CYCLING

**Mike:** This morning I saw a cyclist go straight through a red light and I feel they have a complete disregard for the laws of the road.

**Matt:** No, I agree with you. Cyclists should never jump red lights, they should never disobey the laws of the road, but there’s always more to it than that, I think. A lot of the time a cyclist will feel in danger and feel that they have to cross a red light to a— avoid being squashed by a car. I think it’s more important— I mean, maybe if there were cycle paths everywhere, then— then it would be different.

**Mike:** No, it is— it is dangerous, cycling, which is why I don’t really understand why so many people do it, especially in the city. You hear so many horror stories about people getting hit by buses, then it’s—

**Matt:** No, I agree. You always get the stories and I always think about people— I find it difficult to cycle in the city because you always have to be on your toes the whole time. It— it takes a completely different sense of mind to cycle in the city than it does on rural roads. But also you have to be a— a lot cleverer and sometimes you have to be a lot cleverer on the cycle paths, because if you see some of the cycle paths, they’re just ridiculous. They’re in completely the wrong place and they just don’t do anything to protect the cyclist.

**Mike:** I feel like in this city there’s not really enough space for the cycle paths. Like, the— the roads were built a long time ago, half of them, and there’s just— they’re— they’re very narrow, so there’s not enough space to have the cycle lane, the bus lane and the regular lanes for the cars.

**Matt:** Yeah, of course. I agree. A lot of the time cycle paths actually make cycling more dangerous, because I think they give cyclists and road u— … um … the drivers the idea that cyclists should only be in the cycle lane. Now, cycle lanes can be used but you don’t have to use them as a cyclist. But if you have … uh … cycle lanes there then car drivers automatically think that the cyclists should be in them. I think it causes a lot more problems than it creates sometimes.

**Mike:** So a cyclist doesn’t have to be in the cycle lane if he doesn’t want to be?

**Matt:** No. It dep— it depe—

**Mike:** I didn’t actually know that.

**Matt:** No, I don’t think so. As far as I’m aware the— the cyclist ha— can choose to be in the cycle lane or not. The cycle lane is a guide to the driver I think, as far as I’m aware.

**Mike:** Oh, I see. Som— something else that bothers me is I always hear … um … cyclists say that buses— or— or bus drivers and taxi drivers think they own the road. [*Yeah.*] But I definitely think it’s the other way round, that cyclists feel that they have complete free— free reign of what to do, out on the roads they’re completely in charge because they’re the most vulnerable.

**Matt:** Yeah. I think it’s a really difficult relationship and I think a lot of myths have sprung up around it. Um, I cycle and quite often you will get bus drivers who act aggressively to cyclists. There’s— they wouldn’t do if I was in a car. So for example, if I’m coming up on the right side of a bus and it suddenly starts indicating it’ll start to pull out on me if I’m on a cycle— if I’m on a bike. But if I’m in a car it won’t do that. I mean, for example— your example of who owns the road. I was cycling once and got cut up by a car driver and I went to the window, had a conversation, at which point the female passenger pointed to the road tax disc and said ‘we pay for the road, you don’t’. And there’s not much you can say about that, there’s not much you can say to argue with that. Apart from the fact that actually, road tax doesn’t exist. There’s never been anything called road tax. We— we all pay through our taxes for the roads.

**Mike:** So you are paying then?

**Matt:** No, we’re all paying.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Matt:** Yeah, but it’s not just the car drivers who are paying. They— there seems to be this idea that car drivers and anyone who uses the road in— on a powered vehicle pays for it and the cyclist just uses it free of charge. It’s just not the case. As long as you’re paying taxes, we’re all paying for the same thing. I think actually there needs to be a whole rethink … um … behind the whole process, and that— I think we all need to think about not just who owns the road and who owns right of way and stuff, but actually get back down to what the roads are for and how we should drive, how we sh— we should respect each other on the roads and— if we’re pedestrians or car users or lorry users or— or cyclists, but actually how everyone uses the road which is a bit more respectful to everyone else.

**Mike:** I— I don’t really understand how that could be done though unless you gave everyone new driving lessons or— well, for cars anyway.

**Matt:** I— I don’t know. I mean, it’s not something I’ve thought a lot about. But then again you get all these campaigns which we— we will remember from when we were young … um … do you remember the crossing the road ones and stuff? I mean, there are way— and … um … click in your seat belt. I mean, there are ways to ingrain these things. And I think it’s—

**Mike:** With a horrifying image of someone— someone that’s been run over on the road.

**Matt:** Not necessarily, no! I mean, I think … um … I think it’s important— cyclists have an image and they— of being aggressive, they have a s— of not paying attention. But I mean, a lot of that comes from … uh … cyclist ho— horror stories. I mean, w— I was hit by a bus in Manchester and if I was in a car that wouldn’t be great, but if I was on a bike I got away very lucky because it clipped my back wheel. Um, there are all sorts of things— but you have— you have to take into account that as there are more people in the world and as this global warming occurs, then more people will take to cycling and pedestrianism. And I think that’s something we really have to deal with now. Like, not just about who’s on the road and who’s respecting whom, but in the future this is only going to get worse and we actually have to say— take a stand now and say ‘this is what we should do and how are we gonna do it?’.

**Mike:** But then the alternatives for that are of using public transport as a way of [*Yeah.*] slowing global warming, which is what I would always choose if I’m commuting into the city, rather than driving or cycling I would take the train or take the bus. [*Of course.*] So— and th— that’s, for me, safer for everyone.

**Matt:** I think there’s a— there’s a lot you’re saying in that— … um … there’s a societal image here, and there’s what’s best for society. Um, and I understand your point of view. I mean, if everyone was to use … uh … the bus then it would be safer because you’ve only got a few drivers on the road. But that’s never gonna happen, you’re never gonna get all car drivers giving up their cars so I don’t see why you should be asking all cyclists to give up their bikes. I mean, it is a problem, but I think you have to come to a conclusion or a— to a solution which doesn’t involve taking the rights of a certain group of people away. Uh, that’s a problem that I think often with environmental issues is that if— if you start arguing for one group rather than another to give something up then you’re never gonna get a solution, you’re always gonna get people being vic— feeling victimised and feeling that they … um … could react in a better way. But I think that if we all take a— an idea which is— sort of, gives a bit and takes a bit then we can get to a solution together which is more equal and safer in the long run— in the short-term and long run.

I tell you what I love about … uh … cycling as well is the exercise element. And often you find that you’re not actually feeling that you’re exercising. We went out … um … just for a potter around London the other day, to the parks, and it’s just lovely to get out in— … uh … the good weather. And actually, in London it’s not always that good weather. But I just think it’s a good way to see London.

**Mike:** I do—I do appreciate that it’s a good way to see London and it’s g— it’s very good exercise. My main problem is with the commuting hours with cyclists dr— … uh … riding sort of early morning and in the evening.

**Matt:** I— I think cycle tourism is a really interesting area that we’re all going to get into. We’ve seen that with the Boris bikes and stuff. And Boris Johnson’s new plans for the city seem to be very cycle-oriented. I know actually that must be quite difficult for everyone else who won’t be using bikes to see all these stands of bikes not being used. But for me, I think it’s a really interesting way— and it’s being used in other cities as well as a really interesting way to get people around the city and to see the cultural landmarks and things … um … without using cars and without using the buses so they can do it themselves. It’s almost … uh … bringing in an autonomous and sort of self-directed way of seeing the city.

**Mike:** I don’t think it’s safe for little children to ride on the back of their parents’ bikes. Like, it’s— for— they’re not competent with cycling, they shouldn’t be on a bike, they— it shouldn’t be done half-heartedly because that can just lead to more danger for the child and for the parent as well.

**Matt:** I agree that there are lot of who— people who I would say would be irresponsible in their cycling practices. For example, you see children on the back of bikes without helmets or you see children in the Dutch-style bikes in the basket at the front … uh … riding without helmets. Now, that’s a really interesting topic to bring up – I think legalising helmets could be an interesting path to go down. I think a lot of old-school riders won’t go with it because they’ve never done it, they don’t see it’s something they should do. And one of the arguments is that … uh … s— car drivers seeing cyclists without a helmet will drive more carefully around that cyclist. Um, it’s been used in Australia … uh … and in Australia it’s illegal to ride a bike without a helmet. But then again, that brings its own things— there’s never a cut and dried rule, apparently a Sikh gentleman was recently given the right in Australia to ride without a helmet because it wouldn’t fit on top of his turban. Now, you’re always gonna get sort of … uh … things which you can’t enforce to the full degree, and it’s all about, sort of, having a little bit of common sense in some issues I think. Um, for me, I would always wear a helmet. I’ve seen … um … too many people and heard too many stories about people not wearing helmets. But someone of my parents’ generation, wearing a helmet isn’t the be-all and end-all, there are b— there are better practices to be had.

**Mike:** Do you wear other protective clothing [*Yeah, well—*] or just a helmet?

**Matt:** I think it’s always important to try and be seen. And I think that’s what annoys car drivers quite a lot in that—

**Mike:** It’s easy to miss them.

**Matt:** Yeah, of course. And … uh … then whose fault is it? I mean, on a car you have to have lights and you have to have indicators and a bike, you have to indicate but you don’t have indicators, you have to— you should have lights but a lot of people don’t around London, and you see a lot of people just riding around—y— I— I’ll miss them. So you look down the road and you don’t see someone until they’re very close to you because they’re riding all in black and they haven’t got lights on. Uh—

**Mike:** Perhaps they should introduce some sort of law that—

**Matt:** Well, the laws are there. It’s just about enforcing them.

**Mike:** Oh, there is a— there is already a law about [*Well, lights.*] wearing hi-vis and …?

**Matt:** Well, maybe hi-vis would be a good way to go as well … um … just to sort of— just to make everything seem a little bit fairer. But again, there are always gonna be difficulties with enforcing something like that.