

## The social sustainability of cycling

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Is cycling sustainable? Well of course it is! It consumes no fossil fuels and hence contributes nothing to global warming and climate change, nor to pollutant emissions such as NO<sub>x</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub> that help to create our poor air quality. It is an active travel mode, thereby promoting health and tackling obesity. Bikes are efficient in their use of roadspace. The majority of journeys are short and hence within the scope of cycle users. There are more cycles than cars in the UK so availability is high. The manufacturing, repair and retailing of accessories contribute to economic activity and workshops renovating old bicycles can develop engineering skills and help divert youth away from crime and anti-social behaviour.

So just who is it that gains all these benefits? Most cyclists are fit young men. Many people either cannot or choose not to cycle. Disabled people, older people, women and ethnic minorities are all under-represented as cyclists. Unfit and obese people who could benefit most from exercise, tend not to cycle. Cycling is difficult in hilly locations and in bad weather, such as rain and strong winds. Considerations of safety, security, clothing and personal hygiene make it difficult for cycling to be the preferred mode for many journeys. Cycling has a 2% mode share, so should transport planners really be making such strenuous interventions in support of the desires of a small minority?



Steve Atkins is a highly experienced transport planner, specialising in matters of policy and research. Starting his career as an academic at Portsmouth Polytechnic and Southampton University, he has now spent more than 15 years as a transport planning practitioner with London Transport, Southampton City Council, the Strategic Rail Authority and MVA Consultancy.

Steve's research topics have included travellers' responses to toll price changes on Southampton's Itchen Bridge; the accuracy and efficacy of transport planning methodologies; pioneering work on transport and personal security; the effects on traffic flows of reducing roadspace; and transport appraisal methods.

He is a former Chairman of IHT Greater London Branch and, together with Phil Goodwin and Sally Cairns, was awarded an ICE Gold Medal in 2004.