

Cycle campaign toolkit: specification – summary

- from CycleStreets, funded by GeoVation

CycleStreets has secured £27,000 of funding from GeoVation (an Ordnance Survey initiative) to develop a fully-featured web-based toolkit to improve the work of cycling campaign groups around the UK. The toolkit will provide lots of facilities to help groups in their daily campaigning work.

The site will be free-of-charge to any cycle campaign group that wants to use it. Groups will be able to sign up for their own customised toolkit website, which they can customise to look like their website, or even embed the toolkit into their website directly.

The website will be split into two sections. The first is a 'submit a problem' section for people to report problems (e.g. lack of cycle parking), and the second (the main section) to help campaign on each such issue.

The reporting part of the website will enable people – basically anyone who cycles – to report a problem on the street/path network. For instance, the need for a new cycle route through an area, or improvements to a poor-quality cycle lane, or lack of cycle parking. They will do this by clicking on a map, adding a comment about the issue, and giving it a categorisation. If they have a photo, they can add a photo of it too. If a problem is already shown on the map, i.e. someone else has already reported it, others can 'thumb up' the issue (to agree that it's a problem) or add more comments. People can also add examples of good practice.

The second, main section of the website, is for cycle campaigners / cycling campaign groups. It will have a large number of useful and highly-user friendly facilities that are designed to assist groups with their work to improve cycling in their area.

Cycle campaign groups will invite their members to register on the toolkit website, by creating a username and password. When they log in, they will be asked two things. Firstly, (i) what kinds of issues they are interested in (e.g. cycle parking, 20mph zones, etc.), and (ii) where they cycle. For the latter, they can enter places such as home/work, and draw routes between them on the map (using a CycleStreets journey planner tool to semi-automate this process).

The campaigner will now be able to see all the problems that other people have submitted (in the first, 'submit a problem' section of the website). Only the issues relevant to the group's geographical area will be shown, e.g. members of Cambridge Cycling Campaign would only see problems on the map in Cambridge. However, this listing will be filtered so that the only problems visible by default are those with (i) the same themes as the user has selected (e.g. cycle parking, 20mph zones, etc.) and (ii) problems in the areas that they have said they cycle. The idea here is that people who cycle through an area are most likely to be the people interested to campaign on issues there.

Thus, the campaigner will see a set of issues of likely interest to them, which they will have been automatically 'subscribed to'. These problem reports will be visible on a map view (with each 'type' of issue having a different icon on the map) and as a forum-style listing. They can then prioritise submitted issues in various ways, and add other issues not yet shown. Also, a search facility will enable people to find issues easily.

Clicking on an issue will show a full page about that problem. For each issue, the details about it will be shown, together with a Google Street View display, links to similar issues and other summary information.

Campaigners can then discuss it, adding replies. For instance, people might have suggested solutions, e.g. proposing a Dutch-style cycle track if there is space. Others may disagree with the original submitter's assessment of the issue. Campaigners can debate and reply in the usual way.

People can also interact with each of these problem threads by e-mail rather than via the forum view if they prefer. Both types of reply (in the web forum or by e-mail) will be seen by others also following that problem report (whether by web or e-mail).

As well as replying, there are other ways people can advance the issue. There will be 'info blocks' that represent a summary of a suggested solution. For instance, if a problem regards the need to allow two-way cycling in a currently one-way street, campaigners will see an info block on the right which will contain a summary of the key government guidance on that issue, plus examples of where this has been achieved elsewhere, together with handy links. In this way, campaigners no longer need spend lots of time re-repeating research, but instead can just 'drag this box into the conversation'.

Campaigners can also do various other things, such as creating galleries of best practice, creating new info blocks, grouping issues together, and marking issues as examples of good solutions that other groups might find useful. They can also set up meetings, petitions and polls on the issue.

In summary, therefore, campaigners can turn each issue into an assembled and agreed solution, and use this for on-street and in-person campaigning, helped with web-based petitioning tools etc. Campaigners get automatically notified about issues of probable interest to them. Each such issue becomes an automatic mini e-mail list or forum discussion. They will be able to propose solutions and construct a campaign around them.

The toolkit will also automatically show locations of planning applications on the map / forum thread view. (This will only be possible if the data is available for the geographical area concerned.) For instance, if a new building is proposed in an area where someone has already suggested that a cut-through be created, this represents a good opportunity to get the council to require that the developer include this cut-through in their plans and assemble a proposal for this. As with any issue, people can easily unsubscribe from an item on the map, or whitelist it as 'not actually a problem'.

Thematic issues relating to wider political discussions, e.g. trying to get several 20mph zones around a city, or helmet issues, can also be discussed as threads like any other type of issue.

Some groups may find it useful to invite officials from their local council into a discussion. For instance, if a proposal for cycle parking has been submitted, the local council officer might already be aware that the landowner will not budge, despite previous pressure to allow new cycle parking. In that scenario, campaigners would be saved from wasting time campaigning on this. Other people that could be invited in to a discussion might be, for instance, residents' association people that the group is working with. These sorts of people may have useful local knowledge.

Groups can publish the issues they are working on in various ways. For instance, they might want to add a 'What we're working on' page to their website.

Deadlines (with automatic reminders) can be set for issues, e.g. to ensure that a response to a council consultation is sent on time.

Event management will also be possible – groups can schedule and organise internal campaign meetings and publicise external meetings (e.g. with the council).