

Closing the Gender Gap: The Key to Increasing Cycling in the US

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In larger urban areas in the US, women make up only about one-third or fewer of the adults who bicycle for transportation. This is in contrast to major bicycling cities such as Copenhagen and Amsterdam where a gender gap in bicycling is non-existent. For cycling to make a major contribution to improving the sustainability of future US urban areas, the gender gap must be addressed.

This paper will first draw upon national statistics (American Community Survey and National Household Travel Survey) to describe the current gender gap. It will then use data from Portland, Oregon to explain why girls and women are not bicycling as often as boys and men for transportation and what might change that. The Portland data are from two primary sources. First is a random phone (land-line and mobile) survey of adults in the region. The second is from the longitudinal Family Activity Study that includes survey, physical activity (accelerometer), and travel (GPS) data from children and adults in over 300 families. Both sources include rich data on the physical environment as well as attitudes, perceptions, and social norms. Some of the key findings that will be discussed include:

- Women feel less comfortable on nearly type of roadway or path facility for bicycles, except bicycle boulevards. Adding physically separated cycletracks increases their level of comfort enough to expect a shift in mode choice.
- Women who are interested in cycling more, but currently do not, are far more likely than men to be concerned about traffic and riding in the dark and poor weather. They appear to have similar levels of social support and concerns about other issues, such as clothing and helmets.
- Women are far less likely to say that they like to bicycle. This appears to have a large influence on decision making and their interest in cycling.
- Girls' likelihood of bicycling appears to be similar to boys up until the "tween" years. Attitudes play a role here, as well as differing parental rules for girls and boys.

The paper will conclude with specific recommendations based upon the research findings to make cities more attractive for women to bicycle over the next 20-30 years.

References

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