

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 restrictions have played a significant role in limiting many aspects of what was planned for Cycling Ulster in 2020, particularly many of the on the bike activities.

Cycling Ulster has, in the meantime, continued to engage in or initiate various projects to develop cycling in the medium and long term.

Membership

Despite the many challenges that Covid-19 has brought to the sport this year, Cycling Ulster remains in a healthy position and is ready to move forward when we get the opportunity to do so. Membership figures are slightly down on previous years and Covid-19 has played a role in that. Currently our numbers stand at 5,896 members and 115 clubs.

Advocacy

The increase in recreational cycling by the public and by government has seen us engage more with regional government and other cycling organisations in the province, including developing a Memorandum of Association with Sustrans. We are keen to ensure that we are representative of all cyclists, including those recreational and commuter cyclists and believe this will be beneficial to us as an organisation and as a sport in the time ahead.

Cycling Ulster has been represented at regular meetings of the Department for Infrastructure's Cycling and Walking Advisory Group which was setup in June of this year to look at ways to improve cycling infrastructure in the North. We are hopeful this will enable us to have a voice on the need for greater and improved cycling infrastructure.

Infrastructure Projects

Cycling Ulster is in the process of setting up several regional cycling hubs in the province which will be a base for Cycling Ulster and our clubs to hold courses and events. This has been achieved through funding from the Department for Communities in the North and Cavan County Council have also invested in one. The hubs should be launched and operational in 2021.

We have been working with Belfast City Council and Cycling Ireland on the possibility of developing a multi-discipline cycling facility in the Belfast area. There has been considerable work done on this to date, including a feasibility study and I want to thank Anthony Mitchell and Gary Lavery for leading in this project. We are hopeful of making further progress on this project.

Together with Monaghan County Council and Emyvale CC, Cycling Ulster has been working on the development of Rossmore Park with off-road cycling routes. Over €350,000 from government has been allocated to this project which will be a great boost for cycling in the area.

BMX

Cycling Ulster has worked with the Education Authority to enable members to have access to their BMX track in Armagh. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has also impacted on enabling it to be an active facility during 2020. Newtownards has also benefitted with a 'pump and jump' introduction track being added to the existing pump track there.

Unfortunately, the planned provincial and national BMX events were all victims of Covid-19.

Off-Road

The year started off well with a successful Ulster Cyclo-cross championship promoted by Omagh Wheelers. Unfortunately, the new cyclo-cross season had just begun when the latest Covid-19 surge suspended these events. The entire domestic cross-country season was also cancelled.

Road

The road racing season had a short window in March in which events took place followed by some more racing between August and October after restrictions were eased. Some Ulster championships managed to take place in this period including the 10 mile time-trial promoted by Ballymena RC, the 25 mile time-trial promoted by Emyvale CC and the hill climb promoted by Roe Valley CC.

Track

Orangefield managed to host some training and events in late summer which included the successful promotion of the Irish junior track championships. Several Ulster riders were successful in these events as well as the national championships in Dublin.

Youth

The CUYA got the year off to a good start with their training day, further plans to extend on this was curtailed by Covid-19. The CUYA adapted however and managed to organise some virtual training sessions on Zwift. Island Wheelers promoted the youth road and time-trial championships in September.

Ulster riders were also successful in winning medals at the national youth road and track championships.

In preparation for the cyclo-cross season the CUYA in conjunction with Cycling Leinster ran a coaching day in Louth.

Women

The Ulster Women's Road League managed to get one event completed prior to the Covid-19 restrictions in March. As well as the competitive events, the second year of the Women on Wheels project was not possible although the Cycling Ireland Bike Like Me initiative did

host some virtual events. There was also an MTB training day for intermediate riders in September which was full to capacity.

Police Engagement

Cycling Ulster has continued to liaise with the PSNI during the past year. Unfortunately, it was only a few weeks after our event planning meeting for the year that Covid-19 arrived. I want to commend the PSNI particularly on their Operation Close Pass and for their support at a number of events that did take place in the North this year. We will be seeking to engage with them further as we move into 2020/21 and likewise with An Garda.

Safeguarding

Due to Covid-19, it was not possible for Cycling Ulster to run any face to face courses this year however we are looking at the possibility of holding virtual courses over the coming months.

Commonwealth Games 2022

Julie Rea liaises with the NICGC on behalf of CU and has attended several meetings this year. There have been ongoing preparations for the 2022 Commonwealth Games over the last year and we would expect some announcements on this to be made late in 2020 or early next year.

Support for Charity

Cycling Ulster had hoped to be working in partnership with the NI Hospice for 2020 and had meetings to that effect with the view to organising a charity event. Once again due to Covid our plans could not come to fruition. We are therefore endorsing Ballymena's Lap the World event in aid of the Hospice and would encourage members to support it if they can. We appreciate that many clubs have their own preferred charities and do much needed fund raising for them. We are especially aware that many of these organisations, who depend on charitable donations, have suffered in their fund-raising activities this year.

Strategic Plan

Cycling Ireland have launched their strategic plan for the next four years and Cycling Ulster will be developing a provincial plan modelled on this for consistency and to ensure we are all working on the same pathway with the same objectives. This will require regular engagement with the Commissions throughout the period of this plan.

Cycling Ulster will be aiming to build on successful initiatives such as the Women on Wheels project, focusing on developing similar participation projects for other disciplines and youth.

We will continue to work with the government departments to further enhance the benefit of the hubs and are actively pursuing plans for getting a coach funded through the Department for Communities who can link in with schools and clubs in the province which will help deliver on the strategic plan.

Supporting talented riders will also remain a key target as has been the case in recent years to help Ulster riders on their path to international competition. We hope this will be available to launch in the coming months.

Going Forward

Hopefully there will be progress during 2021 towards a return to more regular activities and we will be able to report on these at next year's AGM.

As can be seen from our accounts, Cycling Ulster is currently in a financially healthy position and we look forward to being able to develop the sport further and support our Commission activities when the pandemic eases.

We have tried to maintain communication levels as best we can in the circumstances we have found ourselves in this year and will aim to continue to do this through our website and social media in the coming months.

I want to thank the Cycling Ulster staff, Patrick Withers and Gary Lavery who have continued to be great support to us throughout the year.

Special mention for the outgoing Executive member, Mark Moroney who is not running for re-election. Mark has been fantastic to work alongside over the past four years and put in a great effort to assist with improving the sport and the organisation. Many young riders will be grateful for his work in securing grants and funding from the Mary Peter's Trust which benefitted a number of our talented riders.

Finally, thank you to our sponsors, in particular Pactimo, Donnelly Group and O'Reilly Stewart Solicitors as well as everyone on the Cycling Ulster Executive, our Commissions, volunteers, Cycling Ireland and the clubs in Ulster for their continued efforts in supporting cycling in the province.

Tommy McCague

Cycling Ulster Chairperson