

# Should cyclists fly?

The only practical way to get abroad with the bike? Or a journey too far? CTC's **Chris Juden** and **Richard George** disagree



**YES – CHRIS JUDEN**

Cycling gives us an intimate relationship with the nature, landscape and indeed the climate of a place. This heightens our environmental sensitivity and cycle tourists are more likely than the average holidaymaker to be concerned about climate change and reluctant fliers for that reason. Of the 18 people on my last cycle tour: two came by train at great cost and inconvenience (baggage restrictions dictated folding bikes that were not ideal for the terrain), while another cycled all the way across Spain – and back again!

Cycle commuters and tourists are already doing their bit, replacing fossil fuels with human energy for daily transport. Before we ask them to do even more, let's see what the experts at Defra say about our strategy for talking about climate change. Under the heading 'Don't get personal', Defra say: 'We need to maintain a balanced approach when we identify who is responsible for tackling climate change – government, industry, communities and individuals need to feel they are acting together.'

Is Richard George getting personal? I don't know what he's written, but to me and many other CTC members, any suggestion that we shouldn't take cycling holidays anywhere we can't easily get without flying surely does 'attack that which people hold dear.' That's another thing Defra say will produce a negative attitude not positive action!

I don't detect any sign of government 'acting together' with us to reduce flying. By saying no to aviation fuel duty and yes to Heathrow expansion, they're still going the opposite way! Defra say: 'We also need to make behaviour that reduces the threat of climate change seem positive or desirable.' CTC's done a bit of that already: January's 'Ticket to Ride' article made international bike-rail travel seem easy as pie. But try to book an actual journey and – assuming you have the extra time and money – a miasma of rules, restrictions and uncertainty about the bike will throw all but the most persistent planet-saving pedaller back into the arms of easier jet travel! European governments recently had the chance to help with that, by requiring space for bikes on international trains, but fumbled it.

What about industry? How does the travel trade respond to air travel's greenhouse crimes? Few suggest we stop flying, but the founders of Rough Guides and Lonely Planet have criticised the growth in short-break 'binge flying' with a call for people to 'fly less and stay longer'. Cyclists can buy into that. It may be easier to get your bike on a 'plane than a train but it's still no cake walk, not worth doing for less than a proper holiday. It's a good approach. If people are staying longer it'll be okay to get there by slower, less polluting means.

Again we look to government and industry for a lead that is lacking. If we're not to cross the Atlantic

for less than a one-month stay, employers must be more flexible with leave.

How about 'community'? Are our non-cycling friends and neighbours giving up flying? There's not much sign of it. According to the 2006 ONS air travel survey, only 11% (out of 1,293 people) expected to fly less in 2007 and not one of them gave environmental concerns as a reason, even though 70% agreed that air travel does harm the environment. Given all the restrictions on taking bikes, rather than just bags, on a train, cyclists cannot be expected to lead the way on this issue.

Perhaps if CTC stands idly by, the airlines will level the playing field by making it just as difficult to put a bike on a 'plane! Who's for a hiking tour then? If forced to choose between touring and cycling holidays, how many of us would still ride enough to justify CTC membership?



**NO – RICHARD GEORGE**

Leaving the car at home and choosing to cycle is one of the simplest ways we can reduce our carbon footprint. Last year, CTC calculated that if the average person cycled to work instead of jumping behind the wheel, they would save half a tonne of CO2 each year. Cycling is becoming one of the fundamental lifestyle changes that we can make to avert climate change – and the government has taken notice, ploughing millions into cycle training and promotion.

But although cycling is greener than driving, not every type of cycling is inherently green.

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Mountain biking is always under the carbon spotlight, and no one standing in the car park at a road race watching the 4x4s disgorge featherweight racing bikes can be under any eco-illusions. Neither is touring entirely innocent. A week spent on the bike may be as green as it comes, but if that week is spent in Thailand or Australia, you can kiss your carbon reduction goodbye.

It all comes down to how you get there. Aviation is the fastest growing cause of climate change, and all those gases emitted at altitude nearly triple the damage it causes. Flying is taking off in such a big way that scientists predict that if we keep jetting about at the rate we are now, aviation could account for our entire CO2 budget under the Kyoto Protocol. In other words, the only way to keep flying as much as we do would be to turn off all the lights, shut down all the factories and leave the cars at home. Forever.

Climate change is not just a theory – it's already affecting many of the places we love to visit. Marine biologists at the Great Barrier Reef report that the coral is bleaching

at an alarming rate. The Maldives are almost under water. Even the Mediterranean is feeling the effects, with forest fires attributed to rising temperatures sweeping through Greece last summer. Flying to places suffering from climate change just makes the problem worse.

Many of the flights we take are unnecessary – there are 100,000 flights a year from Heathrow to destinations easily reachable by train. Heathrow's number one destination is Paris, which you can get to by Eurostar – and, thanks to CTC, you can now take a bike with you when you go. But long-distance travel is much, much worse for the environment, and there aren't many alternatives. A week's cycling in Australia emits 11 tonnes of greenhouse gases, doubling your annual emissions and wiping out the CO2 saved by getting 22 people to cycle to work.

Part of the problem is that we no longer make choices based on mode of travel. California is never going to be accessible by train or coach, so deciding to go cycling there locks you into flying. It is the same

*"Choose your mode of transport first and then explore where it can take you. You may be pleasantly surprised."*

complaint we level at car drivers, who decide to go to Tesco on the other side of town, and then realise the only sensible way to get there is driving. Choose your transport first and then explore where it can take you. You may be surprised.

How many cyclists can say that they've truly done all of Western Europe or North Africa? Morocco is easily accessible by ferry from Spain – and if you haven't cycled over the Pyrenees, you're missing out. You can get to Italy on an overnight train far more comfortably than a cramped budget airline special leaving at 4:30 in the morning. With enough time, the Far East is cycleable. Just think of the faces on the next club run when you announce you cycled to Beijing or Bangkok.

*These are Chris and Richard's personal views and not CTC's. CTC is formulating a policy on climate change. For more, see page 13.*