

PRESS RELEASE

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UK lagging behind Europe in supporting and prolonging cycling among the older population

Cycling could play a significant role in promoting health and wellbeing among the older population but the UK is lagging behind other European countries¹.

This is one of the findings of a three-year study which set out to investigate how older people in the UK experience cycling and how this affects independence, health and wellbeing.

The cycle BOOM study led by Oxford Brookes University involved 240 participants across Oxford, Bristol, Reading and Cardiff. These were a mix of non-cyclists, current cyclists and also a group of older cyclists who wished to re-engage with cycling after a break and who took part in an eight-week 'cycling and wellbeing' trial designed to investigate their experience and measure the impact on their mental and physical health.

Results from the cycling and wellbeing trial showed that cycling has the potential to improve physical and mental health in the older population, however, participants reported that a number of factors including poor and unsupportive infrastructure and fear of injury from other traffic, had a negative impact on their cycling experience.

Dr Tim Jones, Reader at the School of the Built Environment, Oxford Brookes University, who led the study said: *"Our research has demonstrated that older people who currently cycle, or who have tried cycling, recognise the positive benefits it can make to their health and wellbeing.*

"However, they find infrastructure in the UK generally unsupportive of their needs, and the small minority that do cycle, who we classify as "resilient riders" use various coping strategies to deal with declining capabilities and road danger. This includes timing their rides to avoid peak periods, riding away from motor traffic, adapting cycles, and even riding on the pavement.

"While the issues highlighted are relevant to all cyclists, they are more acutely felt in an ageing cohort as capabilities change and previously easy activities become

¹ The share of all journeys by cycle by the over 60s is just 1 per cent compared to 23 per cent in The Netherlands, 15 per cent in Denmark and 9 per cent in Germany.

more difficult. The way our towns and cities are designed, as well as cycle technology, needs to consider the diverging capabilities of different users, if cycling is to be embedded in the lives of an increasingly older population.”

A series of recommendations based on the findings is being presented at final conference this week in London and Manchester. This will advise policy makers, and more specifically, planners, engineers and designers, health promoters and the cycle industry, on the part they could play in supporting older cycling as part of a broad age friendly city agenda.

Dr Jones added: *“Our study reinforces the need for cities to plough ahead and create a dedicated infrastructure for cycling along major roads, implement slower speed zones and support the growing market of electric bikes. Interventions targeted at promoting older cycling will, not only support healthy ageing, but it will also support younger cycling and help address the pressing issue of low levels of fitness and growing levels of obesity amongst the nation’s younger population.”*

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Sample quotes from participants [names are pseudonyms]. Further quotes and links to participant videos available in the Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations in the report.

*“It’s not like a drive is it, when you know you’ve always got a lane? On the bike you’ve got loads of different things, haven’t you? Sometimes you have got to cross a pavement, sometimes you’ve got a cycle lane, and sometimes you’re among the traffic, sometimes you’re in a dangerous spot in the middle of the road. It’s nothing like being in a car, is it?” **Sibylle, 50s, Cardiff.***

*“I don’t like looking over my shoulder, partly as a result of the accident I had in the car, lost some mobility turning right, if I was turning right, I tend to stop, look around and then cut across, particularly if I am tired and it is up hill...” **Gareth, 60s, Bristol***

*“... over the last couple of years my bike has been modified a lot, you know, it’s... to cope with me as much as anything, I was getting pins and needles, I’ve got carpal tunnel syndrome, and so things like the handle bars come up by riding much more sat up position than I used to, I can’t ride drop handle bars anymore.” **Sadie, 60s, Reading.***

*“It was good exercise [riding the e-bike] and I felt that I’d really accomplished something. If you’d suggested this to me a year ago I’d have dismissed the possibility of cycling this distance out of hand.” **Harvey, 60s, Oxford***

*“Really enjoying the time on the e-bike. Beginning to wonder if I will find my own cycle hard work. Feel fitter and sleeping extremely well.” **Amanda, 60s, Reading***

Notes to Editors

1. The study findings will be launched at the cycle BOOM final conference on [Monday 26 September at London South Bank University \(10.00am-3.00pm\)](#) and at the [Central Library in Manchester on Wednesday 28 September \(10.00am-3.00pm\)](#). The conference in Manchester is being supported by [Age Friendly Manchester](#).
2. More information about the cycle BOOM study can be found at www.cycleboom.org and the full report and briefing notes can be found at www.cycleboom.org/outputs/
3. A series of short video clips with 12 participants from the trial can be found at www.cycleboom.org/video. Video clips and high resolution photographs are available. Please contact the Oxford Brookes University Press Office for more information.
4. The study involved approximately 240 people, over 50 years old, from Oxford, Bristol, Reading and Cardiff and ran between October 2013 and September 2016. The oldest participant was 83 years old (Brian Hook based in Oxford) and a video of his experience is available at <http://www.cycleboom.org/outputs/videos/>.
5. 'cycle BOOM' was funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) under the UK Research Councils' Lifelong Health and Wellbeing Programme (Grant Number EP/K037242/1).
6. The 'cycle BOOM' project team is:
 - Oxford Brookes University:** Dr Tim Jones (Lead Researcher), Ben Spencer and Nick Beale.
Contact: Dr Tim Jones at tjones@brookes.ac.uk or telephone 07764 48 26 46
 - University of Reading:** Emma Street, Carien Van Reekum, Louise-Ann Leyland.
 - University of the West of England:** Kiron Chatterjee and Heather Jones.
 - Cardiff University:** Justin Spinney, Carl Mann and Shaun Williams.
7. Set in a historic student city, Oxford Brookes is one of the UK's leading universities and enjoys an international reputation for teaching excellence and innovation as well as strong links with business and industry. More information is available on the Oxford Brookes website at www.brookes.ac.uk