

04.06.2012 – Can Vancouver Copenhagenize?

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Cyclists in Copenhagen Credit: Mikael Colville-Andersen

Brussels-June 04, 2012.

Vancouver could become North America's cycling capital, reveals the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF).

With over 60,000 trips everyday done by bicycle, Vancouver has seen a huge spike in cyclists and pro-cycling policies.

"If Vancouver keeps up this positive momentum towards cycling, I'm almost certain that it could be the Copenhagen or Amsterdam of North America," says Bernhard Ensink, Secretary General of ECF, which groups together half a million cyclists across Europe.

Cycling has become the fastest growing mode of transportation in the city with bicycle trips nearly doubling in the past decade. Some neighbourhoods see over 10% of all trips made by bicycle putting it on par with many European cities.

"I really think Europeans will be impressed by Vancouver when it hosts the world's biggest cycling policy conference at the end of the month. Velo-city is going to create a huge push in the number of cyclists," says Ensink, "but they [Vancouver] will have to continue spending on quality infrastructure."

At the end of June (26-29), the city will host 1000 cycling experts at the world's biggest cycle planning conference, 'Velo-city Global'. Traffic planners, cycling advocates, architects, educators, politicians and others from around the world will be giving advice on everything cycling related. Countries that have hosted the prestigious conference have generally seen an explosion in cyclist numbers. In the run up to Velo-city in 2009, Brussels (Belgium) managed to double cyclists. Seville (Spain), who hosted the conference in 2011, saw bicycle traffic increase ten-fold.

Mikael Colville-Andersen, a Danish-based mobility consultant and editor of the Copenhagenize blog believes that "any city can become the Copenhagen of Canada".

Compared to Toronto and Montreal, Vancouver takes the lead. It has a higher share of women cycling (37%), and has the highest number of people commuting to work by bicycle (3.7%), with Montreal trailing behind (2.4%) and Toronto seeing 1.7% of commutes by bike (2006 figures).



Cyclists in Vancouver Credit: Vancouver Cycle Chic

To become a cycling capital, Colville-Andersen says: "All it requires is a definitive cutting of ties with 80 years of failed traffic engineering and the archaic school of thought that so many traffic engineers desperately cling on to. We need instead the very simple concept of designing cities and we need to design bicycle infrastructure and pedestrian-friendly streets and use common sense and human observation to do so."

Copenhagen currently sees 10 times as many trips done by bicycle than Vancouver however Mayor Gregor Robertson wants to bridge this gap. He has just signed onto ECF's **Cities for Cyclists' Network**, which groups together high-profile cities such as Copenhagen, Brussels, Vienna and Munich who share best practices in cycling.

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The Index

The Copenhagenize Index gives cities marks for their efforts - or lack thereof - towards reestablishing the bicycle as a feasible, accepted and practical form of transport.

Cities were given between 0 and 4 points in 13 different categories, with a potential for 12 bonus points awarded for particularly impressive efforts or results. In short, a maximum of 64 points could be awarded.

The 13 Categories

Advocacy:

How is the city's (or region/country) advocacy NGO regarded and what level of influence does it have?
Rated from no organised advocacy to strong advocacy with political influence.

Bicycle Culture:

Has the bicycle reestablished itself as transport among regular citizens or only sub-cultures?
Rated from no bicycles on the urban landscape/only sporty cyclists to mainstream acceptance of the bicycle.

Bicycle Facilities:

Are there readily accessible bike racks, ramps on stairs, space allocated on trains and buses and well-designed wayfinding, etc?
Rated from no bicycle facilities available to widespread and innovative facilities.

Bicycle Infrastructure:

How does the city's bicycle infrastructure rate?
Rated from no infrastructure/cyclists relegated to using car lanes to high level of safe, separated cycle tracks.

Bike Share Programme:

Does the city have a comprehensive and well-used bike-sharing programme?
Rated from no bike share programme to comprehensive, high-usage programme.

Gender Split

What percentage of the city's cyclists are male and female?
Rated from overwhelming male to an even gender split or better.

Modal Share For Bicycles:

What percentage of modal share is made up by cyclists?
Rated from under 1% to over 25%.

Modal Share Increase Since 2006:

What has the increase in modal share been since 2006 - the year that urban cycling started to kick off?
Rated from under 1% to 5%+.

Perception of Safety:

Is the perception of safety of the cyclists in the city, reflected in helmet-wearing rates, positive or are cyclists riding scared due to helmet promotion and scare campaigns?
Rated from mandatory helmet laws with constant promotion of helmets to low helmet-usage rate.

Politics:

What is the political climate regarding urban cycling?
Rated from the bicycle being non-existent on a political level to active political involvement.

Social Acceptance:

How do drivers and the community at large regard urban cyclists?
Rated from no social acceptance to widespread social acceptance.

Urban Planning:

How much emphasis do the city's planners place on bicycle infrastructure - and are they well-informed about international best practice?
Rated from car-centric urban planners to planners who think bicycle - and pedestrian - first.

Traffic Calming:

What efforts have been made to lower speed limits in and generally calm traffic in order to provide greater safety to pedestrians and cyclists?
Rated from none at all to extensive traffic-calming measures prioritising cyclists and pedestrians in the traffic hierarchy.



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The Copenhagenize Index

Early in 2011 a discussion arose at Copenhagenize Consulting about what cities really are the best cities for urban cycling. Over a period of six months our team has gathered information and statistics and developed an index with which we could rate cities for bicycle friendliness. It was originally meant to be a tool for internal use in the company but after a period of time we realised that the index was perhaps worth releasing on the internet.

Developing the index has been time-consuming but rewarding. We would like to thank all of the people in our network who assisted with information and statistics. A wide range of individuals - politicians, advocates, traffic planners - have contributed to this inaugural index and we couldn't have done it without their help. The original concept was developed with a collaboration with James Schwartz of The Urban Country.

At the end of the day we rated over 80 major cities around the world. Ideally we would have liked to have included smaller cities but based on the time we were using on the index we narrowed it down to major cities. We know that smaller cities like Groningen, Netherlands or Malmö, Sweden would have fared extremely well, but we had to draw the line somewhere.

The smallest city to make the Top 20 list is Portland. We are aware that it doesn't technically fit into the major cities category, but we were curious to see how the USA's top cycling city would fare. Not to mention the fact that we'd never hear the end of it from Portlanders if we didn't include them.

The final list of the Top 20 bicycle friendly cities offers up some surprises. We thought we had a pretty clear idea of what the list would end up looking like but a number of cities ended up shining brighter, especially after awarding bonus points. The top two cities - Amsterdam and Copenhagen - will probably surprise noone but seeing results of the index we were surprised to see cities like Montreal, Guadalajara, Rio de Janeiro, New York City and Dublin ranking so well.

No city scored full marks but Amsterdam came close with 54 out of 64. If we look solely at the bonus points, however, Dublin rode off with 12 out of 12 while Paris and Barcelona scored 11 and Tokyo, Copenhagen and Amsterdam each harvested 10.

In the event of a draw, the city with the highest bonus point score is ranked higher. This determined the hierarchy among the cities of Budapest, Portland, Guadalajara and Hamburg while Helsinki and London were even on all scores, as were Rio de Janeiro and Vienna.

Queries from the press can be directed at info@copenhagenize.eu

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The World's Most Bicycle Friendly Cities - from Copenhagenize.com



Scanning the internet there seems to be a wide range of information about which cities are the world's most bicycle friendly. Many of them are opinion pieces and others use various criteria in making up the list.

Here at Copenhagenize we figured we'd just look at the hard facts. How many trips are made by bicycle in various cities? If there are many people choosing the bicycle in a city then that would indicate that cycling infrastructure is in place, that the culture is bicycle-friendly, that there is a to transform cities into more liveable places and that cycling is, or has been, promoted positively

We looked at the stats for OECD countries since these are traditionally cultures where the car is accessible to the citizens and is a main competitor to the bicycle.

In the interest of brevity, we chose to feature cities with percentages that are in double-digits. There are large cities and small on the list, from Tokyo to Davis, USA.

Copenhagen - 55% [37% city wide]
Gronningen, Netherlands - 55%
Greifswald, Germany - 44%
Lund, Sweden - 43%
Assen, Netherlands - 40%
Amsterdam, Netherlands - 40%
Münster, Germany - 40%
Utrecht, Netherlands - 33%
Västerås, Sweden - 33%
Ferrara, Italy - 30%
Malmö, Sweden - 30%
Linköping, Sweden - 30%
Odense, Denmark - 25%
Basel, Switzerland - 25%
Osaka, Japan - 25% [est.]
Bremen, Germany - 23%
Bologna, Italy - 20%
Oulu, Finland - 20%
Munich, Germany - 20%
Florence, Italy - 20%
Rotterdam, Netherlands - 20-25%
Berne, Switzerland - 20%
Tübingen, Germany - 20%
Aarhus, Denmark - 20%
Tokyo, Japan - 20% [est.]
Salzburg, Austria - 19%
Venice (and Mestre), Italy - 19%
Pardubice, Czech Republic - 18%
York, UK - 18%
Dresden, Germany - 17%
Basel, Switzerland - 17%
Ghent, Belgium - 15%
Parma, Italy - 15%
Bern, Switzerland - 15%
Davis, USA - 15%
Cambridge, UK - 15%
Graz, Austria - 14%
Berlin, Germany - 13%
Strasbourg, France - 12%
Turku, Finland - 11%
Stockholm, Sweden - 10%
Bordeaux, France - 10%
Avignon, France - 10%

I may have forgotten some cities that deserve a place on this list. Feel free to let me know and I'll add them.

