

## **Top Twenty Cycling cities - learning from best performance?**

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The goal of this paper was firstly to identify the European cities with the highest and the lowest bicycle use, and secondly, to discuss if and how other cities can learn from the Best and Worst practice. It is generally recognized that a shift from car use to public transport, walking and cycling will reduce both local and global emissions and indeed contribute to better health. However, even with clear goals and ambitions to increase cycling, most cities fail to achieve their goals. “Thirty years of broken promises to increase cycling” is how the major newspaper in Norway described how the capital Oslo had failed to implement a bike strategy.

The modal share of urban travel is a key indicator to describe the sustainable transport performance of a city. Most modal split data measure the number of trips on the different modes and thus give indications on how many travel with each mode. The TEMS EPOMM database makes it easy to compare modal split in cities and thus answer questions as: Which city is most transport sustainable? Which city is the most car dependent?

The Top Twenty of cycling cities in Europe is presented. Münster in Germany tops the list and is the European Bike City. Copenhagen is the World Cycling Capital. It is not surprising that they cycle a lot in Dutch cities, nor in Copenhagen, possibly more surprising that the bike is used extensively in Bolzano and Berlin? A line can be drawn through Europe. North of the line are the “cycling countries” and south of the line “car countries”. Belgium is divided in two. Cities in the Flemish part to the north

cycle a lot, while in Valona they hardly cycle. In the British Isles only few cycle, although some cities like Bristol and Cambridge stand out.

The paper discusses some of the findings and gives tentative answers to these differences between countries and cities. The forces that shape cities are very complex, but in the analysis of the modal split in the cities three factors are considered being dominant: Transport priorities, Economic priorities, Cultural priorities. The vast majority of cities in Western Europe have given high priority for automobile transport and road infrastructure; high priority to suburban infrastructure development and thus supporting high mobility. The bike cities have given high priority to non-automobile transport; high priority to re-urbanization and emphasis on compact urban development and place making. The car sales took off after the Second World War and in a few decades, the car literally drove the bike off the road. Gradually the car became ubiquitous and automobile dependence became a feature of urban life. With it followed the demolition of houses to create more capacity and a rapid increase in traffic accidents. Many of today's successful bike cities started as a grass-root reaction on the consequences of car development, especially in the Netherlands, but also in Freiburg, Aalborg and other cities.

Why and how did the present successful bike cities break the general trend? In many cities the planners' car modernisation ideas met opposition. Some of the successful bike cities today are a fruit of this opposition. Behind many of the successful cities, there is a story of how an opposition group won over the vision of the planners and politicians. In Freiburg the tramway was proposed to be closed down, but it was not. In Groningen the opposition to the Traffic Circular Plan in the seventies, changed the car modernisation path into the green bike city it has become. There are barriers to mode shift, one often finds that the governing structure and the incentives for the city planners and politicians work against sustainable transport in cities. The consequences of a fragmented and sectoral organised transport policy, is that the local politicians have strong incentives to acquire state grants for roadbuilding and disincentives to promote cycling.

The main lesson from the successful bike cities is that at a certain point the car modernisation path was broken and shifted towards a bike path or a public transport

path, or an eco path, often a combination of all these. The new path was reinforced and widened over time. The City of Davis in California for example, adopted a bike strategy in 1966. This was expanded into more environmentally designs for neighbourhoods and by 1980, the City was praised as an Eco-City. Freiburg, which retained the tramway, became famous for developing “the environment card” a payment system for public transport. In the early nineties the design for the new urban area Vauban, became the example of how to design a sustainable city. Milton Keynes, one of the British New Towns, was the example on how to plan in the seventies, has both an excellent car infrastructure and a good bike network, Redway. However, 75 % of all trips are with the car and only 3 % cycle.

Another lesson to be learnt from the successful bike cities is that context matters a great deal and that cities should not be planned by a small group of planners and politicians, but be developed in a dialog with the public. It was very much a local focus that drove change. This underline that each city is unique, and that instruments and measures must be adapted to the local context.

Still, the Top Twenty Bike cities show that it is possible to reduce the car share to well below 50% and a bike share above 15 %. It is however necessary for the politicians to shift the priority from high priority for automobile transport and high mobility, to priority for walking and cycling, accessibility and liveability.

Does a shift in modal share matter? A simulation of work journeys comparing the mode split of Freiburg and Milton Keynes in the imaginary city of KAND is presented. It clearly shows that there are substantial gains in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to be obtain, if a mode shift is realized. There are many European cities aiming for such a mode shift in their plans and several major EU research projects has given guidelines on how to achieve such a shift.

However, only a few cities manage to break away from the trend towards increase automobility and change course towards their sustainable transport aims. Seville being a good example of a city that has managed such a shift. The last part of the paper discuss why mode shift in cities is so difficult and what can be learnt from the Best and Worst cities.