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NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY

# What makes Copenhagen the world's most bike-friendly city?

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Almost one third of all journeys across Copenhagen are done on a bike.

Image: REUTERS/Fabian Bimmer

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outnumber cars by more than five to one. So it's perhaps not so surprising that in 2016 more bikes crossed the city than cars for the first time since records began in 1970 – a real milestone.

Almost one third (29%) of all journeys across Copenhagen are done on a bike, and 41% of commutes (to work or study) are the result of pedal power. For people living as well as working or studying in Copenhagen that proportion is even higher – 62%. Every day, Copenhagen's cyclists covered a total of [1.4 million km in 2016](#). That's an increase of 22% since 2006.

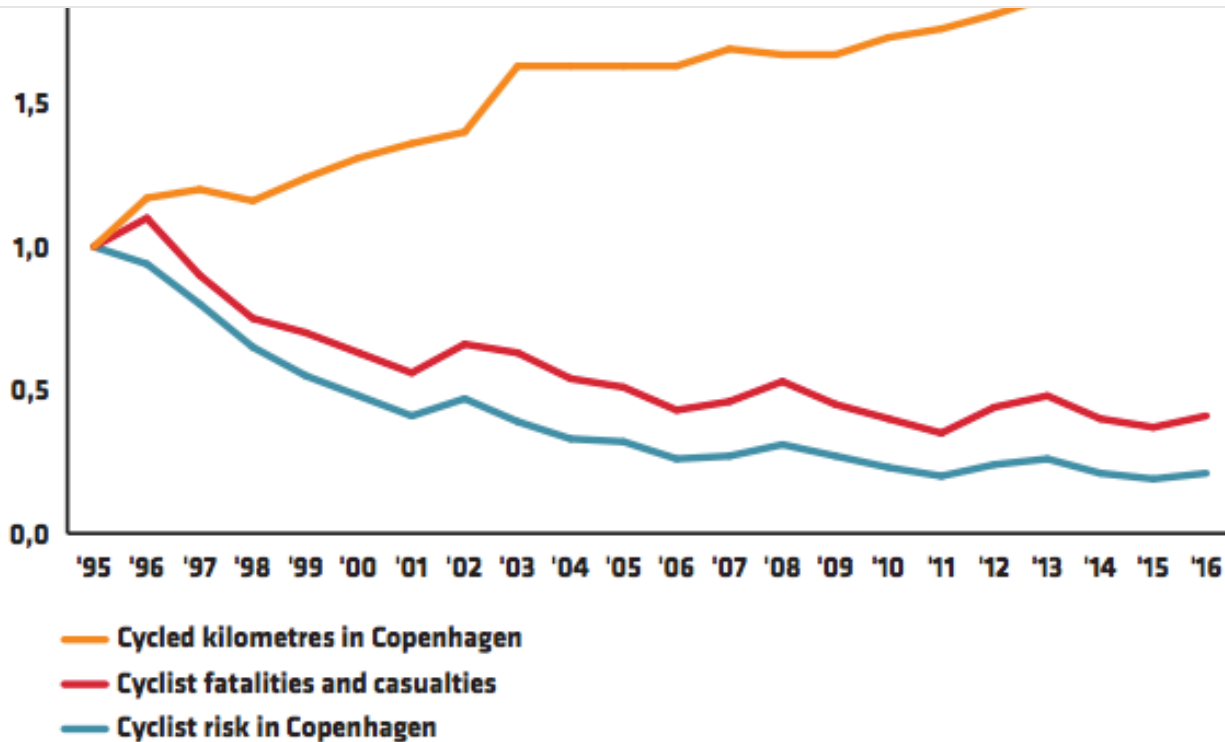
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One of the main reasons for the popularity of cycling in Denmark is the network of paths, including innovative bridges, which form cycling superhighways across the city. This is perhaps the key to understanding why Copenhagen is also one of the safest places to be a cyclist.

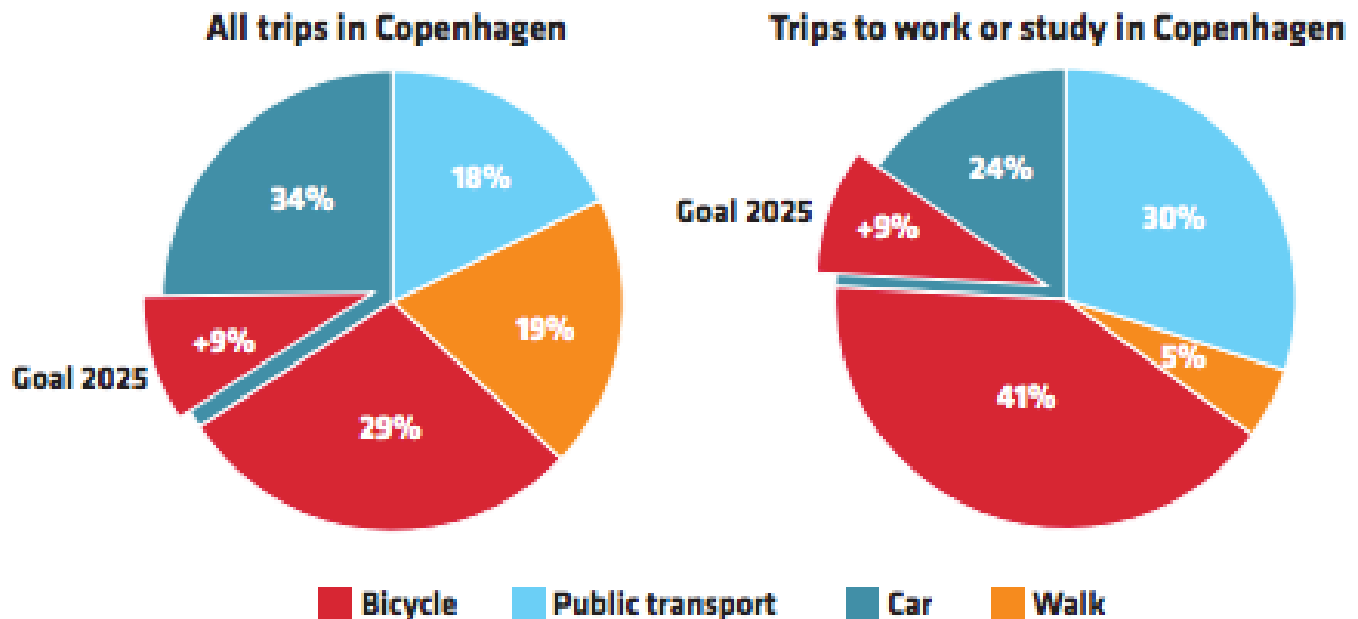
Between 2006 and 2016, there was an increase in cyclists' sense of safety – from 53% to 76%. But the city council wants to see that increase to 90% by 2025, by which time it also wants the city to [become carbon neutral](#).



The city's investment in impressive cycling infrastructure is paying off in multiple ways. For not only are there many health benefits to getting more people to use bikes, there are some serious economic gains too. Cycling is a [great, low-impact form of exercise](#) which can build muscle, bone density, and increase cardiovascular fitness. Figures from the finance minister suggests that every time someone rides 1 km on their bike in Copenhagen, [the city experiences an economic gain](#) of 4.80 krone, or about 75 US cents. If that ride replaces an equivalent car journey, the gain rises to 10.09 krone per km, or around \$1.55. And with 1.4 million km cycled every day, that's a potential benefit to the city of between \$1.05m and \$2.17m, daily.

These gains come from multiple sources, including shorter commute times due to reduced – or even eliminated – traffic congestion and [reductions in sick leave](#). But the Cycling Embassy of Denmark, a collection of public and private organizations promoting cycling, points to increased retail spending too. Around one third (32%) of all high street and supermarket spending comes from people who have traveled to the shops via bike. This effect is felt even more keenly in those local shopping areas that have invested in cycle-friendly infrastructure.

infrastructure. That's around \$155m. In 2017 there were 3.9 km of new cycle paths, 600 km of green cycling routes and five new super cycle paths inaugurated in the Copenhagen area. Additionally, 3,500 new cycle parking stands were established and 12,900 abandoned bikes collected.



It is hoped this will lead to even more Danes-on-wheels – the city authorities reckon on encouraging **15%-20% more cyclists** each time they open a dedicated cycleway. But with all the associated socio-economic benefits on offer, it could also act as an inspiration for other cities hoping to encourage more people to get on their bike.

In Paris, plans are taking shape to encourage more people on to two wheels. Currently, **cycling accounts for just 3% of all journeys made by the Parisian public**, which is way below the rates seen in northern Europe. To coincide with the 2024 Olympics, which are to be hosted in Paris, the French government is preparing to invest €350 million (\$410 million) in cycling infrastructure over the next seven years.

China is experiencing a cycling resurgence, too. The city of Xiamen built a 7.6 km elevated skyway for bikes – **the world's longest elevated cycle path** – which was

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[enormous piles of discarded bikes](#). So it could be there is still some supply-and-demand finessing to be done.



Image: (REUTERS/CHINA OUT)

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In the UK, a study carried out by the University of Birmingham for the Department for Transport, calculates that cycling schemes can typically achieve benefit-to-cost ratios in the in the range of 5:1 to 19:1, with a single 'cycling city' [worth £377 million to the National Health Service](#) in healthcare cost savings.

Meanwhile, the Netherlands – where there are [more bikes than people](#) – the government is [banning the use of mobiles](#) while cycling to tackle safety concerns.

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