

Book Review: City Cycling

by Blog Admin

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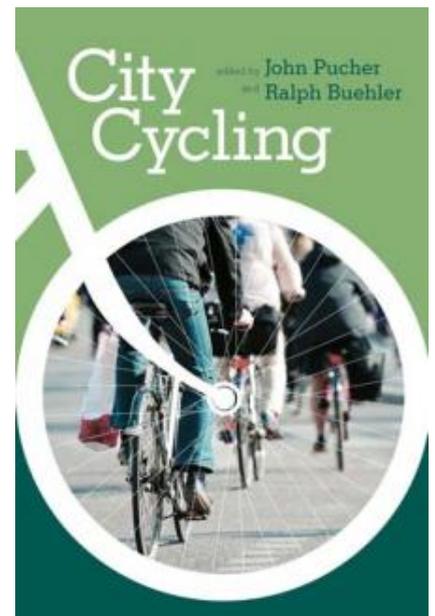
*Cycling in cities is booming, for many reasons: health and environmental benefits, time and cost savings, more and better bike lanes and paths, and innovative bike sharing programs. **City Cycling** offers reports on cycling trends and policies in cities in North America, Europe, and Australia. The authors offer detailed examinations and illustrations of cycling conditions in different urban environments: from small cities such as Delft in the Netherlands, to megacities such as Tokyo. **Alexander Grous** finds this to be a relevant, interesting and instructive addition to the cycling literature.*



City Cycling. John Pucher and Ralph Buehler. MIT Press. November 2012.

Find this book:

Concomitant to, or perhaps as a result of, the renaissance in cycling in both urban and city environments in many industrialised western countries, a plethora of material continues to emerge that portrays trends, but does not identify measures that could increase cycling levels. *City Cycling* represents an effort to address the latter, taking the reader through a 15 chapter journey with contributions from various authors that depicts cycling enhancement as the result of coordinated ecosystem that encompasses bicycles, somewhere to ride them ('bikeways') a lack of fear in doing so ('safety'), and engagement by Government ('policies'). These elements are depicted in major cities with and without a historical cycling culture and provide insight into the drivers of cycling across environments and social groups.



As editors, [John Pucher](#) and [Ralph Buehler](#) offer the reader a strong cycling vantage point through their academic roles in urban affairs and planning. They also introduce the book by providing an international comparison of cycling trends in the US, Australia, and Western Europe. They indicate that some 'myths' such as the incompatibility between high car level ownership and high levels of cycling are not justified, as witnessed in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany where both are prevalent. This chapter also presents the significant contrast between bike trips taken, with cycling accounting for 1 per cent of all trips taken in the US and the UK, in contrast to 23 per cent in the Netherlands, 15 per cent in Denmark and 9 per cent in Germany. Further supporting statistics are presented to depict cycling variations across these countries since the 1970s, with a decline in average daily kilometer cycled per person in the UK and a static scenario in the US, versus a growth in the other three countries. This chapter concludes with a description of the role of government as a key catalyst for cycling change.



A considerable portion of the book's information focuses on topical themes popularised through mainstream media, including chapters that focus on the health benefits of cycling, cycling safety, mass cycling programmes, and others. If these had been developed further, such as the chapter on health benefits, in contrast to presenting more cursory statistics and citing a lack of research, they would have complemented many of the other chapters. This is reflected in Chapter 4 on 'Effective Speed', that posits that cycling's speed is actually the primary attraction for many people cycling; not health, fitness, or environmental reasons. This chapter discusses a linkage between greater cycling in dense cities and spillover benefits, including shops being within 'easier reach' to cyclists versus car drivers. The notion of 'effective speed' is presented in a holistic sense to outline the potential benefits to individuals, including spending less time exercising as a result of cycling. One of the interesting points made is the potential for city residents to retire ten to fifteen years earlier if they switch to public transport, sell their car and invest the funds at 8 per cent over a thirty five year period. This chapter offers a further argument for the minimisation of investment to make the average trip speed of motor vehicle faster by highlighting that the notion of a fast city is likely to be the result of investment in cycling infrastructure instead.

With policy makers in megacities like London recently announcing £1bn [cycling 'superhighway' infrastructure plans](#), the challenge of cycling in such large environments is gaining increased attention. Chapter 14 compares cycling in London, Paris, New York and Tokyo across a number of variables including deaths, highlighting that New York's fatality rate is around twenty times as high as in Tokyo. The authors suggest that this may account for the very low proportion of [female](#) and senior cyclists in New York. This theme is the central one in Chapter 10, which focuses on women and cycling. The chapter highlights that real and perceived fears can be deterrents to greater cycling participation by women, and that successful cycling cities are those that have addressed the "tyranny of small things" that can result in the decision to cycle being less attractive than driving a car.

This book has wide audience appeal and is equally readable by policymakers, urban planners, cyclists and others interested in both understanding the growth of cycling and its drivers. The theme of infrastructure, including separate cycling and vehicle lanes, is evident in many of the chapters, but other chapters that depict complementary and differing elements of cycling. The integrated topics weaved throughout *City Cycling* make it a relevant, interesting and instructive addition to the currently available cycling literature.

Alexander Grous undertakes research with an applied focus, working across the [LSE's Centre for Economic Performance](#), the Department of Management and LSE Enterprise. He teaches on the LSE's management programmes and regularly advises major external organisations in addition to undertaking large research projects for them and Government in the UK and internationally. He has an interest in sports economics and cycling, combining these to recently research and write the reports, [The British Cycling Economy](#), and [The Olympic Cycling Effect](#), supported by British Cycling and Sky. [Read more reviews by Alexander.](#)