

Britain's lost cycle network

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Britain's lost cycle network. One thing I have always been impressed with was the cycle network in Germany. This was much better than that in Holland. Part of the reason for this is the need for drainage ditches which limits the paths to one side of the road. In Germany the metalled cycle paths were on both sides of the road. Well it seems that the UK had a cycle network like this at one time and it might in many cases need unburying. Read on below for this interesting post by [Jeremy Williams](#) on the subject reposted by me. Neil A couple of weeks ago I wrote about how London once had the beginnings of [an electric taxi fleet](#), which was then lost for 120 years. Here's another lost sustainable transport initiative that could still be recovered: Britain's 1930s cycle path network. Beginning in 1934, the Ministry of Transport began building cycle paths alongside new roads. They were separate from the traffic and often paved in red tarmac, and connected towns to new suburbs or ran next to new arterial roads. It made particular sense at the time. Fewer people had cars, and many more people cycled. In some parts of the country, over half of road traffic was bicycles. In rush hour that could rise to 80%. The cycle path network grew all through the 30s, before coming to an abrupt end in 1940. The Second World War put huge pressure on government budgets in every department, and the cycle paths were not considered essential spending. Investment in cycling infrastructure paused, and existing paths were not maintained. If we had kept it, Britain may have nurtured and supported a cycling culture like the one found in the Netherlands today. Instead, the planned network and the paths themselves were abandoned – another forgotten casualty of WW2, [like Britain's food culture](#) or that early electric car charging network. They're back in the frame today because historian and cyclist Carlton Reid uncovered references to this lost network in the course of researching a new book ([Bike Boom: The unexpected resurgence of cycling](#)). He was able to map the network using Google Streetview, and has pieced together 300 miles of lost paths. "Some of the 1930s-era cycleways I've identified are either fully or partially buried," he says. "Most are above ground, in full view but they are not recognised for what they are, which is innovative-for-the-time cycle-specific infrastructure that's more than 80-years-old."



What's

really useful about this is that many of these cycle routes could be brought back. Browse through the photos of them, and many of them are just sitting there, needing nothing more than a cycle path designation and some signage. Others are used as off-street parking. Some are overgrown and in need of refurbishment, but even if the path itself is no longer viable, the space for one was allocated when the road was built. It would be much easier to add cycle infrastructure along these existing routes than trying to squeeze it in elsewhere. As a next step, Reid has launched a [crowdfunding project](#) to fund further research and advocacy, all aimed at saving these cycle routes and getting them back in use. It met its target in a matter of days, but you can still support it and play a part in restoring the network.

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