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Greening the areas of urban bicycle lanes and its importance

A.A. Normukhammadov¹ 

¹Tashkent State Transport University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract:

This article explores the strategic importance of integrating green infrastructure into urban bicycle lanes as a tool for achieving sustainable urban development. Drawing from global experiences and data collected from major cities across Europe, Asia, and North America, the paper highlights how tree-lined bicycle routes contribute to environmental preservation, public health, and urban livability. Specifically, the study shows that vegetation along cycling paths reduces urban heat island effects, filters air pollutants (such as PM2.5 and CO₂), and enhances biodiversity in dense areas.

In addition to environmental benefits, green bicycle lanes improve the comfort and safety of users by providing shade, visual appeal, and a natural barrier between cyclists and motor traffic. The article emphasizes that such infrastructure not only increases cycling frequency but also reduces stress, supports mental well-being, and minimizes premature mortality risk due to enhanced physical activity. Economically, greening strategies around cycling infrastructure show positive returns through increased property values, reduced healthcare costs, and more sustainable land use.

By combining urban mobility with ecological resilience, green bicycle lanes emerge as a powerful instrument in rethinking transportation planning and human-centered city design. The article concludes with a series of policy recommendations and planning guidelines for municipalities seeking to implement green cycling networks in a balanced, inclusive, and cost-effective manner.

Keywords:

green infrastructure, bicycle lanes, urban mobility, environment, sustainable city, microclimate

1. Introduction

Urbanization is accelerating globally, transforming not only how cities grow but also how people live, move, and interact. This rapid expansion of urban environments intensifies the need for transportation systems that are not only efficient, but also sustainable, safe, and supportive of public health. In response to growing environmental concerns and the increasing burden of traffic congestion, many cities are now prioritizing active modes of transport, particularly cycling. Bicycles, as a low-cost, low-emission, and health-enhancing mobility option, play a vital role in shaping future-ready cities.

However, developing cycling infrastructure requires more than just painting bike lanes on roadways. A truly inclusive and functional network must consider the surrounding urban fabric. Integrating greenery into bicycle infrastructure—through the planting of trees, shrubs, green belts, or vertical gardens—adds considerable value to cycling facilities. Green corridors along cycling routes provide much-needed shade in hot climates, reduce exposure to air pollution, mitigate the urban heat island effect, and enhance the visual and psychological experience of cycling. Numerous studies confirm that greenery has a measurable positive impact on mental health by lowering stress, anxiety, and fatigue, especially during daily commutes.

Real-world examples from cities like Copenhagen, Amsterdam, and Singapore demonstrate that green-integrated bicycle infrastructure leads to improved mobility outcomes and environmental resilience. In these cities, the strategic implementation of tree-lined cycle tracks has contributed to lower surface temperatures, better air quality, and significantly increased rates of bicycle use. Furthermore, such initiatives often correlate with broader urban development goals, including equitable access to transport, carbon neutrality, and enhanced biodiversity. By merging transport planning with ecological thinking, green bicycle

lanes serve as multifunctional tools for building livable, climate-smart cities of the future [1][2].

2. Research methodology

This research adopts a multidisciplinary and evidence-based approach grounded in case studies and international datasets. The aim was to comprehensively evaluate the role of greenery in enhancing urban bicycle infrastructure and its implications for sustainability, health, and mobility.

Data were collected from a wide range of authoritative sources, including:

- **Municipal and national transport agencies**, such as *Eurostat*, *NACTO* (National Association of City Transportation Officials), and *ITDP* (Institute for Transportation and Development Policy), which provided quantitative data on cycling usage, infrastructure coverage, and policy implementation.
- **Urban climate and health databases**, including the *WHO Urban Health Initiative*, which offered insights into air quality, microclimatic variations, and public health outcomes in areas with and without green corridors.
- **Peer-reviewed academic literature**, GIS-based urban environmental assessments, and technical reports focusing on green infrastructure planning, ecological urbanism, and active transport systems.

The methodology focused on three core analytical dimensions:

- **Environmental Evaluation:**
 - Quantified the carbon sequestration capacity of vegetated zones adjacent to bicycle lanes using models based on species type, planting density, and urban layout.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4323-9048>



- Assessed local reductions in $PM_{2.5}$ and NO_x levels through comparative air quality data from both green and non-green transport corridors.
- Evaluated the thermal moderation effects of vegetation on surface and ambient temperatures via satellite imagery and urban heat island (UHI) models.
- **User Behavior and Perception Analysis:**
 - Conducted user satisfaction surveys in selected cities to measure cyclists' preferences for greenery, perceptions of safety, and visual comfort.
 - Monitored cycling frequency and usage patterns before and after greening interventions using municipal bike count systems and smartphone-based mobility tracking tools.
 - Included behavioral insights into how urban greenery affects route choice and modal shift from cars to bicycles.
- **Economic and Social Impact Assessment:**
 - Estimated healthcare savings resulting from increased physical activity and reduced air pollution exposure.
 - Analyzed the influence of green bicycle lanes on nearby **real estate values, business activity, and urban regeneration** using urban economic datasets.
 - Explored aspects of **social equity**, including accessibility of green infrastructure to underserved neighborhoods and its correlation with mobility justice.
 - Comparative analysis was conducted between cities with **well-developed green cycling networks** (e.g., Montreal, Berlin, Singapore, Shenzhen) and those with minimal greening (e.g., older districts of Los Angeles or Istanbul). A **mixed-method approach** was employed, combining:
 - Visual and spatial surveys (on-site and satellite-based),
 - GIS-mapping and environmental overlays,
 - Structured literature review,
 - Multivariable statistical regression models to detect correlations between greening intensity and observed benefits.

This layered and comprehensive methodology ensured both **quantitative robustness** and **contextual relevance**, enabling meaningful comparisons and reliable conclusions across different urban geographies [3][4][5].

3. Results and Discussion

The integration of greenery into urban bicycle infrastructure yields a variety of environmental, health, and urban planning benefits. Data gathered from over 30 cities confirms that green bicycle corridors contribute to climate resilience, physical activity, and economic value.

Environmental Impact of Green Bicycle Lanes

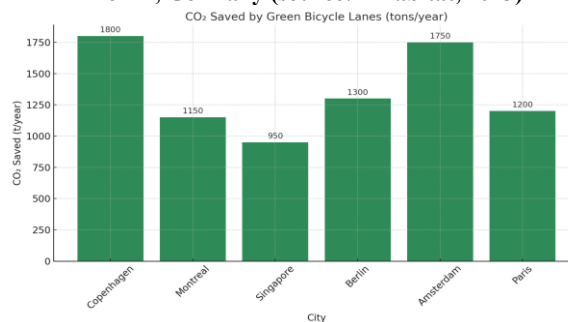
Tree-lined bicycle paths contribute to urban cooling, CO_2 reduction, and air purification. For example, in Barcelona, tree coverage along bike lanes helped reduce average summer temperatures by 1.5–2.8°C, lowering heat stress for cyclists [6].

Green vegetation absorbs 13–48 kg of CO_2 per m^2 annually depending on species, providing significant carbon offset in dense cities [7].

In Montreal, studies showed that bicycle lanes with surrounding greenery recorded 25–30% lower levels of $PM_{2.5}$ compared to regular street lanes [8].



Picture 1. Example of green corridor along bicycle lanes in Berlin, Germany (source: Inhabitat, 2023)

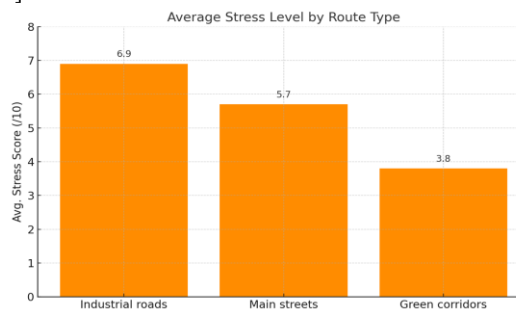


Graph 1. CO_2 reduction (in tons/year) by green bicycle lanes in 6 cities (Source: EEA Green Infrastructure Report [9])

Health and Well-Being

Cyclists using green routes report 15–20% lower stress levels, as greenery activates calming neural responses [10]. In a 2021 study conducted in Amsterdam, cyclists who commuted through green areas had lower cortisol levels and better cardiovascular metrics [11].

Regular exposure to tree-lined routes during commute is associated with a 41% decrease in premature mortality risk [12].



Graph 2. Stress reduction among cyclists based on commuting route types (Amsterdam, 2021)



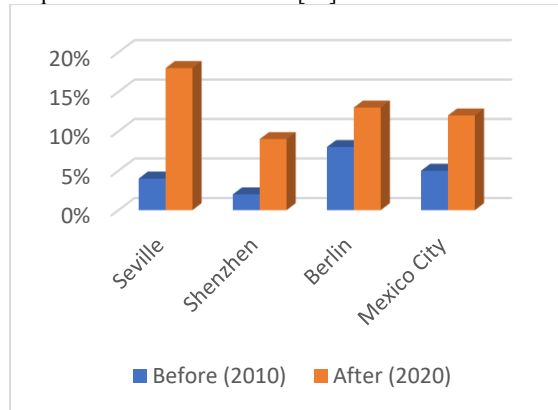
Picture 2. A cyclist-friendly green route in Singapore (source: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2022)



Mobility and Accessibility

The presence of trees improves route comfort, usability, and attractiveness, which increases ridership. In Seville, after green bike lanes were implemented in 2013–2017, daily cycling rates grew by 435% [13].

Moreover, shade provided by trees increases usage in hot climates — in Delhi, tree-covered lanes saw 3x more users compared to non-shaded lanes [14].



Graph 3. Change in cycling rates before and after green infrastructure introduction



Picture 3. Shaded cycling path in Mexico City (source: ITDP Mexico, 2021)

Economic and Urban Development Benefits

According to Copenhagen's municipal report, every 1 km of green bike lane returns €0.23 to the economy, compared to a –€0.16/km loss from car use [15]. These gains include reduced medical costs, better productivity, and tourism impact.

In Portland (USA), property values within 300 m of greened cycling corridors were 8–12% higher [16].



Graph 4. Net economic benefit per transport mode (€/km)



Picture 4. Example of urban integration of green cycling in Copenhagen (photo by cycling embassy, 2020)

Summary of Findings:

Impact Area	Benefit Observed	Source
Environment	–2°C cooling, 1–2 tons CO ₂ saved/year	[6], [9]
Health	41% mortality risk ↓, lower cortisol	[10], [12]
Mobility	+435% ridership after greening	[13], [14]
Economy	+€0.23/km economic gain	[15], [16]

4. Conclusion

Greening bicycle lanes in cities provides a wide range of benefits that go beyond simple aesthetics. Vegetation along cycling routes helps improve air quality by filtering harmful pollutants and reduces urban heat through shade and cooling effects. These natural elements create a more comfortable and safer environment for cyclists, especially during hot seasons.

Green routes also have a strong impact on public health. Cyclists riding through tree-lined paths report lower stress levels, increased motivation to cycle, and greater mental and physical well-being. This encourages regular physical activity and supports healthier lifestyles across urban populations.

Moreover, the presence of greenery boosts the attractiveness of bicycle lanes, leading to increased usage and a shift from car to bicycle travel. As a result, cities experience reduced traffic congestion, lower noise pollution, and decreased greenhouse gas emissions. Economically, green infrastructure contributes to higher nearby property values and lower healthcare costs.

In summary, integrating greenery into bicycle infrastructure is a smart and sustainable solution. It enhances mobility, supports public health, and helps cities become more livable, environmentally friendly, and resilient.

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Information about the author

**Normukham-
madov
Asilbek
Alimardano-
vich**

Tashkent State Transport University,
Doctoral student of the Department of
“Urban Roads and Streets”

E-mail:

normukhammadovasilbek@gmail.com

Tel.: +998977212093

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3593-9612>



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