

Copenhagen plans super highways ... for bikes

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People are seen here riding their bicycles in Copenhagen. In Copenhagen, already one of the world's most bicycle-friendly cities, work has begun to turn an extensive network of bike paths into full-fledged cyclist highways in a bid to push more commuters to leave their cars at home.

Copenhagen, one of the world's most bicycle-friendly cities, has begun turning its extensive network of cycle paths into bike highways in an effort to push more commuters to leave their cars at home.

Considered one of Europe's two "bicycle capitals" along with Amsterdam, Copenhagen counts more bicycles than people and cycling is so popular that its numerous bike paths can become congested.

Two-wheeler [traffic jams](#) are especially regular on the main Noerrebrogade thoroughfare used by around 36,000 cyclists a day.

"You have to elbow your way in to go forward and some cyclists aren't always thoughtful," complains 22-year-old university student Lea Bresell.

The creation of bike highways "comes right on time", says Danish Cyclist Federation spokesman Frits Bredal.

"Copenhagen's roads are overloaded with people who want to ride their bicycles in all kinds of weather," he says.

If in the 1960s Danes viewed the car as the symbol of freedom, the bicycle has assumed that role today, Bredal says.

"It's a mode of transportation used by all social classes, even politicians ride bikes," he says.

It is on crowded Noerrebrogade -- the busiest bicycle street in Europe, according to the cyclist association -- that city planners have decided to build the first of Copenhagen's environmentally friendly boulevards.

The jammed bike paths will be widened up to four metres (yards) on either side of the road, which will itself will be reserved for buses only.

The idea is to make Noerrebrogade "Europe's great cycling street", says Andreas Roehl, the Copenhagen municipality's bicycle programme manager who is also known as "Mister Bike".

But Roehl is not content with making life easier for Copenhagen's inner-city cyclists: he wants to get suburbanites out of their cars and onto two wheels as well.



Frits Bredal, of the Danish cycling federation, shows a meter counting the number of cyclists riding through Noerrebrogade in Copenhagen. The Danish capital is hoping 50 percent of commuters will get around by bike by 2015.

His goal is to hike the percentage of suburban commuters cycling to and from the city from the 37 percent it is today to over 50 percent by 2015.

Within the city, 55 percent of all commuters already travel by bike, according to the municipality.

Copenhagen's bike highways of tomorrow will be dotted with pit stops where it will be possible to pump up tyres, fix a chain and have a drink of water, Roehl says.

And synchronised traffic lights prioritising bicycles over cars will bring riders from the suburbs into Copenhagen "quickly and safely," he says.

That "could lead car-addicted suburbanites to take their bikes to go to Copenhagen," says cyclist Bresell, for whom bike highways will "make life even more difficult for motorists and easier for cyclists."

Already Copenhagen stands out among other European capitals for its cycling infrastructure,

counting more than 390 kilometres (242 miles) of bike paths.



People are seen riding their bicycles in Copenhagen, on Noerrebrogade boulevard. In Copenhagen, already one of the world's most bicycle-friendly cities, work has begun to turn an extensive network of bike paths into full-fledged cyclist highways in a bid to push more commuters to leave their cars at home.

Between 2006 and 2010, it spent 250 million kroner (33.6 million euros) in bike infrastructure and an extra 75 million kroner were allotted for 2011.

The first two city-to-suburb bicycle highways are due to open at the end of 2011 and reach a distance of 15 kilometres from central Copenhagen, while a third, going as far as 20 kilometres from the capital's centre, will be put into service in 2012.

While celebrating the Danish capital's efforts, Bredal of the cyclist association says he hopes the rest of the Scandinavian country, which altogether has 5.5 million inhabitants and around four million bikes, will soon "follow Copenhagen's example."

Denmark's other main cities -- Aarhus, Odense and Aalborg -- are already contemplating similar bike highways, according to the head of the [Copenhagen](#) project, Maria Helledi Streuli, who is eager to sing the plan's praise.

"It's an initiative that is good for the environment, for health," Streuli enthuses, adding it also "makes it possible to unclog car traffic and to breathe easier in the city."

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