

## Written evidence from Mary Manning (RTL0045)

My experience spanning many years is that UK motorists are able to break the law pretty much with impunity – the likelihood of them being stopped and charged is, I believe, vanishingly remote. They are more likely to fear receiving a parking fine and will take more care in choosing a parking spot, than they exhibit in their driving abilities.

I am a 45-year-old woman; I have been a motorist for 27 years, I hold a full motorbike licence (although I have not regularly ridden a motorbike now for a number of years), I cycle very regularly – it is my main mode of commuting, I walk and run regularly (including to get to work occasionally). I also use public transport, trains, occasionally, and buses less frequently.

Of all the modes of transport I am a user of, it is as a cyclist that I most keenly feel the effects of the wholly, and in my view shamefully, ineffective policing the UK now experiences. I am shocked as a driver at the lawlessness on Britain's roads, with dangerous, even reckless driving being commonplace, and speed limits routinely viewed not as a legal limit but, at best, as 'advisory' – you only need to drive at 20mph in a 20mph zone to experience aggressive tailgating or dangerous overtaking and speeding, accompanied by horn-sounding, or aggressive gestures. I am not a dawdler, I proceed at pace both by car and by bike - I am what is frequently in cycling terms referred to as a 'fast cyclist'. But the threat to life and safety is considerably more visceral when on a bicycle and this is where effective policing matters most, but is completely absent on our roads.

I have commuted from South-East London into work in Central London (adding up to around 3500 miles cycled a year just for commuting, not counting leisure cycling) for over 10 years now. Over this period, I have experienced a frightening increase in aggressive driving – cars tailgating me on my bicycle, trying to push me out of the way – extremely close (illegal) passes, dangerous and foolhardy overtakes, I have had drivers deliberately drive their cars at me (and yes, I am quite sure that it was deliberate and also unprovoked; there are some truly dangerous drivers out there) simply because I was on a bike; I have been spat at, had cigarette butts thrown at me, been dowsed in water, had foul abuse directed at me and much more, none of it provoked, all simply because I ride a bicycle. For any non-cyclist, it might be difficult to appreciate the abuse cyclists can be subjected to, but it is real.

About five years ago, I got so fed up with the aggression displayed by some motorists towards me as a cyclist (and just in case there are any members among you who think cyclists disregard the Highway Code, let me state emphatically that I obey the Highway Code to the letter, whether I'm driving a car or riding my bike), that I started using a helmet-mounted camera in the hope that I would then be able to report incidents to the police and that at least those drivers who showed a careless or dangerous disregard towards me as a vulnerable road user, would at least be dealt with appropriately, in accordance with the law. The most horrific situations experienced by cyclists are things like close passes, left hooks and dangerously close tailgating, all of which are extremely difficult to police, however with video-evidence, the evidence is there, plain to see, legally admissible and by and large, inarguable.

What I have found is that the police show very little interest in vulnerable road users. Cyclists routinely are not taken seriously. Close passes are passed off as 'subjective' – they are not, the

Highway Code is pretty clear and if a driver passes you with two inches to spare between his wing mirror and your elbow, he has passed dangerously close. If you report something to the police, they are more interested in whether you were wearing a helmet or high-vis clothing at the time (neither of which are legal requirements, and neither of which have a scientifically demonstrable benefit – I do wear both though, anyway) than they are in the aggression you experienced.

The UK is in desperate need of a significant increase in the uptake of active travel, whether it is walking, running, using a scooter, rollerblading or cycling – obesity and inactivity are killing record levels, toxic exhaust fumes are shortening people's lives, the congestion on the road network is gradually leading to gridlock – the average speed in London is now considerably slower than I travel on my bike not only leading to stress and frustration, but lost business with the resultant economic impact. However, as long as the roads are as hostile as they currently are, there is no way that less 'brave' people will take up cycling. Is the police entirely to blame for this? Of course not: primarily it is the fault of successive governments to make active travel more attractive by building infrastructure which prioritises active travel and provides a safe environment. But the police do play a very important role and they have failed entirely to take vulnerable road users seriously. With this backdrop, no matter that statistically, it is not that dangerous to cycle – people can very clearly for themselves judge what a hostile environment the roads have become and due to lack of enforcement, drivers, quite literally, get away with murder (look at the alarming rise in hit and run collisions on both cyclists and pedestrians).

My partner needs to hear from me every morning when I get to work, and if I need to leave work a little late, even 15 minutes, I give him a call to say I'll be a little late or else he'll worry that something has happened to me. He is not neurotic, and neither am I. We are both normal people, just living our lives, but in our case, because I cycle, we just have to 'check in' with one another regularly. I know from social media, that this is the experience of many other cyclists – that uncomfortable feeling in the pit of your stomach, if you haven't heard from your loved one, and all only because they happen to cycle.

Daily, on my cycle to work, I see drivers texting while driving, surfing the internet, talking on hand-held devices – sometimes I tap on people's windows and I ask them to stop. Perhaps unsurprisingly this is mostly met with abuse. People know they will not be caught. There is no effective policing. Even when camera footage evidence is submitted to them, in my experience, the police are more likely to present excuses for the offending driver than to take the matter further – and so, recklessly dangerous drivers continue to drive. And careless ones who maybe don't quite understand the space they need to allow cyclists? They don't even get a slap on the wrist, so there isn't even an educational element.

I experienced a terrifying incident nearly two months ago, where a driver deliberately drove his car as close as possible to my rear wheel – he came to within about 4 inches of my rear wheel – then overtook me, but again, as closely as he possibly could without knocking me off, simply because I was on a bike and he didn't like me taking up 'his' road (I'm guessing of course – nothing happened which could explain him endangering me the way he did - and again, I can't stress enough, that this sort of thing does happen, it is not a misinterpretation or a misreading of a situation, there are some seriously awful people out there, who get enjoyment out of using their car as a weapon, to

intimidate and terrify). I was so shaken up, I cycled straight to the police station, when I should have been at work – they could see how shaken up I was, a hardened London cyclist with over ten years' experience of riding in London, but still totally and utterly distressed, in a complete state – I had helmet footage and footage off a rear-facing camera I have fastened to my bike. And was I able to speak with a police officer there and then, as might be expected? No, I was asked to fill in a form, which wasn't even fit for the purpose and told it might take 2-3 weeks for them to get back to me; I am still waiting for a reply, two months on. I missed a day at work because I was so shaken up, and I only report very serious incidents such as this one. And the police have not even bothered to come back to me.

If the UK is serious about getting more people cycling, then the message needs to be very clear – if you intimidate a vulnerable road user, or you drive carelessly or dangerously around a vulnerable road user, you will be prosecuted. But at the moment, that is not at all the case, quite the reverse in fact – the police do not take cyclists seriously at all, and so only the most hardened people cycle. It is not a coincidence that the vast bulk of regular cyclists are male and young. The police are more interested in passing the responsibility of cyclist safety on to the cyclist by suggesting such things as helmets and high-vis; aggression by drivers is ignored.

The message is clear in the UK – if you're a cyclist, your life does not matter. Your safety does not matter. You do not have a right to get from A to B safely. And if a driver uses their car against you in a manner which is careless or dangerous, the police will find a way of 'explaining away' their actions, rather than tackling that driver. Oh, and course they'll ask if you were wearing high-vis, as if that mattered in broad daylight with an aggressive driver trying to intimidate you.

I used to have a great deal of respect for the police, years ago. Now, I have, quite literally, none; it has seeped away, from years of observing their inaction towards cyclists. I know from social media and from talking to other cyclists, that I am far from being alone in this view. I distrust the police entirely, I believe they are not fit for purpose and I believe they have let down vulnerable road users, cyclists particularly, but also motorcyclists and pedestrians, as well as other motorists, very badly. Bad driving is now the norm and they seem to have abdicated their role in enforcing the law. I feel sad at having reached this point after all these years, but my experiences are clear – the police do not care.

The police would no doubt point to statistics relating to death and serious injury experienced by cyclists and no doubt they would suggest that the rates in the UK are relatively low (I have actually heard a senior police officer say this at a talk), but it is insulting to measure cyclist safety purely by how many have died or been seriously injured! It is the everyday hostility – the close passes, the horns honked, the aggressive overtakes – experienced by so many cyclists, and routinely dismissed by the police, which are a more accurate depiction of the experience of cycling in the UK. I hope the committee is aware of Dr Rachel Aldred's important work in this field, with her 'Near Miss' project, in which she has collated numerous everyday experiences by cyclists, which haven't resulted in collision or injury, but which are sometimes terrifying or unpleasant at least, and wholly unacceptable in a civilised society – it is these incidents which police must start taking seriously to send out a message that says that aggression from within a car towards an unprotected human being will not be tolerated.

I grew up abroad and have cycled in many European countries; drivers in the UK easily fall within the most aggressive when it comes to attitudes towards cyclists. Enforcement by the police would certainly go some way towards ameliorating the situation.

I hope also that the committee is aware of Baroness Jenny Jones's report on Britain's Lawless Roads as well as Brake charity's (with Direct Line) report on routine lawbreaking by motorists in the UK. It is clear that the police are failing in their duty to protect those who are most vulnerable on Britain's roads and I hope the committee will make recommendations which force the police to take cyclists' and motorcyclists' reports more seriously.

On a practical note, it is also clear that processes need to be changed. The police have to serve a Notice of intended prosecution within 2 weeks, a wholly unrealistic timeframe. The committee would, in my opinion, achieve much simply by making a recommendation that an NIP can be served within a two-month period. There are many, many examples online reported by cyclists who have been thwarted by this unsatisfactory and unrealistic timeframe.

I hold a great deal of hope in this committee's investigation – there is an urgent and desperate need for the police to hold drivers accountable to a much more significant level than they currently are.

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