

Dear reader,

in cities with a high cycle share, most cyclists are all weather cyclists: they cycle when temperatures are average, when it is hot, when it is cold, when it rains, when it snows. However, during winter, cycling might be very reduced – but this happens mostly in cities with a low cycle share. Why is this – and what can be done about it?

Where winter cycling is normal



Cyclists in Oulu

In Copenhagen, Denmark, with a cycle modal share of over 30%, 80% of the cyclists continue cycling in winter. In the Netherlands, with a cycle share of about 25%, the drop is even less – about 85% of the cyclists continue in winter ([Sabir 2008](#)). In Graz, Austria, where the cycle share is about 16%, the winter share is 50-60% ([Graz Bicycle Counters](#)), while in Vienna, in the same country with a quite similar climate, the cycle share is around 5%, but only 23% of the cyclists continue in winter ([Fahrrad Wien](#)). This effect can even be seen in countries with much harsher, darker and longer winters than in Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands: where a significant part of the people cycle – the share of winter cycling is still quite high: the best cities in Finland and Sweden have an average cycling modal share of well over 20% - and even with lots of snow and temperatures well below zero, 30-50% of the cyclists [keep on going in winter](#).

It is because of the advantages of the cycle: it is fast, convenient, low cost, accessible to everybody and fun and healthy to use – in winter even invigorating – winter cycling strengthens the immune system and helps against winter depression.

Not a polar expedition



Having fun in Örnsköldsvik

Some research suggests that cycling in winter is even safer than it is in summer, because speeds are lower and cyclists more cautious. It depends. Even in the Netherlands, often authorities are ill prepared when more snow than usual comes and then [additional accidents happen](#).

However, it is normally sufficient to just wear common sense winter clothing, pay a little more attention to maintenance (lubing the chain, have functioning lights) and clean the bike as it gets dirty faster. When it is wet or snowy, you go a bit more cautious than usual. For everyday cycling, it is not necessary to get studded tyres or wear highly specialised winter cycling clothes.

Really tough winter weather (heavy snow, rainstorms) is often limited to a few days or a few weeks per year – not a reason to stop cycling for many months. However, many people do, more so in cities with a low cycling share.

Clearing the bike paths



not many cyclists here...

If cycle paths after snow fall are not cleared, it is only logic that cyclists are not encouraged. Many cities do much better:

- In Copenhagen, where 80% of cyclists keep on going in winter, cycle path clearance is top priority. They have invested heavily in specialist snow clearing machines. See the Copenhagen [bike path sweepers at work](#).
- [Örebro, Sweden](#), has a priority plan for snow removal and sanding of cycle paths in the winter, and for the removal of sand in spring. Örebro guarantees to remove snow from cycle paths within 12 hours of the end of snowfall.
- In Oulu, Finland winter maintenance of bicycle paths is even prioritised over streets.
- Zaanstad in the Netherlands aims to improve on clearing and information and has installed a [website](#) on which cyclists can report slippery road conditions. It is part of a nationally funded pilot project to improve wintry bicycle route conditions.

The Dutch centre of cycle-expertise Fietsberaad did research and found that many communities have no adequate clearing policy – they have some simple recommendations:



[Click to see video](#)

- Start in Summer with readying material and gear and prepare a priority clearing plan to swiftly clear the main cycle routes
- Avoid installation of infrastructure that tends to form hindrance in winter such as bollars, too narrow curves, too high kerbs
- Use adequate clearing technology: not salting, but sweeping in case of snow – special narrow cycle path clearing machines

Sometimes, cyclists have to speak up to demand snow clearing of cycle paths. Belgian cyclists can find a standard text to e-mail to their authorities on the website of the [Belgian cyclist's Federation](#) (link in Dutch). And if your municipality is not performing, here are some do-it-yourself solutions, either [by go-cart](#) or [by bike](#). After all, this is how a small group of volunteers convinced the [city of Calgary](#) in Canada to clear cycle paths in wintertime. Nowadays, Calgary has a detailed [map of pathways and sidewalks](#) that they keep clear from snow.

When determining their priorities, cities can ask themselves: is snow clearing on cycle paths worthwhile if there are only a handful of winter cyclists? Or are there only a handful of cyclists because cycle paths are not properly cleared?

Motivating citizens



Free check in Graz, © Heidi Schmitt, ARGUS Stmk

The challenge is to present winter cycling as a normal activity that “normal” people do – and to encourage cycling in winter in general. Many cities and regions hand out information on visibility, bike maintenance and clothing – some provide extras:

- In Vienna, [Fahrrad Wien](#) (link in German) was present with a free winter bike check service at important cycling junctions
- [Transport for Greater Manchester](#) offers one-to-one advice to find a good winter cycling route, free bike maintenance courses, and even up to six hours of one-to-one cycle training for commuters.
- In Brussels, cyclists on the road in November got a free breakfast and bicycle lights.
- Other organisations have produced beautiful or funny videos to promote winter cycling, like the [Ottawa Bicycle Lanes Project](#) in Canada (video 4,5 and 6), [SmartaResor](#) in Sweden (see bottom of page) or [RouGETomate](#) in Québec.

Give it a try and you will like it



[Click to see video](#)

- See this [Eltis video on winter cycling promotion](#) in Oulu.
- Örnköldsvik in northern Sweden offered free studded tires to commuters if they would cycle at least three times a week. In exchange the participants had to use a GPS during cycling, write a weekly log and report back on cycle path quality. Only 30 percent of participants had previously been biking in winter. After the test period 79 percent of participants would continue to ride at least three days a week.
- A similar campaign was conducted in Sweden, in [Linköping](#) and [Gävleborg](#) (link in Swedish), handing out winter tyres, bicycle lights, cycle computers, reflective vests, seat covers and helmets.
- As from 2012, the annual [Bike Kilometre Competition](#) in Finland has a winter edition in February and March, under the motto: "Winter cycling is great exercise and before anything it is fun and refreshing if you have the right attitude and equipment".

Conclusion: Make people enjoy winter cycling



Enjoying Copenhagen

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Inspiration can be found in the snowy paradises of Scandinavia, that show us that cycling is normal even in harsh circumstances. However, the images of thickly dressed cyclists in snowy landscapes might be something that puts potential cyclists in more moderate countries off. As Mikael Colville-Andersen points out on the Copenhagenize blog, we have to be aware of the adverse effects of [overcomplicating winter cycling](#).

Providing well usable infrastructure, encouragement, some useful tips and help with bicycle maintenance can bring you a long way. In general, the more people cycle on average, the higher the share of winter cyclists will rise – and people will enjoy the freshness, the speed and having no hassles with icy windshields or overcrowded and damp public transport.

ECOMM programme online



The ECOMM takes place in Florence from 7-9 May. The [programme](#) and [registration](#) are online. It has an attractive Programme some new themes: "Secrets of our Behaviour", "City and Cycling Logistics", "Capitalisation" and "Tourism". Please have a look! We will report on details in the next e-update.

For more events, please visit the [EPOMM Calendar](#).



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Co-funded by the Intelligent Energy Europe Programme of the European Union



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