



Copenhagen, Denmark

Branding the Cycling City



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In the 1930s, foreign visitors marveled at Copenhagen's many cyclists, and especially at their great diversity. People of all stripes rode bicycles: beautiful blondes cycled the streets on their way to work along with revered professors and fast bicycle messengers.² Today, almost 80 years later, Copenhagen's city managers are capitalizing on this very same bit of local culture. "Everybody" cycles in Copenhagen: from high to low, left to right, fashionable young urbanites clad in the latest *cycle chic*, men

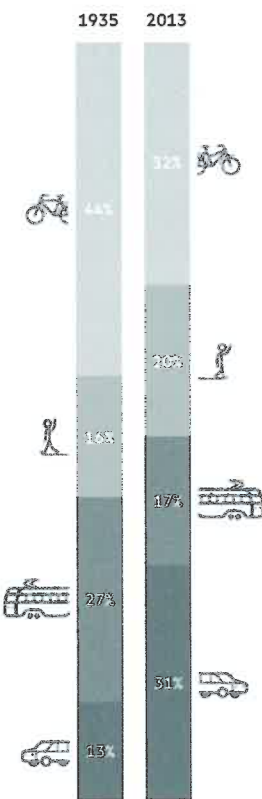
in suits on their way to work, and families with kids accompanied by their parents or learning the ropes on their own. During rush hour, streams of confident cyclists cycle through crowded streets even faster than their Dutch peers. City marketeers delight in projecting this image of Copenhagen's cycling culture. Copenhagen—unlike the world's other premier cycling city, Amsterdam—embraces cycling as a tool of city branding, helping to portray Copenhagen as an attractive, livable city. Policymakers are proud of Copenhagen's reputation and invest a lot of tax Kroners to ensure that the city continues to live up to it.

🚲 Copenhagen: City of Bikes

For a hundred years, tourists in Copenhagen have marveled at the many bicycles—and cyclists of all stripes—as this late-1930s postcard attests. The photo was taken at Langebro, on the former drawbridge, opened in 1935 to connect mainland Copenhagen with the district of Amager, home to Copenhagen's working-class population. The photographer captured the moment in which the bridge has just been lowered, and cyclists have re-mounted their bicycles. Notice how the people's attire—especially their hats—reveals their social class. The pedestrians are presumably on their way to swankier destinations across the harbor, while cyclists commute home, further away.

Copenhagen, a seaport city, is Denmark's capital and is located in the easternmost part of the country on the islands of Sjælland and Amager. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the city was fortified—the former walls defining today's historic city center. After the city tore down the walls in the 1870s, Copenhagen expanded rapidly with the construction of densely populated working-class neighborhoods like Nørrebro, Vesterbro, Amagerbro, and the middle-class Østerbro (jointly called *brokvarterene*). In the early twentieth century, the city annexed the surrounding villages and attained its current size. Between 1880 and 1950, the population increased from roughly 80,000 to 800,000. Starting in the

Modal Split
— Copenhagen



🚲 Cycling Beyond Copenhagen's Center

From roughly 1900 to the 1960s, Copenhagen's bicycle network grew continuously. In this 1935 map of the city's bicycle network, notice that cycle paths and lanes were most elaborate in the outer city. After the 1960s, authorities removed some lanes on the principle that cycling was becoming obsolete. In the 1970s, a time of bicycle activism, the bicycle network expanded once again.

1960s, migration to outlying suburbs caused a decline to just below half a million in the early 1990s. Since then, the labor-dominated council has sought to transform Copenhagen from a working-class city to a knowledge-based city. The Danish capital has also nurtured a reputation for being a laidback, alternative city, epitomized by Freetown Christiania, a self-proclaimed autonomous area that has occupied a former military base since 1971. The population has once again increased, and now stands at 660,000; Greater Copenhagen (*Hovedstadsområdet*), at 1,250,000 people, is almost twice as big.

Copenhagen acquired a reputation as a “cycling city” early on. In the interwar period, cycling easily competed with public transit. Traffic counts between 1925 and 1950 showed that nearly 90 percent of the traffic on the bridges connecting the city with the working-class districts on the island of Amager (Langebro and Knippelsbro) consisted of bicycles. The bridges were the sole route for the throngs of working-class cyclists travelling to and from the city. In the rest of Copenhagen, and counting the number of passengers rather than vehicles, cyclists made up a smaller proportion, but still accounted for 50 percent, if we exclude pedestrians from the count. After the Second World War, Copenhagen's cycling levels declined according to the same pattern we find all over Europe. At its lowest level, cycling accounted for about 15 percent of the traffic on the bridges, while the bicycle's share of total trips was 23 percent. In any case, cycling remained competitive with public transit throughout the postwar period. Although Copenhagen boasts an extensive network of suburban railroads, policymakers did not manage to realize a subway until very recently. Since the 1970s, cycling has made a spectacular comeback with modal-split levels comparable to those of the 1920s. Today, Copenhagen is among the top cycling cities in the world, its 40 percent modal share putting it in

a class with only Amsterdam and Utrecht. The city council, inspired by the UN Climate Summit held in Copenhagen in 2009, has mobilized Copenhagen's cycling reputation as an effective branding tool and marketed it as the way forward in the global pursuit of livable cities.

Bicycles Everywhere 1920–1955

In the interwar years, Copenhagen was a working-class city and cyclists ruled the streets in a city dominated by social democrats. During the 1920s, total traffic on Copenhagen's streets increased by a quarter. Traffic counts at five locations show that cycling's share increased from 31 to 36 percent, and automobility from 7 to 12 percent, while walking and public-transit declined. In the course of the Great Depression, traffic increased only slightly. Most notably, we see people shifting from walking and public transit to cycling. By 1935, cycling's share had climbed to 44 percent (52 percent excluding pedestrians).³

An American newsreel shot in 1937 zoomed in on Copenhagen's cyclists as an exotic marvel for audiences back home: “Cyclists overrun the city and provide an interesting spectacle, especially to automobile-conscious Americans, who may be of the impression that bicycles in metropolitan cities are a thing of the past.” In fact, the commentator said, cyclists “rule the streets” because of their overwhelming numbers.⁴ Copenhagen's own journalists frequently took a dimmer view as they vented criticisms of cyclists' unacceptable behavior and called for programs to educate them in responsible road use. Most, however, acknowledged that cycling was an efficient way to get around the city. Against the background of interwar suburbanization, economic crises, and rising

Den danske Cyklistforbund har i samarbejde med Københavns Kommune udarbejdet en cyklistkort over København og Frederiksberg for 1935. Kortet viser de officielle cykliststier, der er anerkendte af kommunen.

Kortet er udarbejdet af Stadsingeniør H. H. H. og er baseret på de officielle kort over byen. Det viser de vigtigste cykliststier, der er anerkendte af kommunen.

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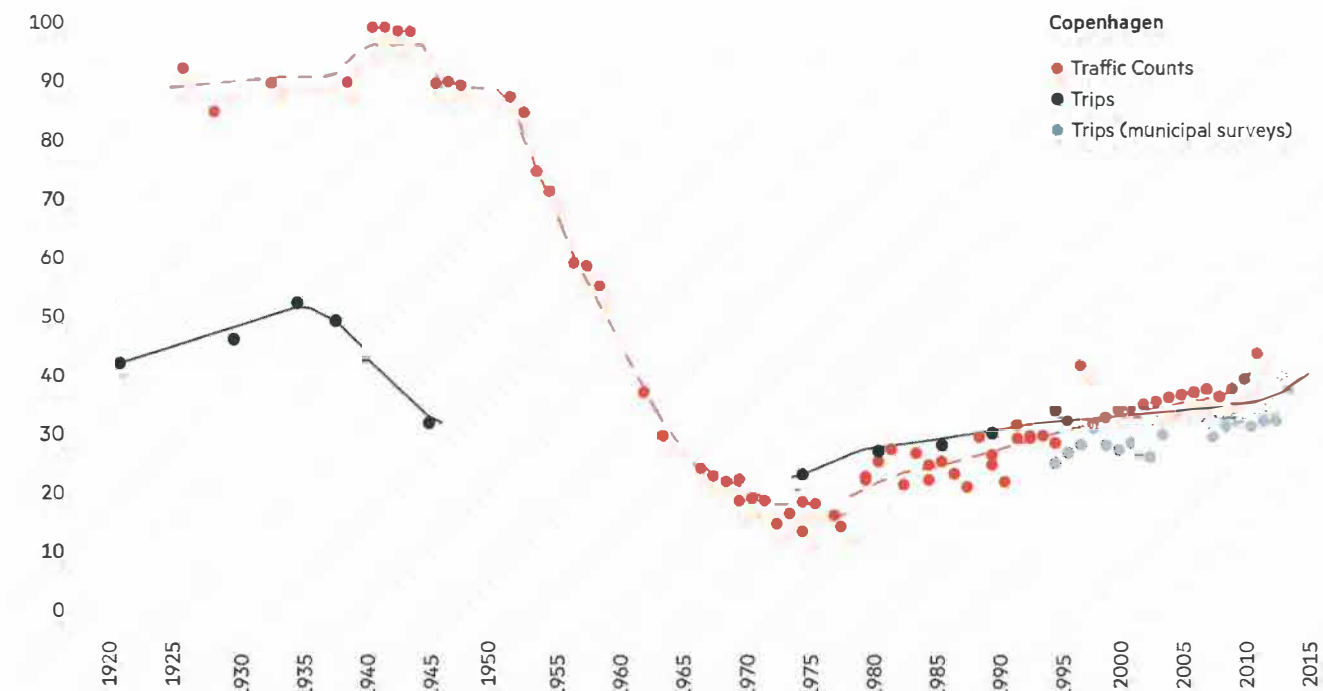
IA 1935

6. udgave, Maj 1935



Reprograveret af Statens Kartografiske Institut 1935

STADSIINGENIØRENS DIREKTORAT
BYPLANAFDELINGEN 1935



Trend Line Copenhagen

Cycling's share of traffic (counts) and trips (travel surveys) excluding pedestrians in Copenhagen

Sources:
see appendices Copenhagen,
→ page 216–217

taxes on public transit, the bicycle easily gained the advantage over trams as the transport mode of choice for lower-income Copenhageners.⁵

In 1935, the rivalry between cycling and trams took a dramatic turn. Aiming to secure more revenue for the city trams during the economic crisis, the deputy mayor responsible for public transit proposed a ban on cycling in the historic center. The proposal touched a raw nerve among the cyclists and prompted a huge outburst. The chair of the Danish Cyclists' Federation (*Dansk Cyklistforbundet* or DCF) warned of a "revolution" if the authorities were to put their plan into operation.⁶ In the press, many commentators agreed with the federation, praising the bicycle as the "people's jewel." Given the poor state of public transit in Copenhagen, they argued, it was unfair to criticize cyclists for clogging the streets.⁷

The city's experts weighed the pros and cons of the bicycle: it was cheap, made efficient use of limited space, and was a convenient vehicle for short trips. On the other hand, cyclists were unruly and unpredictable—a real headache for traffic planners. Cycling was highly seasonal and varied greatly in the course of a day, with high morning and afternoon peaks. The authorities had a hard time fitting this into their public transport planning. As Vilhelm Malling, engineer at the Planning Office, emphasized in 1932, the bicycle

had an "extraordinary importance" in Copenhagen's traffic. In his view, doing away with cycling would be impossible "without radical improvement of mass means of transport."⁸ At the end of the Second World War, city engineer Olaf Forchhammer observed that, compared to Stockholm, cyclists in Copenhagen were well integrated into traffic—and he predicted that cyclists would continue to outnumber commuter train passengers, even with increasing commuting distances.⁹

Planners, engineers, and politicians agreed that the large numbers of cyclists warranted separate cycle lanes. They also had many legitimate reasons for not building them: lack of space in the historic center; conflicts with (un)loading and with car-based shopping in busy shopping streets; and even the overwhelming numbers of cyclists during rush hour. They argued that the massive rush-hour stampedes of cyclists would overload any imaginable network of cycle lanes. As a result, the city only built cycle lanes along main roads to improve the flow of motorized traffic.¹⁰

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the Danish Cyclists' Federation successfully lobbied for cycling infrastructures, particularly in the capital Copenhagen. Between 1912 and 1927, the Copenhagen cycle path network doubled from 35 to

74 km, increasing to 100 km in 1935.¹¹ By then, a quarter of the road and street networks in Copenhagen and neighboring Frederiksberg had been retrofitted with cycle lanes—most of them in the suburbs.¹²

During the Second World War, walking and public transit made gains at the expense of cycling (partly because of the shortage of bicycle tires and spare parts) and automobility (because of fuel rationing). By 1950, cycling had recovered to prewar levels, only to decline again from the mid-1950s onwards.¹³ With the resumption of comprehensive planning at war’s end, public transit became the heart of Copenhagen’s future transport system. The 1947 regional “Finger Plan”, with roots in the British garden city movement, expressed a style of urban design that planners also adopted in cities like Amsterdam, Eindhoven, Stockholm, and Hannover. Urban development would follow existing and future commuter rail networks. An expanded road network would complement the public transit network and spaces in between these traffic corridors would serve as green wedges. Planners designed the residential “fingers” so that the combined pedestrian, cycle, and public transit (especially tram and S-Train) commuting times would not exceed 45 minutes.¹⁴

Public transit remained the backbone of subsequent blueprints for the city’s transport system, though without impeding a “reasonable” development of car traffic. Planners also realized that cycling was an essential element of Copenhagen’s transport system. While acknowledging that this justified cycle lanes, they also worried about serious competition with public transit.¹⁵ A 1953 report by the Copenhagen Traffic Commission highlighted the capital’s reputation as “cyclist city”; it also reiterated the need for both cycle lanes and dedicated cycle roads to relieve radial access roads of high numbers of cyclists.¹⁶ The 1954 Master Plan for Copenhagen characterized the bicycle as a “cheap and convenient means of transport, whose popularity has made Copenhagen the city of cyclists.” The bicycle was also a source of “inconvenience” for planners: it took up space, cyclists were vulnerable, and worst of all seasonal and weather variations caused cyclists to invade public transit systems unpredictably and massively. The authors concluded that if public transit was to continue handling the bulk of traffic, the system should be able to compete not only with the car in terms of convenience and range, but also with the bicycle in terms of reasonable costs.¹⁷

Traffic Policy Postponed, 1955–1975

After the Second World War, Denmark, like many other European countries, wanted to accomplish economic reconstruction by imposing thrift on its population: investments should go to heavy industry, not consumer goods. Immediately after the war, the government curbed Danish car ownership by regulating imports and later through high taxes.¹⁸ Once the government lifted import restrictions in the early 1950s, the number of cars in Denmark increased rapidly—more rapidly than in the Netherlands.¹⁹ As car prices fell and people’s disposable income increased, more and more Danes were able to afford a car. While private car ownership increased everywhere in Denmark, Copenhagen residents averaged fewer cars than the rest of the country—especially in the 1960s. About 40 percent of Copenhagen households had a car against 65 percent in Denmark as a whole.²⁰ In comparison, in the early 1960s, 70 percent of Danish adults and 86 percent of Danish children had a bicycle.²¹ And even in Copenhagen, when researchers counted cyclists on the bridges between Sjælland and Amager, they found that the cyclists’ share had dropped dramatically from 70 percent to 20 percent in just fifteen years (between 1955 and 1970). By this time, owning bicycles did not necessarily mean people used them.

Copenhagen’s traffic engineers had not anticipated this rapid decline in cycling, but they were hardly averse to adapting their city to the new “demands” of automobility—just like their colleagues elsewhere. Their blueprints ignored the ambitions of city planners and politicians to encourage public transit. The urban engineers believed that the United States was the paradigm for the future and gave full priority to cars. Still, disagreements about preserving or renewing the medieval city took some of the wind out of their sails.²² During the 1950s, municipal, regional, and national governments all made plans for Copenhagen’s development that included expanding the capital’s road network and constructing a subway. A shortage of funds forced the authorities to limit themselves to the commuter rail lines. However, the national government provided subsidies in the early 1960s and the plans became top priority. Some radial arteries into Copenhagen, along the “fingers,” were reconstructed as highways; primary networks that had already been planned were upgraded, on

➔ Copenhagen Cool

In this photo of 1950s Copenhagen, three young women in fashionable summer dresses pedal breezily down the street. The link between urban cycling and cosmopolitan fashion is quite well established: in the interwar period, the blonde girl on a bicycle was an iconic representation of Denmark. These days, the bicycle is similarly fashionable. Consider the popularity of the lifestyle oriented Cycle Chic blog—a fusion of cycling, fashion, and urban cool. Blogger and bicycle consultant Mikael Colville-Andersen cleverly created the original Copenhagen Cycle Chic blog in 2007. Today, he has more than a hundred copycats all over the world.



paper, to highways, which sometimes involved major demolition. Meanwhile, the national railroad company, Copenhagen city, and the national government jointly planned a comprehensive subway network, formalized in the national subway law of 1967.²³ By the 1960s, the authorities had replaced the inner-city tramlines with a bus system because this resonated better with the traffic engineers' visions of car-based mobility.

National and local policymakers' focus on the car and on public transit had drawn attention away from bicycle traffic. In the 1960s, hardly anyone mentioned the bicycle any more. Like their colleagues elsewhere, Danish experts and politicians implicitly assumed that the bicycle, an old-fashioned and outdated technology, would disappear of its own accord. America, where the car ruled, was the future.²⁴ To them, cycle lanes were an archaic remnant, in light of radical plans to transform Copenhagen into a supposedly more modern city. In the 1950s, new cycle lanes had been built, others broadened, and some abandoned. The cyclists' federation expressed

its concern when the traffic planners came up with a comprehensive proposal to abolish cycle lanes in 1957. City engineer Paul Vedel felt that cycle lanes were a poor use of scarce space, given that cycling was on the way out. The city council's politicians dealt with the controversy more delicately, however. In the end, no large-scale demolition of cycle lanes took place.²⁵ Between 1935 and 1970, 10 km of cycle lanes were removed and in the following five-year period another 24 km. The cycling network expanded to 175 km in 1970 and then shrunk back to 150 km in 1974.²⁶

As cycling lost ground, planners were increasingly reluctant to give cyclists their own infrastructure. Scrapping cycle lanes was, however, so overtly anti-cycling that many Copenhageners and pro-cycling politicians urged planners to be more accommodating to cyclists' needs. Despite these setbacks, many Copenhageners kept on cycling. The 1967 traffic study for Greater Copenhagen showed that the bicycle was very popular with commuters (21.5 percent) and schoolkids (32.7 percent).²⁷

Cycling Regains Ground 1975–1990

Despite its cycling tradition, Copenhagen reached its cycling low point in the mid-1970s. Traffic counters found that the bicycle's share on the bridges between Sjælland and Amager dropped to a mere 15 percent in 1975 only to climb again to around 30 percent in the early 1990s. The yearly traffic counts on the route around the lakes and harbor area showed a slight increase, while on the city's outskirts, cycling levels remained stable at slightly over 10 percent. The bicycle modal split for all trips in Greater Copenhagen had fallen to 17 percent, almost equal to those taking public transit (16 percent). Many still walked (27 percent); more went by car (36 percent)—even though car ownership, already low compared to other cities internationally, decreased slightly in Copenhagen.²⁹ Within a decade, cycling increased to 22 percent at the expense of walking.

In the 1970s, Copenhagen's grassroots environmental movement and the political left began to criticize car-centered planning in Copenhagen. The movement broadened after the 1973 oil crisis, which for many was a wake-up call. As in other western European

countries, the authorities confronted the crisis by instituting car-free Sundays. These demonstrated to the public and policymakers alike what a city with little or no automobility might look like.²⁹ In the next decade, authorities abandoned several major national road projects—partly in response to protests, partly due to a lack of funds or political will. Neither the city nor the national government wanted to bear the high costs. The city also cancelled Copenhagen's subway plans for financial reasons. The commuter railroad network, despite its postponed expansion, remained the backbone of the public transport system. A host of technical and legal measures slowed down or barred motorists: pedestrian streets, traffic zoning, speed limits, physical barriers, banning of through traffic, dedicated streets, and priority for buses. After 1976, inspired by Dutch examples, the city designated a number of “integrated streets,” where pedestrians and cyclists ruled and motorists were guests. These so-called “*Paragraph 40-streets*” were named after the new clause in the Danish Road Traffic Act.³⁰

Despite this paradigm shift, specific cycling policy measures did not extend beyond a few additional bicycle racks and the occasional new cycle path. Pro-bike and environmental activists were the only groups calling on the city to adopt cycling as a fundamental

➤ Bicycle Activism: Strategies

The 1970s was an era of activism—including bicycle activism. In some cities, small, ad hoc groups organized protests. In other cities, existing institutions led the changes. This held for Copenhagen, where the long-established Danish Cycling Union took up the cyclist's cause in the late 1970s. *No more traditional negotiation with authorities* became one tactic. This new, radical approach proved hugely popular. The union's bike demonstrations attracted thousands, while membership surged. This 1979 photo captures the “White Crosses” campaign—drawing on a symbolism introduced by the Dutch organization *Stop de Kindermoord* (Stop Child Murder) in 1972. Each painted sign symbolizes a cyclist killed at the city's most dangerous intersection.



policy choice. International World Cycling Day on June 4 1977, consolidated the bike activist movement that had originated in Paris and Amsterdam. In Copenhagen, the Danish Cyclists' Federation's mass bicycle demonstrations from 1977 on were also a catalyst, their annual growth underscoring the broad public support for cycle-friendly measures. Membership skyrocketed from 3,000 in 1975 to 25,000 in 1980.³¹ Their demonstrations addressed Copenhagen City Hall as well as the Danish Parliament, which appointed a committee to investigate the prospects for more and safer cycling. In his spare time, the committee's chair produced a film entitled, *Bike Power* (*Cykelmakt*), which proposed that Danish cities should follow Amsterdam's example in terms of cycle-friendliness. The film also portrayed the resistance towards cycle lanes on the part of Copenhagen's chief traffic engineer; the Federation often cited it to underscore how technocrats favored motorists.³²

The cyclists' federation also lobbied the city to develop a bicycle plan. When the municipal authorities showed little interest, the organization developed its own. The plan entailed the construction of a network of 92 km of new cycle lanes within a decade—the most critical stretches of which, totaling 32 km, the city wanted to realize within three to four years.³³ Encouraged by the young left-wing deputy mayor Villo Sigurdsson, a champion of progressive causes, the city's planners reluctantly adopted the federation's plan. While the city council never approved the bicycle plan, the planners did use the proposal as a blueprint to develop the cycle network in Copenhagen in the following years.³⁴ Half of the cycle network that existed in 2013 was already in place in the late 1970s. Indeed, the ten-year period from 1975 to 1985 saw the network's fastest rate of expansion ever: 8.6 km annually compared to an average of 3.3 km in the period 1912–2013.³⁵ In short, Copenhagen's 1978 plans were a watershed, even if the authorities, as in Amsterdam, implemented them in an indirect and fragmented way.

The city's engineers and planners had clearly abandoned their resistance to cycle lanes. In the 1980s they built them along the main streets of the Brokvarter district and in some of the center's narrow streets, and to a limited extent even in the medieval quarter.³⁶ At the end of the 1980s, after a decade of decline, automobile use in the city began to increase again. The authorities responded with a critical review of the problems associated with urban

automobility. The municipal engineering directorate (*Stadsingeniørens Direktorat*) estimated that they needed to curb automobility by one-third compared to its "natural" growth in order to meet the noise threshold established by national law. The agency published a report in 1987 called "The Car Out of the City" (*Bilen ud af Byen*) that jump-started a debate initiated by the left-wing deputy mayor for urban planning Gunna Starck, who had followed in Sigurdsson's footsteps. Her office implemented several measures to limit car use in the 1990s.³⁷

A City Embraces the Bicycle 1990–2015

After the mid-1990s, Copenhagen's population once again began to grow, as did the city's economy, no longer solely dependent on the goodwill of the Danish government. This urban renaissance was part of a global trend, in which Copenhagen became a pioneer by turning itself into a model of the "livable" city. As the older working-class generation left the city for the suburbs in the 1970s and 1980s, a new young professional class moved into their old neighborhoods—a process of gentrification that was controversial. In the 1990s, the promotion of economic growth to compensate for lost industries became an integral part of the city's redevelopment strategy. The derelict harbor area, whose traditional industries had folded or moved away, was being redeveloped by the city with housing and cultural facilities (the two quays Kalvebod Brygge and Islands Brygge). In an apt bit of symbolism, the 2006 bridge, the first the city built over the harbor in fifty years, was a bicycle bridge, followed by a second one in 2015. Not only did the city invest in cycling, but also in public transit. Planners drafted plans for a subway to connect the city with the airport and the new Ørestad development located on Amager, halfway to the Øresund Bridge (opened in 2000).³⁸

Young Copenhageners may own ever more cars, but they prefer the bicycle for their daily travel. Between 1995 and 2013, car use actually declined from 41 percent to 31 percent despite increased ownership. On a similar note, while the city has recently invested heavily in the subway, relatively speaking, fewer people used public transit (decreasing from 26 to 17 percent). Walking and cycling were the big winners. Walking increased from 12 to 20 percent. Cycling increased

➔ The Bike Comes Full Circle

Think back 125 years, to the late-nineteenth century. Young, middle-class urbanites used bicycles to tour the countryside—and to display status. Later, in the interwar period, workers used cargo bikes to transport goods. Fast-forward again to the 1950s: many Copenhageners with families moved to the suburbs, replacing their bikes with cars and public transit. This photo shows today's young, middle-class Copenhageners—and their rediscovery of the bicycle. A favorite vehicle? The cargo bike! Note how this specimen transmits affluence, hipness, as well as child- and eco-friendliness, all in one go.



from 22 to 32 percent. While the city had earlier done little to extend the cycle network, it stepped up its efforts in the 2000s with 6.5 km of new cycle lanes each year.³⁹

According to the city's cycling planner and former bicycle activist, by the 1990s "everyone" in the city council favored new cycle lanes—at least in principle. The council mandated efforts to curb automobility by encouraging cycling and public transit use.⁴⁰ At this point, the council also embraced the branding of Copenhagen as a "city of cyclists." For example, in 1989, Copenhagen hosted the international Velo City Conference; in 1997, on his visit to Copenhagen, U.S. president Bill Clinton received one of Copenhagen's public bicycles, part of an innovative scheme (*Bycykeln*), introduced two years earlier; in 2009, while hosting the UN Climate Summit, the city showcased its bicycle-friendliness—helped along by the dynamic bicycle consultancy Copenhagenize.

Bicycle-centered planning had become mainstream. The city council approved the first priority plan for cycle lanes in 1997 and committed itself to a 54 km extension. Funding was slow—as was construction in the 1990s and early 2000s. The cycling network grew from roughly 245 km in 1985 to 280 km at the turn of the century. Estimates suggest that around this time just under half (42 percent) of the city's streets were equipped with cycling facilities on one or both sides. In addition, there were "green cycle routes," traversing parks and green areas in the city. City engineers were in the vanguard of this effort. The city council,

for its part, mandated a cycling policy in 2002 with the ambitious goal of a 40 percent bicycle modal share in ten years and an additional 51 km of new cycle lanes.⁴¹

Since around 2000, all of Copenhagen's political parties consider cycling the key policy instrument for achieving a sustainable and livable city. In 2005, cycling was at the heart of the city council election campaign. The two candidates most committed to cycling policy, the social democrat Ritt Bjerregaard and the progressive Klaus Bondam, became Lord Mayor and Deputy Mayor respectively. Bondam in particular developed policies and strategies to transform Copenhagen into a super-cycling city, starting with the visionary 2007 urban environmental document *Eco-Metropolis: Our Vision for Copenhagen 2015*. He also managed to secure funding towards realizing this vision. The new plan increased the earlier policy goal of 40 percent bicycle commuting to 50 percent. In the same year that Copenhagen hosted the UN Climate



Summit (2009), the city also established a Bicycle Secretariat to oversee new cycling infrastructure as well as to stimulate Copenhagen's bicycle culture. The council adopted a new cycling strategy for the period 2011–2025 ("Good, Better, Best") to promote cycling and integrate the policy into Copenhagen's international image. Copenhagen has now upgraded some two-lane cycle tracks to three-lane ones, for example on Nørrebrogade, so that a cyclist can now pass two cyclists riding next to each other—a Danish innovation.⁴²

Even in Copenhagen, the transition to cycling has not been entirely smooth. Measures to curb automobility through a congestion-charging scheme were voted down. In addition, there are more workers than jobs in Copenhagen, which means that many have to travel outside the city to get to work. So, while commuting

into the city has stabilized in recent decades, commuting out of the city is increasing.⁴³ While the bicycle's share in traffic counts at the route around the lakes and harbor area show an increase (from 25 percent in 1990 to 45 percent in 2012), counts at the city's outskirts show lower—and declining—levels of cycling (from 12 to 10 percent between 1990 and 2012). As in so many other places, taking a regional perspective tends to diminish cycling's success: Copenhagen's bicycle modal split of more than 30 percent contrasts sharply with that of approximately 20 percent in surrounding communities and 10 percent in the rest of the metropolitan region, which moreover is in decline. While Copenhagen has become a world leader in cycling policies, Denmark has no regional cycling policies. The Capital Region of Denmark (*Region Hovedstaden*) has taken matters into its own hands and is coordinating the development of



Branding the Cycling City

For around a century, Copenhagen has been known to the world as a cycling city. Actively marketing Copenhagen this way began only around 1990. Old and new cycling infrastructures lie at the core of this branding. This century, the city has built everything from super cycle highways to new pedestrian and cycling bridges connecting harbors. Pictured here is a new addition to one of the city's iconic cycling bridges. This structure, built in 2014, was dubbed the "bicycle snake." While similar cycling bridges have been built elsewhere—in Enschede, for example—Copenhagen is unchallenged in marketing its bike-friendly architecture.

regional "super-cycle highways," presenting them as engineering innovations.⁴⁴ Copenhagen's struggle for the bicycle is far from over.

Summary

Copenhagen belongs to the small group of cities discussed in this book—Amsterdam, Utrecht, Malmö, Enschede, and Basel among them—whose postwar policymakers actively and at an early date began to promote cycling as an efficient, healthy, and green alternative to the car-dominated city—as did planners in Delft, Munster, Freiburg, Västerås, and Stevenage, for that matter. The Danish capital also vies with Utrecht and Amsterdam as the world's top-ranking cycling city. How can we explain this? One factor is doubtless a history of intensive cycle use going back to the interwar years. As in the Netherlands, cycling in Copenhagen has always been a popular and deeply embedded mode of transport. That in turn had its roots in very specific geographical, economic, and cultural factors: Copenhagen was flat, compact, had a large population of working-class commuters, was impoverished after the war, and was a cosmopolitan, diverse, and relaxed city with a temperate climate. All these features undoubtedly promoted cycling.

This may explain why the postwar decline in the bicycle's modal share ground to a halt in the early 1970s at a still impressive 23 percent. Yet it hardly explains the sustained revival since then, let alone the stellar increase since 2010. Even in Copenhagen—as indeed in Amsterdam and Utrecht—it took politicians, engineers, and cycling activists to defend cycling's share and increase its scope in their cities' urban transit. Most decisive, here as elsewhere, were the authorities' attitudes toward cycling's rivals: public transit on the one hand and automobility on the other. As in most other cities, cycling and public transit

were already keen rivals in the interwar period. When bicycles became affordable for modal wage earners in the 1920s, cycling began to erode the profitability of public transit. Nonetheless, the city's socialist leadership supported working-class cyclists; urban planners and engineers catered to upper- and middle-class lifestyles and considered cycling irreplaceable. Urban authorities embraced and extended the network of cycling facilities—kept on their toes by the Cyclists' Federation and its predecessors.

Postwar poverty goes a long way to explaining the high modal split share for cycling in postwar Copenhagen. Most workers could not afford cars until relatively late—if at all. And public finances fared no better: there was no money to fund the expensive urban highways and public transit subways that most planners deemed necessary to turn Copenhagen into a modern city. Moreover, Copenhagen's robust cycling tradition made even car-oriented planners sensitive to cyclists' demands.

Copenhagen, as opposed to cities like Budapest, Stockholm, and Basel—but again like Utrecht and Amsterdam—missed the boat when it came to developing a dense and efficient public transit system after the Second World War. The prevailing high levels of cycling may have had something to do with this, but cycling was in turn certainly encouraged by the lack of an affordable alternative. As automobiles became more popular in the late 1950s, cities lacking decent public transit faced the options of surrendering to the car, implementing belated crash programs of public transit construction, or ultimately rebuilding their central cities to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians. Copenhagen rebuilt and actually began to self-consciously brand itself as a world-class cycling city—with even the most conservative modal split figures, including pedestrians, reaching over 30 percent.