

Getting Out There: Improving families' experiences of cycling

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Digital games and media are being harnessed for educational purposes, with some now being used to promote sustainable behaviour. Such approaches exploit current trends in technology use and the popularity of digital gaming to encourage new activities or to change people's behaviour. This research has focussed upon the potential of placing such games (here in the form of 'missions') within the National Cycle Network (NCN) with the rationale being that this could be a motivating factor in encouraging greater use of the cycle network, and consequently help in promoting cycling and active travel more generally. The project involved in-depth ethnographic work with eight families (including additional interviews and narrated, photographed and filmed bike rides with four families). Findings suggest that children and adults enjoyed the simple feeling of being on their bike, and the suggestion for increasing fun in the NCN was to pose challenges that involved being on the bike: such as having options to divert from the main, direct path and explore areas with ramps, berms, banked corners and chicanes; and challenges structured around the activity of cycling itself, including using gears, riding one-handed etc. Finally, attractively landscaped areas at which to stop, rest, and explore along the route was also suggested. The key message to be taken from this research is that whilst playing games together was always seen positively, there is a question as to how motivational adding a gaming element to the NCN would be in the context of encouraging greater use. The key barriers to greater use of the NCN identified were not things which games could always overcome, such as a lack of confidence on bikes and concerns for safety linked to the fragmented nature of the network and the need to cycle on the road for part or some of it.