

# Australian cycling boom a myth

28 June 2012

(Phys.org) -- There has been a decline in the per capita level of cycling in Australia, with population growth three times that of recent increases in cycling trips, according to research by University of Sydney Professor Chris Rissel and independent researcher Chris Gillham.

The study, recently published in the journal *World Transport Policy and Practice* ([PDF, 557KB](#)) demonstrates that on a per capita basis there were 37.5 percent fewer Australians riding bikes in 2011 than in 1985-86.

This is despite Australia's population increasing by 58.4 percent from 1986 to 2010.

While Australia's reported cycling 'boom' over the past decade has seen increasing numbers of cyclists, there has been an effective decline in per capita cycling participation over 25 years, according to the study.

"If even just 10 percent more people were cycling instead of driving at any given time, [traffic congestion](#) would be significantly reduced on Australian roads with a commensurate reduction in risk to motorists, pedestrians and cyclists," Professor Rissel, from the University's School of Public Health, said.

The health benefits from recreational exercise and environmental gains from reduced [CO2 emissions](#) would also be substantial, he added.

"The most likely major deterrent to more people cycling is [helmet legislation](#), which is a significant feature of the cycling environment in Australia."

"Well over half a million more Australians could be riding bicycles if we didn't have mandatory helmet laws, according to research I conducted last year which showed one in five adults surveyed in Sydney said they would ride a bicycle more if they did not have to wear a helmet," Professor Rissel said.

Australia has a low cycling rate compared with most countries and the international consensus is that the mandatory bicycle helmet laws, introduced in 1990-1992, are a significant contributor to this lack of participation.

There are now at least three local government areas in Australia (Fremantle, Adelaide and the City of Sydney) who want helmet laws relaxed.

"Another likely contributing factor to the declining rates of cycling nationally is the lack of investment in [cycling](#) infrastructure. Qualitative research consistently reports that people not confident riding on roads prefer bike paths separated from traffic."

Provided by University of Sydney

APA citation: Australian cycling boom a myth (2012, June 28) retrieved 1 December 2020 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-06-australian-boom-myth.html>

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