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**Summary:**

# Norwegian cycling policy – on track

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*Bicycling represented seven percent of daily travels in Norway in 1992. Two decades later, the modal share of cycling was reduced to five percent. In the meantime, the number of policy documents stressing the importance of bicycling have increased tremendously. An active policy networking across administrative sectors and levels, and the public and voluntary sector, has seemingly put the bicycle high up on the public agenda. Recent policy documents promote strong, concrete and quantitative goal formulations, both at the central and local level. However, the gap between goals and realisation seems to be widening. The target of increasing the bicycle's modal share from five to eight percent within eight years will hardly be met. Weak institutional capacity, delayed plan production and low prioritisation of bicycle infrastructure investments, are important factors explaining the poor implementation. A more comprehensive and integrated approach to both technical cycling infrastructure and new contexts of interpretation of cycling, may contribute to a normalisation of bicycling as an important transport mode, especially in cities.*

Policy formulations in the drafts for the most recent National Transport Plan (2014–2023) represent a starting point for this study. The paper draft of *National Bicycle Strategy – Promote the bicycle!* from 2012 demands that all cities and towns with more than 5000 inhabitants, should have an *approved plan* for and integrated main/core network for cycling by 2014. When Norwegian Road Plan II was launched in 1977, the goal was that all towns (>5000 inhabitants) should already have *established an integrated bicycle network* within 1985. The formulations in the transport plan documents from the last revision represent, in light of the documents from 1977, an interesting goal reduction – from *realisation* of integrated bicycle networks within 1985, to merely *launching plans* for the same, 35 years later.

All bicyclists know that these integrated bicycle networks, intended to have been realised by 1985, do not yet exist in Norwegian cities and towns. This study aims at exploring the basis for this lasting, if not increasing, gap between ideals and realities in Norwegian cycling politics.

## Methodological approach

Development and realisation of a policy depend on central and local authorities, as well as pressure from and interaction with actors from civil society. In our mapping of the development of national bicycle politics, we have studied national documents, such as the road plans from the 1970s, -80s and 90s, and after 2000, the National Transport Plans. In order to assess the importance of local politics for the development of bicycle facilities and the promotion of cycling, the three Norwegian cities Bergen, Kristiansand, and Trondheim have been studied. These cities were selected mainly because their daily shares of bicycle travels vary a lot; the modal shares have developed very differently over time; their cycling facilitation are evaluated highly differently by the local cyclists; and there are huge differences in the actual bicycle infrastructure. These cities also differed widely in their assessment of

local bicycle facilitation when reporting to the local road planning in 1977, and in what they regarded as the most pressing problems for cyclists. We have approached the role of the civil society through policy documents and informant interviews with some of the recent leaders within the main NGOs in this field, the National Bicyclist Association.

## Earlier research on cycling politics

In earlier research, the extent and quality of cycling infrastructure, e.g. cycle lanes, are among the main explanatory factors for cycling shares across countries and cities. Environmental factors such as topography, weather and climate are also found to be significant. The individual choice of transport mode is usually assumed to be influenced by individual background variables like age, gender and family situation, and the individual access to transport resources (driver licence, access to a car, to public transport, to a bike). In addition to the physical (technical and environmental) factors other contextual factors are also seen as decisive – political, institutional and socio-cultural factors such as traditions, established practices, norms and values related to bicycling.

This study mainly addresses the *political and institutional context* when searching for basis for bicycle politics across time and in different cities. Many policy variables are frequently found to play a part. Among these are, for instance, the scope of the local bicycling politics, the concrete actions safeguarding bicyclists' interests in the local government, and the overall involvement on behalf of cycling and bicyclists in general. There is, however, scarcely research on the *implementation deficits* from overarching policy goals to the very realisation, in the situation when such policy goals actually are formulated and put forward in prevailing policy documents.

## The bicycle in national transport documents

While Norwegian Road Plan II from the late seventies provided considerable interest, the national road plans in the eighties did not emphasise bicycling as a transport mode. The first National Transport Plan (NTP) was launched in 2003. The next will be the fifth revision. The NTP-documents pays more and more attention the bicycle. Our historical exploration of main transport policy documents the last forty years reveals a development from a marginal role of the bicycle to a significant attention in the Norwegian Road Plan II from 1977. There are, however, no evidence of any breakthrough for the bicycling part of this plan in the political practice.

In the 1990s, and in particular in the 2000s, the bicycle became a highly appreciated transport mode in politics and administration. The bicycle has clearly been highlighted and put into more central policy making, and for the first time been taken seriously as a transport mode, according to our informants. From the overarching national bicycle strategies (NBS) from 2003 (put forward every fourth year with the NTPs) bicycling has clearly got a national policy attention.

The goal structure in the national bicycle strategies seems to be continuously changed. In the first NBS, as part of the NTP 2006-2016, the main goal was formulated like this: *“Bicycling must be safer and more attractive”*. Four years later the goal is that *bicycling shall be attractive for all*, whereas the main goal in NBS, in NTP 2014-23, addresses the extent of bicycling in the future: *Bicycle traffic will make up for 8 percent of all travels within 2023*. This quantification of the bicycle share has been a secondary objective also in the earlier NBSs – without connected to a specific year.

The objective of a bicycle share of eight percent has been in the goal structure in all the NBS. There is, however, no evaluation of the realism of this goal – that is of the actual probability of reaching this goal within 2023. Since the bicycle share is so stable over time – between four and five percent in all the last four Norwegian national travel surveys since 2000 – the increase to the eight percent share will be a considerable challenge. Several demographic and mobility trends seem to counteract any increased bicycle share. The population growth consists to a large extent of social groups less prone to bicycling than others, e.g. the oldest elderly people and non-European immigrants. Also, the population’s increasingly better access to car works against increased bicycling. However, the strong urbanisation with more and more people living in urban areas together with a greater awareness and policy measures for reduced car use, will, on the other hand, benefit increased bicycling.

### **Bicycle policy development in three cities**

Our investigation of bicycle politics in the three cities, Bergen, Kristiansand, and Trondheim, has revealed three different development tracks – different cycling facilities implying different motivation for using the bike. Kristiansand was already in the seventies on a good track on constructing bike lanes. In contrast, Trondheim and Bergen did not prepare this kind of infrastructure before in the eighties and nineties. Whereas Bergen in these formative years mainly prioritised road construction (establishing what they called *Useful Road Net*), both Kristiansand and Trondheim had a much more balanced approach since they also invested in bicycle infrastructure, not only roads for cars. In Kristiansand and Trondheim different agencies have built an institutional capacity and competence with an organisation that seemingly more easily promote bicycle in the planning.

The bicycle responsibility in Bergen has traditionally been rather sprawled or fragmented organisationally. The municipality has not been able to build a competence ensuring the role of the bicycle in the production of local regulatory and construction plans. This may easily be seen in the light of the prioritisation of bicycle politically. A low priority of cycling in general has obviously consequences for the status and attractiveness in working with bicycle questions internally in the municipal administration. A low attractiveness working with bicycle compared to other policy areas, may hamper the recruitment of new, competent employees that may promote the role of the bicycle. In Bergen, a call for a “bicycle office” has been suggested, drawing on the positive experiences with the success and firm organisation of an “urban light-rail office”. This suggestion has, however, been rejected politically.

Competence and a beneficial organisation internally are certainly of great importance. Quite regularly, plans and constructions that do not influence the basic conditions for bicycling are implemented. A good planning competence paves the way for a beneficial planning framework also for good bicycle solutions in relevant cases. A certain planning preparedness contributes also to a *faster implementation* of new project when the budgets invite to do so.

The importance of the internal organisation when it comes to the role of the bicycle is underlined by our informants both in Kristiansand and Trondheim. Kristiansand puts forward that an independent organisational unit, “*the land-use and transport planning coordination in the Kristiansand region*”, severely contributed to enhance the bicycle promotion. In this collaboration, a certain bicycle group develops bicycle plans in close cooperation with the municipalities and the Norwegian Public Roads Administration. In addition, the role of the bicycle and various bicycle solutions are

continuously under evaluation in all new constructions. Also Trondheim has emphasised the importance of a smooth collaboration among various agencies.

The literature on bicycle use underlines that the access to bicycle infrastructure ensuring the cyclists' passability and safety, stands out as the most important factor. Of the three case cities, Kristiansand and Trondheim have the largest extent of walking and cycling lanes per capita. Then it is almost self-evident that these two cities have a higher bicycling use. When the bicycle share in Bergen is so much lower than in the two other cities, the poorer cycle infrastructure is one important factor. In turn, this may be due to a failing implementation culture. The city does not lack ambitious goal formulations, but has some organisational failures that, as mentioned, seem to result in lack of plans, which in turn hampers the implementation, due to, among other things, less economic resources for bicycle infrastructure than the other two cities.

In general, effect of campaigns and information are small or uncertain. However, there are clear differences among the cities when it comes to promoting bicycle for city's inhabitants. Kristiansand was earliest also regarding campaigns and commercials to increase the bicycle share (campaigns like "Cycle to Work"-, "Thousand Step" and "I drive Green"). In addition the municipality has emphasised information to the inhabitants. Also Trondheim has used commercials and information. Bergen has only to a very little extent used such communicative policy measures. It may be harder to promote cycling, the worse the cycling conditions are. Campaigns and information should probably only be launched after a satisfactory infrastructure is in place.

### **Rhetorical break-through – poor implementation**

Despite a rhetorical breakthrough in overarching plans and strategy documents in terms of well-intended policy formulations, there are still no practical repercussions – the implementation has failed. One explanation for the poor performance when it comes to practice, is the actual priority in the responsible authorities. Since long it has been said that newcomers in the Norwegian Public Road Authorities were allowed to "practice on" bicycle lanes before they could turn to "real roads". Also conflicting sectoral interests are seen to play a part. For instance, the police and the cultural heritage authorities are said to represent barriers for an improved bicycle facilitation in many cities.

Lack of strength in the realisation of national bicycle politics might be explained by a poorly developed institutional capacity for bicycling policies. There are only ad-hoc working groups behind the National Bicycle Strategies (NBS). Only the first of the strategy documents was evaluated after its launching.

A rhetorical breakthrough for bicycling may be due to an active policy network interaction, across the central and local level and across public and the voluntary sector. Still the gap between rhetoric and realities in the cycling policy exists. It seems to be a certain *collective powerlessness* among the various bicycle policy actors. Congruent action is lacking – often due to internal conflicting powers and interests, and mutual deprivation of responsibility. Other interests dominate over the common interest in promoting bicycling. Some institutional arrangements (authority, organisation, plan production) are seen as hampering the very cycling infrastructure implementation – for instance, even if the budgets are ready, the plans are not, because the planning processes ensuring the cycle lanes are in delay or have not been prioritised.

To normalise bicycling as a social practice, inherently constituted of material as well as sociocultural aspects, it seems clear that cycling political interventions and actions have to occur in a research-policy interaction, based on broad interdisciplinary insight and competence. That is, based on input from both those who know a lot about the best *technical bicycling infrastructure*, bicycle lanes and constructions, and input from those who know a lot of how *to change motivation and behaviour, policies and institutions* to promote and normalise bicycle as an ordinary daily transport form, especially in towns and cities.