

Cyclists Spend More Than Car Drivers

Le Monde
15 May 2004

Pedestrians and cyclists bring life to town centres and bring more custom to shop-owners. That's the conclusion - contrary to popular belief - of a survey by the French Bike-User's Federation (Fubicy) and carried out under the direction of the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research). In May and June 2003, 1300 people were surveyed as they left shops in the town centres of Dijon, Grenoble, Lille, Nantes, Salon-de-Provence and Strasbourg.

The result shows that car drivers spend less than pedestrians and cyclists who have a similar disposable income. Car drivers do spend about 50% more per visit to the shops or the town centre than a pedestrian, cyclist or someone using public transport. However, in a week drivers spend much less: 87% less than a pedestrian, 12% less than a cyclist, and 3% less than someone using public transport. Only 34% of car drivers say "the long distance to travel" justifies their car usage. 14% cite "the weight of their shopping" and 13% "because it's quicker".

Yet this last advantage is the most popular reason (40%) for shopping by bicycle, ahead of the "economy" of using a bike (26%), and that they "enjoy the trip" (20%). Cycling is certainly economic - and for the town as well, particularly in town centres where space is expensive and hard to find. Fubicy points out that a bike takes a tenth the space of a car to park on the roadside. Fubicy also studied the flow of people that different modes of transport allow on a 3.5 metre wide road. A tram can transport 12,000 people per hour, people on foot 10,000 per hour, by bike 6,000, bus 5,000, and in cars, only 1,000 people per hour. The cost of an underground parking building is, at present, about 15,000 Euros per space - 6 million Euros for 400 spaces, to which one has to add expenses for maintenance and security of about 100,000 Euros per year. There are real problems recovering these costs - even when the parking is metered - and the cost of parking is generally falls on the town.

Getting cyclists into town is obviously much cheaper: 50 Euros for a bike stand in front of a shop. "Having a cycling policy that merits the name," concludes the study, "will cost the city about 5 Euros per person per year. Therefore, for a town of about 100,000 people the cost of building and running a 400-place car park corresponds to 15 years of funding for an effective cycling policy".

[Le Monde - thanks to Geoff Leyland for translation]