

How to organise a Feeder Ride to Pedal on Parliament



Picture credit: Chris Hill, Flickr

Introduction

These observations are based on experience of organising the Harrison Park Feeder Ride (the 'HP Feeder Ride') to Pedal on Parliament for the past four years. We normally have around 100 people on the ride, and have tried various routes and methods over the years, and definitely now know the 'best' way to do this particular ride.

If all this seems a bit daunting, remember that the HP Feeder Ride is a big one. If you're only having a handful of people on your feeder ride, you won't need to do all this: just pick out the bits that you think are useful. Don't worry *too* much: you're just going for a bike ride, and a couple of confident cyclists who know the way and don't mind taking charge will get you out of most situations without too much bother.

Start point

Meeting points need to be obvious, unambiguous and to have capacity for all the people you're expecting. Parks and other greenspace are good. If you're meeting in a big park (Braidburn Valley, for example) be specific about where in the park people will find you.

The route

The ideal route will be traffic-free or on quiet roads. Try to avoid situations where your riders don't have priority and may have to give way to other road users, because this may chop your ride into pieces, which makes marshalling more difficult. It may be better to choose a longer route that's easy to navigate rather than the shorter route you would do on your own. You have no authority to 'direct traffic', although of course you can politely ask other traffic to wait for you. Best to avoid right turns if you can.



Photo credit: Chris Hill, Flickr

- *Left turn from minor to major road* (i.e. where you don't have priority). If the 'major' road isn't very busy, you may be able to use a marshal to persuade oncoming traffic to stop and let you all out in one go.
- *Right turn from minor to major road*. Again, if the 'major' road isn't busy, you may be able to use two marshals to stop the traffic in both directions on the major road. Not ideal, though. We tried this on the HP Feeder Ride for a bit, by turning right on to Harrison Road from the park, then realised that it's easier (but longer) to go in the 'wrong' direction, away from the Meadows, and turn left out onto Ashley Terrace.
- *Mini-roundabouts*. It's possible to control these effectively with a marshal at every arm of the roundabout that you're not using and that you don't have priority over, politely asking the other traffic to wait. On the HP Feeder Ride we block one arm of the Polwarth mini-roundabout with a marshal.
- *Traffic lights*. Probably not practical to turn right unless there's a lengthy filter arrow. If turning left or going straight on, consider how to get as many people across with each cycle of the lights and what you'll do if the ride gets split up. I wouldn't expect to be able to stop other traffic at a light-controlled junction. Your ride needs to stop on red and go smartly on green.

Permissions and bureaucracy

If you want to hold a 'march or parade' or if you want to use an Edinburgh park for an organised event, you need permission from the Council. There's a blurred line between a few people meeting up to ride their bikes somewhere and an organised event, so you may

think it's a bit of a waste of time, but there are some advantages to getting official permission:

1. You have official permission(!). If you're in a park or on the road and someone objects to your presence, being able to say that it's an official event immediately closes down one of their things to grumble about.
2. You get into the system. There's a Council process for supporting events, and by registering with them you can ask for police support.
3. The police can't be involved *unless* it's an official event. There's a bureaucratic thing that the police aren't allowed to direct traffic unless it's an emergency or there's a 'order' in force. If you ask them to come in advance, it's immediately not an emergency, so they can't direct traffic for you. If it's an official event you'll have an 'order' and the police can then direct traffic for you. Don't hold out much hope of getting the police involved: their resources are very stretched. We've twice had them escort the HP Feeder Ride, and it was brilliant, but we are realistic about our chances of that happening again. However, we do ask for them to help us cross the King's Theatre junction, and hope that they will continue to support us with this.

You must apply for permission a *minimum* of 28 days in advance of your event.

Here's the Parades form:

http://eventsedinburgh.org.uk/docs/Marches_and_Parades_Notification_Form_280415.pdf

...and here's how to request permission to hold an event in a park

http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20179/park_activities_and_events/974/plan_an_event_in_a_park (Their form for this has lots of stuff about child protection and things on it. You'll need to accept the conditions if you want to hold your event, even if you think they are bit over the top for a few people meeting up to ride their bikes). Despite the references to fees, we've never been asked to pay to use Harrison Park.

Insurance. If you register your event for Bike Week, you can benefit from their insurance.

<http://bikeweek.org.uk/>

Publicity

- **Facebook.** It's a good place to host your main event details, because even people who don't use Facebook can see it, and active Facebook users can share the event to their networks.
- **Twitter.** A tweet linking to your Facebook event can reach a wide audience quickly, particularly if you, or some of the people you send it to, have lots of followers.
- **The PoP website.** If you tell the PoP team they'll put your feeder ride on their site.
- **Local schools.** Do you have a contact on the Parent Council of your local school who can get a message out to parents via ParentMail or similar?
- **Posters.** Where can you put them to have the maximum impact?
- **Word of mouth.** Invite your friends and colleagues the old-fashioned way, by asking them direct. Ask them to invite their friends too.

Preparation

Things you must do before the event

Marshalling plan

- **Work out your marshalling plan.** When you've worked out your route, you'll need to work out how you're going to marshal it, and how many marshals you need. For marshalling you'll need:
 - Someone at the front who knows the way and who will set the pace.
 - Someone at the back, who marks the end of the ride. They need to be very easy to spot (particularly if your ride is relatively short) so that the leader can glance behind them and know that the back of the ride is in sight. Consider giving this person a prominent flag on a pole. The person at the back needs to be confident to deal politely with anyone in a vehicle who starts to become impatient with being 'delayed'.
 - A suitable number of other marshals to give instructions and manage the traffic at any places where you don't have priority. At traffic lights they will encourage riders to bunch up and get as many across the lights in each sequence, and if the ride gets split they will take on leadership of the newly headless part. Experienced cyclists will be fast enough to overtake the ride, so your marshals should be able to leapfrog each other from hazard to hazard. We find on the HP Feeder Ride that we need two sets of marshals: one lot manage getting people out of the park and onto Ashley Terrace, while the others zoom ahead to the Polwarth roundabout. When the first ones have finished on Ashley Terrace they leapfrog on to the next obstacle at Viewforth.
- **Find some marshals to help you.** Your plan will tell you how many you need. They need to be confident cyclists who can handle a bike while thinking about other things, and who can put on a turn of speed when needed. Some of them will need to be able to deal with any issues from other road users with charm and diplomacy.
- **Communicate your plan to your marshals.** They all need to know what they are doing when, and where to go.

Risk assessment

It's a condition of Bike Week insurance that you do a risk assessment. Think about what might go wrong, what you can do to stop it going wrong before it happens, and what you will do if it *does* go wrong. Here's a few things to think about.

- **Foul weather.** What would be the effect of strong wind or heavy rain?
- **Collision between cyclists on your ride.** What would be the effect of a collision between cyclists on the ride?
- **Young cyclist running out of puff.** What will you do if a small cyclist starts to run out of steam and is holding up the ride?

- **Someone arrives with a flat tyre.** What will you do if someone turns up at the start with a flat tyre or other mechanical problem?
- **Someone in a vehicle starts getting impatient at the back of the ride.** What will you do if someone in a vehicle starts 'effing and blinding' and leaning on their horn at the back of the ride?
- **A vehicle collides with the ride.** What will you do if there is collision between a vehicle and people on your ride?

For the HP Feeder Ride we've found that a trailer at the back of the ride is the answer to a lot of these questions. It's big and visible to people in vehicles behind the ride, and is ideal for scooping up small children + bike if they get too tired to continue. It can carry a first aid kit and a track pump to deal with minor incidents. If the trailer chooses its road position carefully (riding in the centre of the road, basically) it can be very effective at discouraging people in vehicles from trying to overtake when they shouldn't.

Invite your VIPs

Invite your local councillors, MP and MSPs to ride with you.

Things you could do before the event

Make some flags

Giving people flags is fun, and gives an identity to your ride. They are always popular on the HP Feeder Ride. You'll need access to a laminator.

1. Buy 4-foot bamboo canes (B&Q sell them in packs of 20). They are light and thin and ideal flag poles. While you're in B&Q, get a big bag of zip-ties.
2. Print a flag. We've found that a triangular pennant the size of a piece of A4 paper works well. The base of the triangle is the short edge of the paper, with the point of the triangle half-way along the opposite short edge. Trim each printed flag to a triangle. Ones that are mainly white save printer ink...
3. Laminate the triangles, then trim off the spare plastic, leaving a neat border.
4. Use a hole punch to make holes in the base of the triangle then attach to the top of your bamboo canes with two zip-ties.
5. Assemble a 'kit' of two zip-ties, a bit of spare inner tube and a flag. The inner tube goes round the tubes on the bike and both protects the paintwork and gives the zip tie and the bamboo something to grip on to.



Get some PoP materials

Get hold of some PoP flyers and little flags before the event. Get yourself a PoP T-shirt.

Find a photographer

Persuading someone to take pictures or make a film of your ride is great, particularly if they can upload to social media during the event.

Make a leaflet for your riders

If your ride is a big one and/or the route is complicated, consider designing a flyer to give people on the day.

- Describe the route (perhaps include a map)
- Mention any rules of the ride. For example 'don't overtake the marshal at the front of the ride', 'be polite to everyone', 'have a great time' and so on.
- Consider including the PoP manifesto, so that everyone on the ride can explain it to anyone who asks what's going on.

Get a uniform for your marshals

How are you going to make your marshals distinctive on the ride? It will help you, riders and other marshals if you can pick out the marshals easily. Fluorescent yellow is no good, because *everyone* will be wearing that. Can you get hold of the PoP pale blue marshal tabards? Could you buy some of your own in a fetching non-yellow colour?

On the day

Before you leave home

Make sure that you have the food and clothes you need to be comfortable for the day so that you can lead the event without distraction. Don't underestimate the stress you'll be under for the next few hours, and make sure that you've got everything you need to keep your blood sugar high so that you're firing on all cylinders the whole time.

Pack the things you'll need:

- Flags on poles + the tools needed to fit them (snips for the zip-ties).
- Flyers and PoP materials
- First aid kit
- Tool kit + pump
- Contact details for your marshals
- Phone for social media updates and pictures

Check the route

Ride the route of your Feeder Ride in the morning, to check that nothing has changed. You don't want to be surprised by a new set of roadworks or a massive flood that appears overnight.

At the start point

- **Meet up with your marshals.** Check everyone knows what they are doing, and run through the plan together. Give them their 'uniform', if you have one.
- **Welcome your VIPs** personally, and make sure they have flags, flyers and anything else that you're giving riders.
- **Make sure that every rider knows what's happening**



Mingle with the crowd, making people welcome and telling them when you're leaving and what route you're taking. Make sure their bikes are pointing the right way. This is where the flyers you could have made earlier come in handy, as it saves you repeating yourself. It helps if you can delegate this.

- **Distribute the flags on poles.** It helps if you can delegate the distribution and fitting of flags on poles. How will you stop your tools getting lost?
- **Update social media.** Post pictures, tweets and Facebook updates of the start of the ride. It helps if you can delegate this to a nominated photographer.

It will seem as if there are lots of things to do, particularly on a large feeder ride, and you'll suddenly find it's time to leave.

Setting off

Give your riders clear warning that you'll be leaving shortly, and tell them which way you're going. When the time comes, make sure your marshals are ready, then do a countdown or something loud and obvious so everyone knows you're leaving.

Consider counting the riders as they leave, and posting the results on social media.

On the Feeder Ride

All your planning means that this bit will pass very quickly. Your marshals will know their roles, and you can move around the ride keeping an eye on things and adding support where needed. You will find that the vast majority of other road users are very understanding, and will co-operate with you to get your riders safely along the road.

Then suddenly it will all be over. You'll be arriving at the start of Pedal On Parliament along with thousands of others. It is *incredibly* satisfying to travel with a large group of riders that you have organised, so do take a little moment to yourself on the ride to recognise this and feel quietly pleased with yourself for having played your part in making it a success.



Photo credit: Chris Hill, Flickr

Afterwards

Update your social media channels. Thank the people who helped you and the VIP's who came.

Get ready to do the same again next year...

David Monaghan, March 2017. All uncredited pictures © David Monaghan