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How to grow cycling by improving equity and accessibility

[Inclusive and Equitable Climate Action](#)[Transport](#)

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Many cities are implementing policies and programmes to increase the overall share of cycling as a mode of transport, recognising the enormous benefits for health, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, air quality, road safety and congestion. Cities with established cycle infrastructure – where the first adopters of cycling tend to be affluent, white and able-bodied adult men – should take steps to make cycling more inclusive and accessible to diverse groups to increase the number of trips cycled.¹ Cities at the beginning stages of implementing cycle infrastructure can accelerate the growth of cycling by embedding equity measures from the start.

This article builds on *How to achieve a walking and cycling transformation in your city*, sharing insights into how to enable the participation of those currently less likely – but with high potential – to cycle. Diversifying cycling typically means targeting support at users of disability-adapted or non-standard cycles (sometimes known as ‘wheeling’), parents with children, women, elderly people, and lower-income and minority groups.

Start by understanding who is currently cycling in your city

Conduct an assessment to develop a profile of the people currently cycling and compare the results against overall city demographics to identify who to target for policies or programmes to expand cycling. Learn who is – and, importantly, who is not – currently cycling, as well as the barriers to cycling and wheeling for target groups, to identify potential cyclists and ensure that people from diverse

backgrounds feel encouraged and enabled to cycle or wheel.



Examples of such studies include:

- Transport for **London** (TfL) identified diversifying cycling as key to growing cycling in the city, as outlined in plans for its Cycling Action Plan Update. TfL conducted research to understand the profile and characteristics of cyclists and to identify pathways to grow cycling for underrepresented groups, building on an earlier analysis of cycling potential. Polling in 2021 showed that one in five Londoners who do not cycle are now actively considering it, which could increase participation levels to more than 40% of the city's population.
- **Bogotá** has designed an approach to inclusive cycling that is embedded in the city's cycling strategy, Plan Bici. It aims to address inequalities in cycling, especially those related to existing gender gaps in transport. The city aims to achieve gender parity in cycling by 2035, as only 25% of current cyclists in Bogotá are women.²
- **Sydney** conducted research to understand women's mobility needs, barriers to cycling and strategies to empower and support women to use active modes of transport. The study recommended conducting campaigns to challenge gender perceptions and increase women's participation and confidence, including specific gender dimensions in transport planning, planning for safety beyond streetlighting and separated cycleways, and requiring end-of-trip facilities in commercial offices to encourage women to cycle.³
- A study conducted across seven cities in the UK found that safety and inadequate infrastructure were barriers to more women cycling. Surveys among disabled cyclists found that inadequate infrastructure, parking and storage were the most common barriers, followed by cost and a lack of opportunity to hire.⁴



Integrate equity considerations into cycle infrastructure and street design

Make streets, urban spaces and infrastructure accessible to people with a wider range of needs. Narrow cycle lanes, steps, speed reduction treatments, physical obstacles, barriers and potholes reduce accessibility for non-standard cycles, which are often wider, longer and heavier than standard, two-wheeled cycles, as well as for cyclists who may not be able to lift, carry or walk their cycle.⁵ Creating accessible urban environments is a relatively inexpensive first step to making cycling more appealing to groups with diverse needs. Examples from cities include **Montréal's** accessible street design principles and guidelines (in French), which cover pedestrian facilities, shared and cycle streets, and **Pune's** urban street design guidelines, outlining principles for the equitable allocation of street space to achieve safety, convenience and efficiency, linked to India's National Urban Transport Policy. **Buenos Aires** has developed urban design guidance that outlines principals for equitable and inclusive streets. UK-based Wheels for Wellbeing offers design principles for inclusive cycling for people with disabilities. The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) also offers guidance on designing streets and cycle infrastructure to be inclusive for all ages and abilities.

Increase the provision of safe and supportive cycling environments. This means delivering accessible, wide and segregated cycle lanes, off-road cycleways, quiet streets and other quality cycling infrastructure.⁶ Access to inclusive infrastructure is a key driver for convincing those that are less likely to

cycle to start cycling, and should be viewed and implemented as a significant, long-term investment. In **Cambridge**, UK, improving cycling infrastructure has allowed 26% of all commutes by disabled people to be made by bike.⁷ The *Urban Bikeway Design Guide*, *Designing for ages and abilities* and *Designing streets for kids* all offer relevant advice.



Pop-up cycle lanes also offer a cost-effective, temporary solution for cities who have not yet secured funding for permanent infrastructure. In **Jakarta**, pop-up protected cycle lanes resulted in a 1,000% increase in cycling. The initiative specifically targeted underrepresented groups in cycling, and surveys indicated that the protected cycle lanes resulted in longer commutes by cycle – up to 11km.

Protect cyclists from climate-related risks, including by using nature-based solutions. For example, use tree cover over cycle lanes to mitigate heat exposure for more vulnerable people who may be more impacted by heat and, therefore, less likely to cycle, such as in **Medellín**. Cities that experience snow and icy conditions should ensure that cycle paths, as well as sidewalks, are treated to enable their continued use by cyclists of all abilities.

Target investments in cycle infrastructure and parking in neighbourhoods with low levels of cycling. For example, cycling infrastructure investments in **New Orleans** have been targeted to promote equitable access to healthy transportation options for minorities and those living in low-income neighbourhoods.⁸ The London Cycle Parking Implementation Plan identifies residential areas for investment in cycle parking, responding to evidence that 45% of residents don't have appropriate space to securely store cycles at home. Home parking challenges are higher for lower-income Londoners.

Integrate cycle infrastructure with the wider transportation system to enable multimodal trips

This means integrating with bus, metro and other transport services. Transport planning and cycle network planning teams should work collaboratively to create a supportive transport system that enables cycling and wheeling for more people.

Policies and infrastructure that have been shown to support integration include:

- **Offering free or discounted cycle-scheme trips to transit riders** to promote first- and last-mile cycle trips. In **Prague**, the public transport system has been linked with bike-sharing apps to offer free 15-minute cycle trips to all transit pass holders.
- **Enable cycle access and storage on a wider range of public transport services**, resulting in more multi-modal trips. This is particularly important for enabling disabled people to use active

transport.⁹ In Stuttgart, cycle rack trailers have been added to light rail trams, allowing English passengers to take their cycles with them on rail journeys. Cycle racks can also be fitted to buses to improve multimodal trips in cities without rail systems.

- **Roll out accessible cycle parking and storage**, such as dedicated disabled cycle storage spaces, particularly at transport hubs, to enable active last-mile trips. Almost 35% of survey respondents in the 2021 UK national survey of disabled cyclists reported a lack of appropriate parking or storage as one of the biggest barriers to cycling.¹⁰ For instance, ‘double-stacker racks’ are difficult to use for people with poor manual strength, dexterity or standing balance, and are too small and unsuitable for non-standard cycles. Also **consider special parking provisions/badges** for disabled cyclists, which would grant cyclists certain exemptions and improve parking access.¹¹



Expand the support and equipment available for cycle hire and other mobility schemes

Ensure that city cycle schemes benefit a wider range of people, particularly by:

- **Including non-standard cycles in city cycle schemes**, such as tricycles or low-step cycles, prioritising provision at major interchanges, to complement public hire schemes. Including e-bikes in cycle schemes also improves access for people who may otherwise be less likely to cycle and

increases the distance that people are prepared to cycle. For instance **Bogotá's Sist~~a~~ de Bicletas Compartidas** (Shared Bicycle System) includes 1,500 cycles with assisted pedalling systems, 150 cycles with special assistance systems for wheelchairs users and 150 cycle chairs for children (of a total 3,300 cycles).

- **Creating dedicated cycle programmes for people with disabilities.** Programmes should respond to the challenges disabled cyclists face, for example, providing trained staff to assist with cycle fittings, or storage space for mobility devices such as wheelchairs while cycling. In **Portland**, **Adaptive BIKE**TOWN offers adaptive cycling resources for people living with a disability or who are unable to ride a traditional two-wheeled cycle. The programme is a partnership between the Portland Bureau of Transportation and Kerr Bikes and offers free one-hour rides on any Adaptive BIKE TOWN cycle.

Consider formally recognising cycles as mobility aids to permit cycle use by disabled people throughout public infrastructure designated as non-cycling zones – including public transport – and reducing the risk of penalties for disabled cyclists.¹²

- **Offering targeted discounts for cycle schemes.** Countering the overwhelmingly white and male ridership of **New York City's Citi Bike** programme, the NYC Better Bike Share Partnership, set up in 2015, has expanded eligibility for discounted membership to minority residents of Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant neighbourhood, resulting in a 257% rise in membership in the first year alone.¹³ Citi Bike also offers heavily discounted monthly memberships to social housing residents and food aid recipients. In **Portland**, **BIKE**TOWN for All offers affordable, accessible and fun bike-share transportation for everyone, regardless of income. Those who qualify for certain forms of state or federal assistance can sign up for discounted BIKE TOWN memberships.

Consider including other forms of micro mobility, such as scooters. In **New York City**, a shared e-scooter programme was piloted in the East Bronx to improve access to an area of the city not currently served by Citi Bike, the city's bike-share system. The pilot found that the e-scooters were the most popular last-mile solutions on routes connected to transit, including subway stations, bus and ferry stops.¹⁴ The National Association of City Transportation Officials' (NACTO) Shared micromobility permitting, process and participation offers useful advice.

Promote cycling and wheeling by encouraging behavioural change

Use communications campaigns, education programmes and open days to promote cycling as a fun, safe

and appealing way to move around your city. Measures available include:



- **Conducting ‘open street days’**, in which streets are temporarily closed to motorised vehicles and open to cyclists, to promote active transport. The Ciclovía programme in **Bogotá** is a key example of open street days. **Cape Town’s Open Street Days** initiative also includes a ‘Claiming Our Space’ campaign, specifically championing road safety for youth.
- **Developing partnerships to promote the wider benefits of cycling or wheeling**, such as educational institutions, public health bodies or healthcare institutions, to promote the health benefits of cycling. **Mexico City**, which faces high levels of obesity (72%), type II diabetes (14%) and respiratory issues, has implemented awareness campaigns, with educational activities in schools and throughout the city, alongside the introduction of its EcoBici bike-sharing scheme.
- **Conducting educational campaigns to encourage cycling among target audiences**. In Denmark, cycle safety programmes for children – organised through schools, day-care facilities, local authorities and non-governmental organisations – aim to maintain and extend a culture of cycling from an early age.





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