

Manchester Friends of the Earth (MFoE) [1] today welcomed council plans for road closures and street festivals across Greater Manchester as part of In Town Without My Car Day [2]. The group hope this year's plans are indicative of a growing and serious commitment to sustainable transport in Greater Manchester. The weekend 21st and 22nd September, will see In Town Without My Car Day celebrated in style in many local authorities, with Manchester planning an art and crafts parking on a road closed for the occasion, and Stockport planning a mini-festival.

Last year, Manchester Friends of the Earth organised a mini-festival in St. Ann's Square [3], which involved live music, organic food, information stalls and children's activities. The group have been lobbying continuously since then for local authorities to take on this year's celebration, and are looking forward to a weekend highlighting the environmental and health benefits of walking, cycling and public transport.

Commenting on this year's events, Manchester FoE's campaigner Dr. Michael Bane said, "Manchester Friends of the Earth welcomes the ambitious plans of local councils for In Town Without My Car Day. We're eager to see their fine words put into action, both for this event but also for longer term measures to reduce traffic on our roads. Public transport was a success during the Commonwealth Games and we're hopeful the authorities will continue to promote this as the clean alternative to driving into city centres."

Manchester City Council has plans to close a major city centre road on the Sunday, where an arts and craft market and a variety of activities will bring a social and fun car-free atmosphere. They will also be using the day to open formally the Urban Cycle Way, which combines the Fallowfield Loop with a route from Debdale Park to Openshaw.

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Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council plans to hold a mini-festival on Great Underbank in the town centre on the Saturday. It will include the 'Imagine FM Street Stormer Crewe', bringing music and entertainment. They are also launching a positive permanent initiative on that day: a walking route through the borough. Bury Council are organising an ambitious event on the Saturday, involving a road closure, entertainment and information. Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council will be marking the weekend by running a led cycle ride in and around Heywood & Middleton townships.

Dick Venes, Hon Secretary of Greater Manchester Cycling Campaign (GMCC) is enthusiastic: 'GMCC welcomes the higher profile being given to ITWMC day by Manchester City Council. The formal opening of the Manchester Urban Cycleway in conjunction with Sustrans marks the culmination of many years campaigning by GMCC and Friends of the Fallowfield Loop. We hope it marks the start of a significant increase in spending on cycling friendly infrastructure by all the Greater Manchester local authorities.'

Councillor Neil Swannick, Deputy Executive Member for Planning, Transport and Environment on Manchester City Council, shares the aims of the European-wide In Town Without My Car campaign [2]:

"... towns and cities throughout Europe and the UK, will be demonstrating the benefits of leaving the car at home," he said. "Here in Manchester we want people to seriously consider how they can get into town without a car - either on foot or using a bike or public transport. By participating in this one day event, we hope that people will see how much more pleasant it is to be in the City Centre without traffic congestion and exhaust fumes, and, as a result, will choose other forms of transport when they visit the City Centre for work or play in the future."

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Notes to Editors

[1] Manchester Friends of the Earth is a prominent pressure group, raising awareness and lobbying for policy changes at a local, regional, national and international level. The group consists entirely of volunteers, and its campaigns are funded by membership fees and individual donations. Up-to-date information is available on their website: <http://www.mcrfoe.dabsol.co.uk>. Manchester Friends of the Earth is part of a national network of local groups, affiliated to the national organisation (further information can be found at <http://www.foe.co.uk>).

[2] Although In Town Without My Car Day is on Sunday 22nd September, some local authorities have chosen to celebrate it on the 21st, for the advantage of the increased patronage of centres on Saturdays. The web site of the In Town Without My Car Day campaign describes its aims as: to encourage public awareness of the need to act against pollution caused by the increase in motorised traffic in the urban environment. All across Europe, towns and cities will be demonstrating the potential benefits of a modal shift away from car use and towards walking, cycling and public transport. More information is available at <http://www.22september.org>.

[3] More information about last year's events in Manchester is available at <http://www.mcrfoe.dabsol.co.uk/transport/ecfd2002.htm> – photographs available upon request.

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