

I am here today to speak on the Vision Zero motion being introduced by Cllr Heijltjes and Cllr Wright, and to shed some light on the experience of young people and students in Bath and North East Somerset. Young people are some of the most exposed when it comes to unsafe roads and pedestrian infrastructure. Most of our journeys involve some sort of active travel, walking to bus stops, cycling into the city, sometimes along busy or poorly managed roads.

This is evident. If you google cyclist fatalities in Bath the top results are both people under the age of 30, some of them students coming to and from the University of Bath, where I am a student. One of them a cyclist on North Road, where there was recently a protest over the poor quality of the road surface. Many of our roads are used by an assortment of vehicles from buses and HGVs to bikes and mobility scooters. We need to be ensuring that these spaces are safe, accessible and usable for all of the diverse needs the roads in Bath and North East Somerset cater towards.

I have mentioned the reliance on active travel by young people on students but I will caveat this. Due to the risks experienced on roads many students and young people are reluctant to take longer journeys on bike and foot. I myself have experienced dangerous driving when attempting to cross Lower Bristol Road on multiple occasions, with drivers seemingly ignoring traffic signals and speed limits.

This has led to a difficult situation, an over-reliance on certain bus services such as the U2 or some feeling the need to bring their cars to Bath when starting University courses, increasing congestion and the cities carbon emissions. For other young people this might manifest as getting a lift to school rather than making the journey by foot or bike. Also increasing congestion around our cities, towns and villages. With a safer approach to our roads and pavements we might see an easing of pressure on buses, with more people taking up Tier scooters and cycling without the fear of injury or death.

We need to be ensuring that our cycle and pedestrian infrastructure is joined up so people are able to make longer journeys safely, we need to ensure there is enough space on our roads for the variety of users that encounter them, we need to be incorporating young people and our travel needs into wider plans on active travel infrastructure, and we need to make sure that those who use roads in an unsafe manner can learn how to go about their journeys without endangering others.

Whilst I will recognise the council for the work they have done so far to reduce road deaths it does not go far enough. For those that might think that zero is too ambitious, I want to ask how many deaths are okay? How many A&E hours need to be spent treating injuries from road accidents? And is it really fair that people have to take the risk of injury on our roads as a possibility in the journeys they take?

We need to be ambitious and future facing, or risk continued congestion, crowded buses, fear, and fatal accidents on our roads.