

# Cycling could be a boon for Lagos—but people fear for their safety on bikes

June 2 2023, by Emmanuel Mogaji

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With an estimated [16 million residents](#), Lagos is the most densely populated state in Nigeria. It's under [immense pressure](#) to transport its huge population. According to a global ranking of mobility in cities,

Lagos was ranked [worst](#) out of 60 cities across the world in 2022. Famous for its [traffic jams](#), Lagos has [40%](#) of all the cars registered in Nigeria.

Transport service quality is known to drive the [public attitude to and image of a city](#), which is important to the marketing of a city as a destination or place for investment. Cycling is one of the cheapest modes of transport. It can ease traffic gridlock and its associated pollution and [environmental impacts](#), making the city more attractive as a destination.

Yet cycling continues to be [marginalized](#) in developing countries. This has stimulated [academic research](#) to understand the adoption of cycling infrastructure. But how well can cycling work in a highly urbanized state like Lagos?

As an academic researcher with a focus on transport, education and [financial services](#), I teach the marketing and advertising of these services. To market cycling as a sustainable mode of transport, I need to understand the challenges, opportunities and prospects facing consumers.

As [part](#) of [my ongoing research](#), I set about [studying](#) the attitudes of cyclists and non-cyclists in Lagos to understand why cycling is a challenging mode of transport despite its obvious benefits.

I found that numerous fears and [social pressures](#) are holding back the uptake of cycling—yet even so there are growing groups of Lagosians championing the bicycle.

## **The study**

My [research](#) involved ethnographic fieldwork, observations and interviews with cyclists and non-cyclists in Lagos.

I interviewed 28 members of cycling clubs and 67 non-cycling participants. The research also collected photographic evidence of transport infrastructure, various activities organized to encourage cycling, and the business operations of cycling clubs and start-ups.

Thematic analysis of the data revealed three key challenges for establishing a culture of cycling in Lagos.

## Three key findings

**Personal fears:** This is about the ability and willingness to cycle. I found that many adults don't know how to ride a bike and can't imagine themselves cycling in Lagos. Some were very reluctant to learn and many felt it was unsafe and wouldn't even encourage their children to cycle. [Gender discrimination](#) was a significant concern—women are often harassed and unfairly treated on the road. Road users in Lagos can be very impatient, putting cyclists at risk.

**Social issues:** These are broader challenges that hinder the adoption of cycling. A lack of awareness of the benefits of cycling is compounded by societal marginalization—many people still feel rich people drive and poor people cycle. Cyclists may have no place to shower or to safely store their bicycles. However, it's important to recognize the growing numbers of cycling clubs in Lagos that provide a safe cycling environment and network and schedule group rides for budding cyclists. [City Cyclers](#), [Bikaholics](#), [Greenhouse Bikers](#), [Cycology](#) and [Cyclotron](#) are some of the bigger cycling clubs in the state. There are also charities, foundations and initiatives—like [Girls Bike Club](#)—supporting the growth of cycling.

**Structural limitations:** These challenges most often place responsibilities on government to support cycling infrastructure. The security of cyclists in Lagos is put at risk because of a lack of cycle

lanes, parking and routes.

## Why cycling matters

The [health benefits](#) of cycling have been well recognized. Lagos needs to promote cycling as a contributor for better population health.

Then there are the economic benefits of cycling in a congested state like Lagos. According to the former permanent secretary of the Lagos State Ministry of Transport, Lagos is set to [lose US\\$21 billion monthly by 2030](#) due to time spent stuck in traffic. Fewer cars on the roads would allow people to be more productive.

Finally, cycling benefits the environment. Road transport in Lagos—with the abundance of old vehicles and high sulfur content in imported fuels—is a significant contributor to air pollution. The World Bank [estimates](#) that at least 30,000 people die every year in Lagos due to pollution—[11,200](#) of them premature deaths.

People are increasingly conscious of how their environment affects their well-being. With Lagos excluded from the comprehensive [world ranking](#) of bike-friendly cities, it needs to improve its brand positioning. The mega city could help change its image as a place where people struggle to move around by investing in sustainable modes of transportation.

## What should be done

Awareness of cycling should be promoted, alongside increased availability of bicycles for people to use. With rental services like [Awa Bike](#) providing bike sharing across educational campuses and [Thinkbikes](#) offering electric bicycles, there are business opportunities for increasing the number of bicycles in Lagos. State government can also consider

financial support for those who may want to buy their own bicycles, like the [Bike2Work Scheme](#) in the UK.

Road users should be made aware of the rights of cyclists on the roads. Ensuring that streets have safe, continuous space for pedestrian movement and dedicated cycle tracks is an essential component of a complete cycle network.

By increasing [cycling](#) uptake and reducing the use of motorized vehicles, the Lagos brand could help attract more visitors who are keen to explore the state.

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