



WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF COMMITTING TO STRENGTHENING CYCLING CULTURE, AND HOW CAN WE USE BICYCLE STIMULATION TO GET MANY MORE PEOPLE ON THEIR BIKES?

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ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

Cycling, understood as a means of transportation for the purpose of this report, is one of the most effective solutions to many complex urban challenges. Since COP27 [1], the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Egypt, cycling has been on the international agendas as a concrete action cities and communities can start and should invest in today. Active mobility (with a focus on the role of cycling), has also been recognised as a solution to issues such as air quality, mental and physical health, economy, vitality, inclusion and accessibility of cities - united by WHO in 'Urban Health' [2].

In the Netherlands, the leading cycling country, where cycling has been embedded in the local culture for over 50 years [3], cycling is rapidly moving up the national policy agenda: see this Letter to Parliament [4] on the cycling ambition to 2025 and the National Vision on Future Cycling [5]. Additionally, in Europe, there are recent developments in this area, such as the double ambition in the EU Cycling Strategy [6] and the concept of the '15-Minute City' [7] that is now being adopted around the world.

We believe, that drastically shifting away from driving to cycling for daily urban mobility is essential in order to shape more human-centric cities and a higher quality of life for all. It is because of this that we often say that cycling is so much more than transportation, it is transformation. This transformation requires more than investment in hard infrastructure, especially since everyone should have the opportunity to cycle. The 'impact multiplier' is in the combination of hard and soft measures; instead of steering by input, we must allow the impact cycling has on quality of life to lead. The Amsterdam-based NGO BYCS, in collaboration with the Province of Gelderland, explored the framework of 'Human Infrastructure' [8] to bring more attention to the emotional and social aspects of cycling culture, and came up with 6 key recommendations:

1. **Improving access to cycling for all and removing barriers to cycling;**
2. **Initiating targeted and ongoing promotional campaigns;**
3. **Emphasising storytelling with a focus on diversity and inclusion;**
4. **Establishing meaningful community partnerships;**
5. **Making the connection between cycling and people's well-being, especially in cities;**
6. **Encouraging knowledge sharing and continuous research on 'soft' measures.**

KEY QUESTIONS

In the Netherlands we have a lot of experience with bicycle stimulation and our bicycle culture is highly valued. So why is it that in the National Bicycle Future Picture we attribute only 1% of the investments needed for the Bicycle Scale Jump [9] to bicycle stimulation? What would we recommend in terms of investments as a percentage of the total budget? What is the social business case?

— These are the questions we tried to find answers to through a literature review, and through semi-structured interviews and a policy consultation session with experts.



THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

If we look at what, according to the National Bicycle Future Picture, is the scope of bicycle stimulation programs and interventions from the Ministry of Infrastructure & Water Management (I&W) and the local authorities, it covers just under 1% of the total task for cycling.

The exact amount currently invested in bicycle stimulation is not clear, investments come from various domains and not only the Ministry of I&W, and the departments of local governments contribute. The policy & practitioner experts involved in this research indicate that in reality this percentage should be much higher. Investing in strengthening the cycling culture, they say, is a long-term investment. After all, more research is needed on the effectiveness of the current ratio in which considerably more is spent on infrastructure than on soft factors. From the interviews and the sources consulted, a picture emerges that seems to justify a larger share of expenditure on soft factors.

What bicycle stimulation delivers is most clearly described in the final report of the programme ‘Better Utilisation Continuation’ programme’ [10], a bicycle stimulation government programme targeting employees. In six years, the programme has resulted in 60,000 more employees cycling more often and

80,000 daily car trips avoided during rush-hour. Much of that programme also involved investment in infrastructure and, for example, bicycle parking facilities. If we assess that investment, we arrive at a high return, assuming that investing in bicycle infrastructure also aims to get more people on bikes. A regional employers’ approach implemented by mobility brokers¹ is currently the focus. It would be important to know how effective that approach is and to what extent it is consistent with strengthening a cycling culture. In other words, what are the (tax) and other opportunities for increasing access to cycling that employers can use to stimulate cycling among their employees. How do they ensure proper activation and how do we ensure that this has a lasting effect?

“The ‘social practice’ that lots of parents find it normal to teach their children to ride a bike is the very best thing we have. More successful than any other program”

- Quote from one of the interviewees

1. View: <https://rwsduurzamemobiliteit.nl/slag/toolbox-slimme-mobiliteit/factsheet-werkgeversaanpak/>

FEWER CHILDREN ON BIKES

The ANWB, the Dutch Cycling Mayors with BYCS, Thalia Verkade and Marco te Brömmelstroet and others have raised the issue that Dutch cycling culture is at stake. “We know that in recent years fewer and fewer children are cycling in the Netherlands. This poses risks for the future generation’s cycling culture [11]. If we work to get children and their parents/families on bicycles from an early age, and invest in this continuously, we will build a strong cycling culture with all its benefits: resilient, sustainable, livable cities/regions, and healthy and happy inhabitants. This is how we work towards a high quality of life,” says one of the experts interviewed. This thought is endorsed by more interviewees.

Continuously working on bicycle culture means working on access to a suitable bicycle, cultural appropriation and skills according to Kaufmann’s Mobility Theory [12]. A number of organisations add (the feeling of) safety. But who has or takes the lead in this? The experts almost all agree: that role lies with the government. However, implementation can only be done in collaboration with knowledge institutions, the bicycle industry, companies and NGOs, and must focus on the whole system, not forgetting especially the ambassadors who help anchor cycling within subcultures, such as at the (pre-)school, the neighbourhood/sports director, parents/caregivers and with employers.



RESULTS

The following key insights emerged from discussions with experts and practitioners:

- The ‘social practice’, that all parents teach their children to cycle, so that they later pass it on to their children, is more effective than any programme.
- In the fields of Service Design and Inclusive Design, soft factors already have a place and bicycle encouragement can be structurally embedded in policy processes.
- Well-constructed programmes - similar to ‘Door-trappen’ (keep on cycling) [13] - can be rolled out nationwide with differences in emphasis within local situations and networks.
- For children in school environments there is still a world to be won, with the involvement of parents/caregivers [14] in their example role to teach children to cycle and their own contribution to unsafe situations such as motorised traffic around schools and sports clubs.
- In addition to encouraging cycling, discouraging and denying people the opportunity to come by car [15] to urban centres, schools, sports clubs and other destinations where this is undesirable with a view to safety and livability, especially for children, the elderly and other vulnerable population groups.
- The provider market of mobility services, such as navigation apps, can help guide policy-driven desirable behaviours among road users, such as advisory routes. After all, cycling is much more than getting from A to B as quickly as possible.
- Differentiation is needed by experience (social, cultural, nature), safety (traffic, social), health (clean air, exercise), among others.
- In cycling incentive programs and behavioural interventions monitor, that incentives actually contribute to the intended effects and sustainable desired behaviour [16]. Impact steering (over input-output steering) helps to keep an eye on the goal.
- The changing composition of the population requires new perspectives and solutions to strengthen and preserve bicycle culture for the future. Service and Inclusive Design helps to find out their needs and motivations in conversation with different populations and find appropriate responses.
- Bicycle stimulation and sustainable behavioural change lead to significant impacts in the long term, if investments are made continuously (i.e. not incidentally in projects), consistently (in the same way physically and socially) and vigorously.
- Bicycle stimulation is something that can only succeed when public-private, social-physical, national-local, top-down and bottom-up cooperation takes place towards the same goal.
- Health is the main motivation for people to cycle [17], short-term rewards are not always the way to go [16].
- A bicycle purchase fee (commitment to access to a suitable bicycle) has a significant effect on bicycle stimulation [18].
- Other incentives can also be effective - such as through health insurance - in promoting healthy behaviour (and taxing unhealthy behaviour).
- To embed cycling culture, you need ambassadors: employers, parents, caregivers. It is important that these ambassadors have access to the right information (communication) and can use it properly. To this end, business cases, frameworks/canvas, campaigns and dashboards are needed that one can tailor to one’s own situation and organisation.

“The social impact of investments in bicycle encouragement among school-age children can only be cashed in 10-20 years, such as reduced automobility, healthy weight and inclusion. Conversely, lack of investment in bicycle encouragement among this target group leads to a disappearing bicycle culture, which has significant negative impacts on people’s health, urban livability and climate in the future.”

- Quote from one of the interviewees



PRINCIPLES

Based on the interviews and the literature consulted, we believe that the following principles apply, when developing bicycle stimulation:

Bicycle facilitation requires cooperation*, and a holistic approach from a common (rather than individual) interest

Focusing on cycling-walking-OV requires an eye for human dimensions and needs, and a long-term approach

Facilitating cycling is facilitating the cycling-walking-public transport chain

*National and hyper-local, between social and physical domains, between different departments and governments, knowledge institutions, companies, NGOs and individuals.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make currently often complicated policy and implementation processes, pilot subsidies and schemes transparent and accessible and provide opportunities for connection, creativity, innovation, and learning.
- Facilitate collaboration between employers, social institutions, knowledge institutes, cycling industry and agree tangible results.
- Structural funding for bicycle stimulation pilots and projects.
- Create a level playing field and reduce dependence on a select number of (large) players. A playing field based on ‘grow by sharing’ rather than ‘the winner takes it all’ is needed.
- Stimulate market development through more accessible and efficient procurement policies.
- Learn from foreign examples of successful bicycle incentives and urban transitions to active mobility.
- Develop toolkits to promote self-reliance and successful scale-up [19].
- Reward bicycle use (and walking) and offer it as a choice option (for example: a free bicycle instead of free public transport, or the choice of public transport or bicycle budget instead of an annual public transport pass).
- Continue to discourage and curtail car mobility in places where you want to encourage cycling.
- Continue to support a few key interventions until the intended impact is achieved. After all, behavioural change takes time, and impact-driven interventions cannot be expected to stand on their own two feet within a few years.



“The government also needs to push more! You can’t just leave change to people’s free will. Otherwise there will always be a group that won’t go along.”

- Quote from one of the interviewees

ANSWERING THE QUESTION

An answer to the question of what percentage of the total budget for cycling should go to bicycle stimulation cannot be given precisely on the basis of this study.

However, it has become clear that the current ratio does not seem to be in line with the importance of maintaining and strengthening a bicycle culture. A broad social view, transcending the - usually physical - domains, is needed to arrive at a balanced business case for cycling. Therefore, this study concludes that it is crucial to develop a business case that also takes into account the following question: 'How can the bicycle culture be preserved, within the changing population composition and social attitude towards mobility, space and technology, in which the old familiar practice of parents teaching their children to cycle is in danger of disappearing?'

“Like bicycle infrastructure, the ‘human infrastructure,’ the social base under cycling culture, must also be maintained and strengthened.”

- Quote from one of the interviewees

NEXT STEPS

With the experts, we want to work on soft strategies to get everyone who wants to ride a bike. Therefore, we have formulated five central questions guiding next steps and actions:

1. **Building a cycling culture starts with Dutch families. How do we get all Dutch children on bicycles from an early age? How do we ensure that cycling culture is passed on (again) from generation to generation?**
2. **How do we build an inclusive cycling culture? Cycling is for young and old and for people of all backgrounds. How do we leverage existing networks?**
3. **How do we invest in alliances - between public, private and knowledge parties, between different domains (physical, social) and between different themes (mobility, sports, health, welfare and economy), at all levels (local, regional and national)?**
4. **How can we commit to cycling and walking as the greatest incentive for more exercise?**
5. **How can we make cycling safe and accessible to all - and make walking and cycling the norm?**

ACTIONS

Establish or join the Bicycle Culture Alliance

Develop a Bicycle Stimulation Action Plan

Embed cycling stimulation in City- and Regional Deals

Implement, monitor, measure effects and Scale up successful cases

Embed learning loops and impact steering in policy and implementation processes



“We should go by the gate of a school more often to see how a social norm is now being nurtured that undermines cycling culture.”

- Quote from one of the interviewees

POLICY & PRACTITIONER EXPERTS INVOLVED

Angela van der Kloof: : Strategic Advisor Mobycon, at home and abroad

Roel Lenoir: Team leader Bicycle Stimulation Tour de Force, Partner at 3PM

Geke van Dijk: Author “Step by step to a successful bicycle stimulation policy”, Founder STBY

Femke Hulshof: Project Manager Wandelnet, Fietsersbond, Beweegalliantie

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Rick Lindeman, Program Manager Bicycle, Rijkswaterstaat

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BYCS

BYCS is an Amsterdam-based global NGO guided by the belief that bicycles transform cities and cities transform the world. We envision an urban future in which half of city trips are by bicycle by the end of the decade. To help achieve this we nurture, strengthen, and scale community-led cycling initiatives globally, striving towards this bold vision that we call 50x30.

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