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## **Vélo et politique globale de déplacements durables**

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## *Summary*

Compared to the countries of Northern Europe and Central Europe, the use of bicycles in France seems very poor: nine times lower than in the Netherlands, six times lower than in Denmark, three times less than in Germany, Belgium or Switzerland. Why such differences? The cultural explanation often put forward is suffering from so many exceptions that it is not credible. The history of representations of the bicycle in each country does not exhaust either the subject. To understand these differences, we must to examine the evolution of urban transport policies and the resulting urban form, and for at least three reasons. 1/ It is impossible to develop the use of bicycles without simultaneously reducing the use of other modes, because the trip market is not extensible. 2/ The practice of the bicycle is very sensitive to road safety conditions and therefore to the influence of traffic. 3/ The bike is inadequate to make all trips and must necessarily be part of a sustainable transportation system combining walking, cycling and public transport.

Specifically, it is appropriate to adopt a historical approach by identifying the main periods of taking account of the bicycle in the transport policies and perform at the same time a work of international comparison. Three countries are more particularly studied: the France of course, the Netherlands for their exemplary cycling policy and Germany because its policy in this area has long been close to that of France before to diverge.

The report is therefore a urban cycling story in Europe in the overall evolution of mobility. The first chapter recalls the origins of the bicycle when it was shown, at the end of the nineteenth century, as a symbol of modernity. Chapter 2 describes the democratization of the bicycle, from the early twentieth century to the 30's. and the first threats to its development related to various attempts to adapt the city to the automobile. Chapter 3 recalls how, in the post-war, cycling has rapidly declined throughout Europe, including the Netherlands and Denmark, under the pressure of the automobile growth and with the now systematic adaptation of the city to it, and it points out the influence, in France, of the unbridled rise of mopeds. Chapter 4 describes the strong reactions of civil society in all automotive and how governments attempt to revive urban cycling during the 70's. Chapter 5 explains why, in the 80-90's, the bike use rises in some countries like the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, but continues to decline in others, such as France. Chapter 6 tries to understand why in this country, however, during the 2000's, urban cycling restarts in city centres, but decrease in the suburb, then tip the inconsistency of the ecological argument and the relevance of economic and public health arguments. A final chapter develops some key aspects of a policy of cycling city, such as the importance of city calming to encourage cycling, the necessary interface with public transport, the crucial role of promoting cycling and the reconquest of audiences. In an appendix, the uplifting case study of Strasbourg is detailed.

## News and events



### News

#### France's National Bicycle Plan: Lacklustre or Ambitious?

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 Cities for Cyclists, News, 01.02.2012

**France wants to see 10% of all trips by bike in 2020 according to a national master plan unveiled last week. In a bid to lift France's 3% of riders, the Government has released an "ambitious" bicycle plan which also seeks to make France Europe's No.1 Destination for bicycle tourists.**

The **31 page document** is a blue print which "seeks to ensure the inclusion of cycling in all national public policies".

Some of the document's key objectives and strategies are:

- To make 10% all trips by bicycle by 2020
- To become the number one bicycle tourism destination in Europe.
- To improve infrastructure, including obligatory bicycle garages in all news constructions.
- To develop off road bicycle paths (known as greenways), with a 50% increase in state funding.
- To implement "Right turn at Red Lights" for cyclists
- To increase everyday bicycle use with the possibility of tax incentives for cyclists
- To improve the image of cycling in France via a national coordinated communication strategy
- To improve bicycle/public transport interconnectivity, as well as investigating combined public transport/bike share tickets.
- To reduce bicycle theft via the "**bicycode**" scheme to engrave bicycles.



#### ECF's Influence

You may remember **ECF's recent Co2 study**, which concluded that cycling like the Danes (2.6 km a day) would help the EU reach 25% of the CO2 target for Transport. French policy makers also took this study to heart: it features in the "Plan national de Velo" on page 6 and has been used to justify the need for a national bicycle plan.

In a **speech** following the release of the plan, Transport Minister Mariani stated that: "...our general climate change

objective alone justifies an ambitious national policy promoting this ecologically responsible mode of transport”.

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the bicycle's potential when it comes to negating transport emissions. That contention amongst many.

## Lacking Ambition?

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The French Bicycle Users Association (FUB) believes that the government plans were lacking in vision.

“We're happy that the government has finally taken an official position, but we're disappointed by their lack of ambition”, stated a spokesperson for the organisation.

The French city of Strasbourg already [sees 15% of trips taken by bicycle](#) and ECF's '[Charter of Brussels](#)' is calling for a 15% bicycle modal share in the EU by 2020. France's next best towns include Grenoble and Nantes where 5-6% of all trips are done by bicycle. One must ask whether or not the government has missed seizing on a vital political opportunity by setting the bar too low.

The FUB was however pleased with certain aspects of the plan, such as the government's partnership on bicycle engraving which it believes should be pushed to the EU level.

The [French Greenways Association \(AF3V\)](#) told French Newspaper [Le Monde](#) that it's “delighted bicycle tourism is finally recognized as being important”, also underlining that its economic impacts are still largely underestimated.

Time will tell if France is to become the cycling nation that it so yearns to be.

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### About the Author



**Julian Ferguson** is the Communications Officer for the European Cyclists' Federation. Originally hailing from Australia and a keen bicycle advocate, he plans one day to ride his bicycle from Brussels to Melbourne

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