



Science for Environment Policy

Bicycle commuting improved by town-wide cycling initiatives

Investment in cycling initiatives, such as creating new cycle lanes or providing training, can increase the number of people who routinely cycle to work, a new large-scale study in the UK suggests. Town-wide cycling initiatives seemed to be particularly successful when they included workplace measures such as bike lockers, showers and cycle parking.

30 January 2014
Issue 359

Subscribe to free
weekly News Alert

Source Goodman, A., Panter, J. Sharp, S. J. *et al.* (2013). Effectiveness and equity impacts of town-wide cycling initiatives in England: A longitudinal, controlled natural experimental study. *Social Science & Medicine*. 97: 228-237. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2013.08.030.

Contact:
anna.goodman@lshtm.ac.uk
c.uk

Read more about:
[Sustainable mobility](#),
[Urban environment](#)

The contents and views included in Science for Environment Policy are based on independent, peer-reviewed research and do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission.

To cite this article/service: "Science for Environment Policy": European Commission DG Environment News Alert Service, edited by SCU, The University of the West of England, Bristol.

Cycling to work can have multiple benefits, improving [health](#) as well as reducing [air pollution](#) and [greenhouse gas emissions](#) by replacing car journeys. Programmes to encourage [urban](#) populations to cycle, such as providing effective cycle lanes, have shown promising results. However, there have been few robust, large-scale studies to examine the true efficacy of such schemes.

In this study, researchers examined the effects of cycling initiatives on the behaviour of 1.3 million commuters in 18 towns and cities in the UK. These initiatives generally combined investment in infrastructure, such as cycle parking and lanes, with promotional campaigns and cycle training.

They compared whether the prevalence of cycling to work (defined as the proportion of commuters who usually cycle) increased in these 'cycling towns' between 2001 and 2011 in comparison to other towns with similar socio-economic features, but no cycling initiatives.

The results show that in the years before cycling initiatives were put in place (between 1991 and 2001), cycling towns and their matched non-cycling equivalents showed similar patterns of commuting. However, in cycling towns the prevalence of cycling increased from 5.81% to 6.78% on average between 2001 and 2011, and this increase was significantly larger (by + 0.69%) than the changes shown in the matched towns.

At the same time, the prevalence of walking to work also increased significantly more in the cycling towns than in the matched comparison towns. The study's authors suggest that this may be because some cycle lanes are used by pedestrians. Combined, these changes led to a reduction in the prevalence of driving to work of 3.01%, a significantly greater drop than shown in matched towns.

Cycling was also shown to increase significantly in both affluent and deprived areas of cycling towns. Moreover, when compared to the changes observed in the matched towns, the positive effect of the cycling investment was largest in the most deprived areas.

These results show a clear beneficial effect of cycling initiatives when examining all cycling towns together. However, the researchers caution that there were big differences between cycling towns with some showing large improvements, but others showing little change and a few even experiencing slight declines in cycling.

In an effort to explain why this might be, the researchers carried out further analysis and found that the largest increases tended to be in towns that invested most in workplace cycling initiatives. This suggests that the effects of town-wide cycling initiatives on cycling to work are likely to be particularly marked where attention is also given to workplace measures such as bike lockers, showers and cycle parking.

