

Devolution in England

Opportunities for
cycling and walking?



Making cycling a manifesto issue

- 2017 – Andy Burnham pledges to build a major new cycling network.
- Says he wants a dedicated cycling budget for the city, a bike share scheme, and the ultimate goal of reaching London's funding levels for cycling.
- Commits to draw up a clear plan for cycling in his first 100 days.



What happened?

- First 100 days – Chris Boardman appointed as Greater Manchester’s first cycling and walking commissioner.
- Consultations on new network start.
- December 2017 – ‘Made to Move – 15 steps to transform Greater Manchester by changing how we get around’.
- July 2018 – Bee Network launched, with plans for 1,800 miles of routes and 2,400 new crossings.



‘Why cycle investment will be increased whoever becomes West Midlands mayor’

- April 2017 Birmingham headline.
- ‘Local members of campaign group Cycling UK persuaded five candidates to set targets for a five per cent increase in the number of journeys by bike by 2023 and to create a linked cycle network across the West Midlands.’
- Andy Street – “In London, spending per head on sustainable transport is around £20. In the West Midlands it is 25p – that is clearly unacceptable and as Mayor I am committing to achieving a 40-fold increase”.



London mayors and cycling – it's political



Ken Livingstone – introduced London's first hire bike scheme in 2008



Boris Johnson – claimed he decided to run for mayor after almost being 'minced' by one of Ken's 'bendy buses'.



Sadik Khan – made pledges at the mayoral hustings and had quadrupled the length of the strategic cycle network

What's coming with devolution & reorganisation?

England Devolution Bill

- Overarching goal to spread devolution to more areas across England.
- Want to replace two tier system with strong unitary councils which can support effective mayoral strategic authorities.
- Six areas chosen for the Devolution Priority Programme, including Hampshire and the Solent.
- Elections next May, with existing councils replaced by unitaries and a mayoral strategic authority by 2028.
- Consultation ongoing to 11 January.

UPDATE : December 2025 - the Government has postponed mayoral elections in these areas by two years. New schedules yet to be announced.

Who has transport powers in a strategic authority?

Strategic authorities have several 'competencies' – the powers they exercise, including for transport and infrastructure – so they:

- Are the Local Transport Authority for their area.
- Are responsible for publishing a local transport plan.
- Can issue a transport levy on their constituent authorities, to meet the cost of exercising their transport functions.
- Can enter agreements with local highway authorities to delegate or share maintenance / improvement of roads.
- Can also enforce parking, bus lane and moving traffic contraventions (PCNs) – if constituent council already has those powers and consent to SA using them.

Key routes, road use charging and micromobility

Strategic authorities also:

- Have a duty to set up and coordinate a Key Route Network (KRN) – strategically managing important roads / routes.
- Can direct constituent authorities on how they exercise their traffic, permit, street and highways powers on KRN.
- Must prepare report on traffic levels on KRN & can set targets for KRN and proposals to achieve them – including traffic reduction targets.
- Can introduce a road user charging scheme – joint power with constituent authority.
- Can licence micromobility schemes, allowing greater control of bike rental schemes.

Wider powers beyond transport

Strategic authorities also:

- Have a health improvement and health inequalities duty – so they have to have regard to the need to improve people's health and reduce health inequalities when exercising their powers.
- Have to produce a spatial development strategy, enabling them to strategically plan for development across their area.
- Have various compulsory purchase powers which can be used to support sustainable development.

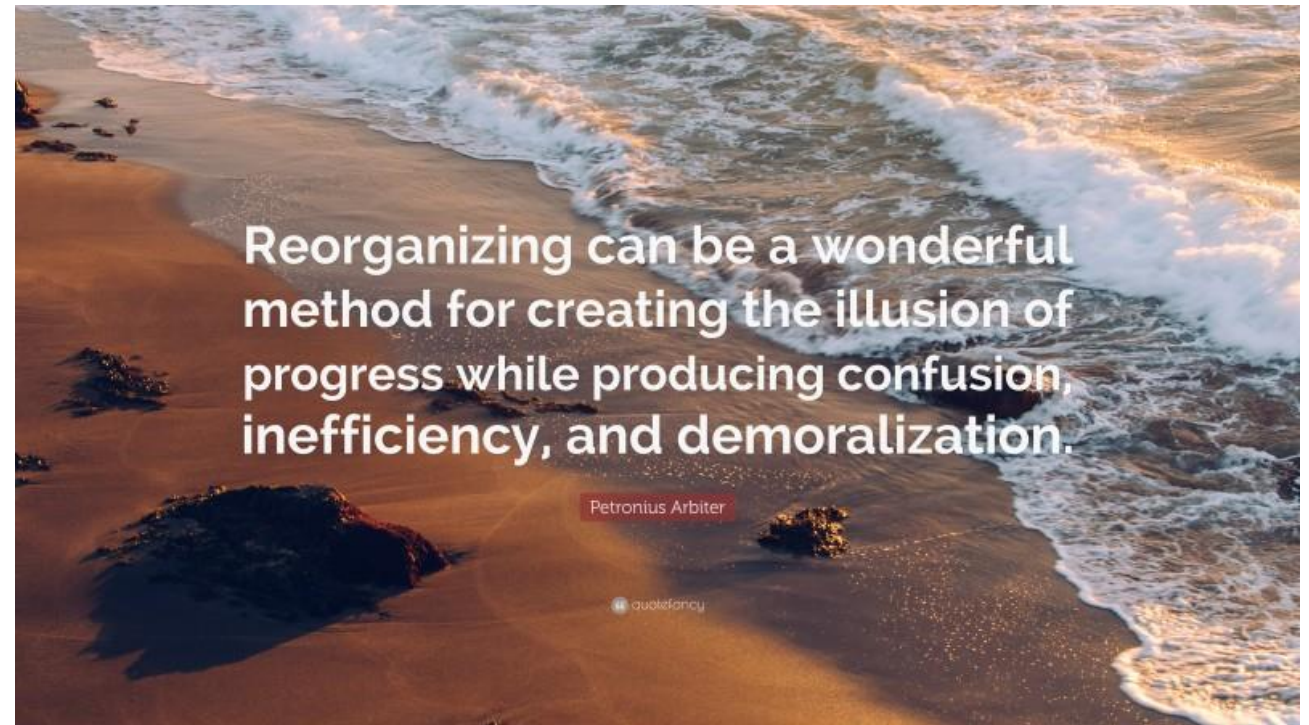
Devolution – opportunities and problems

- People hold an elected mayor accountable for transport – it's more difficult to pass the buck.
- Active travel has moved up the political agenda in places where they have an elected mayor – and not just within cities.
- Not always, but the two tier system has often presented further hurdles for active travel delivery.
- Networks which end at local boundaries are problematic, so wider strategic oversight can be helpful.
- The Devolution Bill gives strategic authorities powers which can be used to improve active travel and sustainable transport,



Opportunities – but what about the transition

- What happens with active travel in the transition period?
- Does all progress stop?
- Does the re-org devour all the energy in the room?
- How do you maintain momentum?
- How long until a new system is fully operational and bedded in?



What it means for campaigners?

Opportunities to:

- Focus your campaigning around something specific – a re-org and election.
- Collaborate with new groups with a wider message.
- Move cycling up the agenda – mayoral elections get more coverage and attention.
- Re-think how you campaign, and secure wider support.
- Push for a big vision – mayors want to be remembered for things.



Thank you

