

City Cycling

John Pucher + Ralph Buehler (editors)

The MIT Press 2012

A book review by [Danny Yee](http://dannyreviews.com/) © 2015 <http://dannyreviews.com/>

The fifteen chapters in *City Cycling* cover different aspects of utility cycling, of bicycling by ordinary people as everyday transport. The approach is academic, with full references for everything and some attempt at being comprehensive, and consequently a little bit dry. There won't be anything in it too surprising for readers with a background in cycling politics or advocacy, but it gave me some new ideas and filled in some gaps in my knowledge. It should command a fairly broad audience.

Pucher and Buehler begin with an "International Overview", comparing cycling rates, safety, broad government policies, and recent trends in North America, Australia, and Western Europe. The volume as a whole is a little US-centric, with much of it clearly aimed at giving people in the United States (and the rest of the English-speaking world) a feel for how differently things work in some European countries.

As well as the obvious benefits of cycling for physical health, "Health Benefits of Cycling" emphasizes the psychological and social benefits — and the broader public health benefits of reduced motor vehicle traffic.

An odd inclusion in the book, "Effective Speed" argues for a rather specialised metric, involving adjusting speeds to take into account time worked to cover the costs of vehicles and so forth. While interesting in an abstract kind of way, this seems to me a poor choice for understanding either social costs or individual incentives.

"Developments in Bicycle Equipment" is a general survey of the range of bicycles and accessories that exist, but also an (understated) argument for more practical bikes in countries where recreational and sports cycling get all the attention.

"Bicycling Infrastructure for Mass Cycling" focuses on comparisons of the

US with continental Europe. It makes the broad case for segregated cycling infrastructure (and looks at how in the United States that was prevented, or greatly delayed, by Forester and other vehicular cycling advocates). "Cycling Safety" considers aspects of actual and perceived risk, and the trade-off with health benefits; it largely sidesteps the "helmet wars", but argues that "improving the safety of cyclists should focus on the causes, not the victims, of danger". And "Integration of Cycling with Public Transportation" and "Bikesharing across the Globe" offer worldwide surveys of different provisions and facilities, and their extent and use.

Women constitute about a quarter of commuter cyclists in Australia and the United States, but more than half in the Netherlands and Denmark. "Women and Cycling" explores some of the explanations for this difference: there are other significant factors as well, but female cycling rates are a kind of "indicator" of how friendly the cycling environment is. "Children and Cycling" looks at international trends and comparisons and at the contributions of cycling to child independence and health, before arguing the need for safe infrastructure and incorporation into broader transport planning, augmented by policies and education and training.

"Cycling in Small Cities" uses Davis and Boulder in the United States as case studies, along with Odense and Delft in Europe. These cities have taken different approaches, but demonstrate that the natural advantages of geographic and social scale are not enough by themselves to enable mass cycling; that needs a comprehensive approach. Sydney and Melbourne are among the cities covered in "Big City Cycling in Europe, North America, and Australia" and it was startling to see just how bad Sydney is for cycling even compared to Melbourne, let alone European peers. And "Cycling in Megacities" covers Tokyo along with London, New York and Paris. Tokyo is something of a world unto itself, managing high cycling rates with very little infrastructure, and the information about it was almost entirely new to me.

Its chapters are written by different authors, but the editors had a hand in six of them and (with the one exception mentioned above) *City Cycling* is very much an organised book, not a collection of papers. It makes good use of diagrams and charts, along with some maps and halftones, and is an

attractive volume.

August 2015

External links:

- buy from Amazon.com or Amazon.co.uk
- buy from Wordery

Related reviews:

- books about [transport](#)
- books published by [The MIT Press](#)

%T City Cycling
%E Pucher, John
%E Buehler, Ralph
%I The MIT Press
%D 2012
%O paperback, index
%G ISBN-13 9780262517812
%P 393pp

[Subjects](#) | [Titles](#) | [Authors](#) | [Best Books](#) | [Search](#) | [Latest Book Reviews by Danny Yee](#)