify six key areas where training practices may affect people’s experiences of cycling and cyclists:

- **Awareness:** cycle training develops people’s awareness of their position in traffic and how different transport modes interact with one another.
- **Communication:** cycle training shows people how to communicate effectively with other road users.
- **Skill:** cycle training prepares people to respond to diverse situations by learning various skills, such as specific cycling techniques and route planning.
- **Emotion:** cycle training teaches people how to deal with different kinds of emotions involved in traffic interactions.
- **Identity:** cycle training affects the way people see themselves as cyclists, and affects how people experience their environment and themselves as individuals.
- **Reflection:** cycle training encourages people to adopt a reflective attitude to daily traffic and the problems of everyday cycling.

All these areas are related. On the basis of the interviews we have discussed in the previous section, it appears that most training sessions revolve around the six areas, although they may take different shapes in actual situations. Below we discuss each of these areas in brief.

Awareness

Cycle training invites cyclists to see themselves as participants within everyday traffic environments. The instructors stressed that it is essential to encourage cyclists to approach traffic in the broadest possible manner, taking into account not only their own behaviour as cyclists but observing closely other road users and how their behaviour affects and is affected by cyclists.

Awareness of how traffic situations operate can increase knowledge of how and why different road users respond to one another in certain ways. For instance, riding a bike made some of the HGV drivers understand why cyclists might ride in the middle of the lane. Conversely, instructors described how cyclists were made aware of the expectations of other road users and how to read their behaviour, such as an HGV moving right before a left turn. Most trainees, including HGV drivers, said that the training had broadened their awareness of relations between different road users.

Communication

Cycle training aims to improve communication between cyclists and other road users. Trainers emphasised communication – for example, being able to clearly indicate one’s position and intentions in traffic by hand signalling and establishing eye contact with others – as an important component of their teaching, not only to make cycling safer but also to establish the status of cyclists as equal road users.

One problem that HGV drivers said they faced when interacting with cyclists was a difficulty in discerning their intentions in various situations. They linked this to a perception of cyclists as unpredictable, even irresponsible participants in daily traffic. Many trainees mentioned that learning how to make eye contact with other road users was an important moment, as it showed them that it is possible for a cyclist to engage actively with other road users and also to be understood by them.

Skill

Cycle training teaches people useful mobility skills that may be applied in other situations beyond cycling. A recurrent response among trainees was that they did not know there was so much to learn about cycling to improve one’s safety and to make cycling enjoyable. Instructors were multi-skilled professionals, who could teach on diverse topics, from the actual embodied technique of cycling and the use of maps in route planning to adjusting and fixing a bike.

Approaching cycling as a skilled activity was reassuring for less experienced trainees as it made them aware that there are simple techniques one may use to make traffic more manageable, while more experienced cyclists realised that they may constantly improve as cyclists. The training indicates that cycling, like any other form of mobility, is about lifelong learning, where one builds on the skills one already has. The instructors themselves serve as an example of this attitude, having undergone various training courses to further improve their cycling.

Emotion

Cycle training enables people to deal more effectively with the emotional challenge of moving in daily traffic. Most trainees mentioned feelings of uncertainty, vulnerability and fear as the primary reason for booking a lesson. The same trainees suggested that their lesson had helped them to handle these unpleasant emotions, for instance by communicating more actively with other road users and by cycling in an assertive manner. As several trainees further argued, increased confidence contributed to their sense of enjoyment while cycling in the city.

Cycle training can also increase the ability of road users to empathise with one another. As the comments from HGV drivers make clear, other road users may learn about the experiences of cyclists by actually cycling themselves. Being placed in the position of a cyclist and going through some of the bodily sensations and emotions experienced by cyclists in everyday traffic settings may have a positive impact on the ability of drivers to empathise with cyclists. Some of the cyclists

mentioned that they had become better drivers as a result of the training, starting to show more consideration and understanding towards other road users and especially cyclists.

Identity

Cycle training strengthens the identity of cyclists in traffic by making trainees feel that they are equal to other forms of mobility and contribute in essential ways to the daily traffic. Most trainees said that attending a lesson convinced them of their rights and responsibilities as cyclists. They had both developed a stronger sense of their role in traffic and a sense that being a cyclist involves certain responsibilities, such as communicating one's intentions to others in a clear way.

Training also affects the identities of people in a more fundamental manner. Several trainees argued that cycling had not simply become a mode of transport for them but had started to shape their daily lives and experiences in positive ways, for instance by opening new possibilities for socialising. One beginning cyclist, Kumar, was able to cycle together with his family members as a result of the training. And a more experienced cyclist, Saskia, mentioned that training with colleagues improved the sense of togetherness at work, because now she and her colleagues had all become part of the cycling culture, sharing a common experience with one another.

Reflection

Cycle training invites a reflective attitude in people by making them think in a critical way about their surroundings. Many trainees said that they had become more alert in traffic, reflecting actively on what they see. They described how instructors had reminded them to look out for possible sources of danger not only from other road users but also from the road layout. For instance, instructors had told trainees to be sceptical of cycle lanes, as they are sometimes drawn in a way that may lead to misunderstandings between road users, and do not always indicate the safest place for a cyclist due to, among other things, parked cars and debris in the gutter.

Critical reflection involves the realisation that traffic could always be arranged in another way. Some trainees had begun to view traffic environments in a new light, noticing aspects that they felt needed rearranging or redesigning. While professional HGV drivers already possessed detailed knowledge of traffic, some thought that cycle training had made them think more about ways of designing traffic and vehicles in a manner that adds to the safety of both cyclists and HGV drivers. This shows that cycle training encourages critical debate about the organisation of daily traffic.

Conclusion

This report has discussed experiences of cycle training in London on the basis of interviews with trainees, trainers, a borough cycling co-ordinator and professional HGV drivers who have participated in on-bike cycle awareness training. The interviews indicate that training affects cyclists in a positive way, adding to their confidence and safety in traffic, as well as making cycling more enjoyable. Training also allows other road users to experience traffic from the viewpoint of cyclists, and HGV drivers argued that they had begun to understand cyclists better because of the training. For this reason, cycle training can improve the communication among different groups of road users, and help to foster safer and more collaborative traffic environments.

While all interviewees were supportive of cycle training, some of them argued that its quality and organisation could be further improved. Trainees felt that newer cyclists might need extra support during training and that more male cyclists should be encouraged to take part. The HGV drivers argued that all cyclists could be obliged to attend training as this would make roads safer both for cyclists and other forms of mobility. Trainers and the borough co-ordinator felt that cycle training

needs to be standardised to ensure its quality, and that the working conditions of trainers, including employment terms and wages, require improving.

Finally, we have identified six areas where cycle training affects people's experiences of cycling and cyclists in London. These areas—*awareness, communication, skill, emotion, identity and reflection*—are interrelated and emerge in different combinations in actual training situations. For instance, they depend on various factors, such as the training environment and the prior skills and attitudes of the trainees. However, the interviews we have conducted with both trainees and trainers suggest that several of these key areas are often covered during a training session.

It is important to note that the six areas we have listed do not only concern cycling, but everyday traffic more broadly. Cycle training is not simply about cycling, but about cultivating a broader understanding of oneself as a road user. From our interviews with trainers and trainees, we have learned that cycle training encourages people to reflect critically on their mobility and their relations to others in traffic. This generates additional educational potential in cycle training, and we suggest that the trainees and trainers are further consulted in shaping this potential.

