

What makes a neighbourhood bikeable?

Focus groups with Vancouver cyclists

Meghan Winters, Kay Teschke

School of Population and Public Health, University of British Columbia, Canada

Background

The great differences in cycling rates between European and North American cities (10-30% mode share versus 1-3%) has been attributed to city design, cycling infrastructure, governmental policies, and also cultural differences. While certain European cities clearly demonstrate conditions supportive for cycling, North American urban design may command a different prescription for what makes a bikeable city.

Methods

We conducted focus groups with regular cyclists, occasional cyclists, potential cyclists, and a group of cycling advocates in Metro Vancouver, Canada. The guided discussions focused on which **neighbourhood characteristics** are conducive for cycling and specifically why and how these factors were influential.

Neighbourhood attribute	Group differences	Participant's quotes
(more intense color = greater importance)		
	Bicycle Facilities Advocates Frequent Occasional Potential	<i>"The more you feel separated from traffic, the safer you feel"</i>
	Traffic Advocates Frequent Occasional Potential	<i>"The encroaching volume of traffic is rendering the bike lanes inadequate"</i>
	Street Network Advocates Frequent Occasional Potential	<i>If I'm commuting I find [grid network] much easier, I feel I can progress through much faster"</i>
	Topography Advocates Frequent Occasional Potential	<i>"Hills are a big problem for me because I don't have the strength or endurance"</i>
	Air pollution Advocates Frequent Occasional Potential	<i>"I just hate it – all types of pollution – I would go a lot out of my way to avoid it"</i> <i>"The air is clear here compared to LA."</i>
	Distance Advocates Frequent Occasional Potential	<i>"If I could ride to work from home in a half hour, I wouldn't think twice about it."</i> <i>"It takes too long to get the biking gear ready, if it's under 1 km I'm not going to bike, I will walk."</i>
	Land Use & Population Density Advocates Frequent Occasional Potential	<i>"I don't find the suburbs set up for bicycles. Its not easy to do your everyday chores because of the distances."</i>

Increasing importance for "bikeability"

Other ideas

Safe Storage, End of Trip Facilities

safe/secure places to store bicycles, end of trip facilities at work places



Aesthetic Appeal



park settings, good views or places feel connected to nature

Road Condition

shoulders of roads need to be better maintained; bike lanes have potholes, garbage and gravel



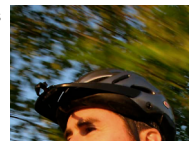
Driver and Cyclist Education

both drivers and cyclists need a clear understanding of the rules of the road



Helmet Legislation

helmet laws are viewed as a disincentive for many



Conclusions

"Bikeability" has a complex definition dependant on the traveler's purpose and experience level. These focus groups provide a wealth of information on the experience of traveling by bicycle in the region, not only from those committed inner city commuters but also from cyclists in suburban areas, from those traveling with children, and from those new to cycling. In a city with low cycling rates compared to its European counterparts, this project gives direction on how transportation planners can work within our city's framework to create a place better for cycling.

Acknowledgements: This research was funded by the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research & Translink (the regional transportation authority).