



BMTS Article Digest October - November 2023

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

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YOUR HEALTH

Bike Riding in Middle School May Boost Mental Health, Study Finds

October 18, 2023 5:00 AM ET

Maria Godoy



Middle school is a good time to encourage kids to embrace the benefits of bike riding, says Esther Walker of Outride, a nonprofit which promotes cycling at school. *Eric Arce/Outride*

Teaching middle schoolers bike riding skills as part of physical education classes may help improve their mental health. That's according [to a new study](#) that looked at the effects of a 6-8 week cycling class taught in schools across the U.S.

"We saw that there were mental health benefits across the entire population," says Sean Wilson, a researcher at Loma Linda University School of Medicine and the study's senior author. "The main thing would be more of a positive outlook on life," he adds.

The mental health benefits of exercise are well-documented. And anyone who's lived through middle school knows those years can be particularly challenging. The new study comes at a time when [research shows](#) that youths across the U.S. are struggling with mental health.

Wilson and his co-authors wanted to see if taking part in a cycling instruction program could result in measurable changes in well-being for adolescents.

The study involved more than 1,200 students, ages 11 to 14, enrolled in middle schools across the U.S. that offered a program called Ride for Focus from the nonprofit [Outride](#), which conducts research and provides cycling programs and equipment for youths — primarily middle schoolers.

Students participated in a cycling class for at least three days a week, for a minimum of 6 weeks. They learned cycling safety and maneuvering skills outdoors while raising their heart rate and just having fun. The students completed standardized screening questionnaires before and after the program designed to measure their well-being.

"We know from the huge body of research that physical activities like cycling can benefit the body. But there's also a huge amount of growing research showing how it benefits the mind and social relationships as well," says Esther Walker, the senior research program manager for Outride. She says bike riding can be an ideal activity for adolescents because of the physical and social benefits it offers.

"Having that positive perception of riding and experiencing it with their peers in this really safe setting is really important," she says.

And middle school is a good time to encourage kids to embrace the benefits of bike riding, Walker says, because "they're starting to experience all sorts of social pressures, anxiety, stress from school, stress from home. So it's a really important time to provide additional outlets to explore not only physical activity, but also the freedom and relief that can come with going out for a bike ride during the day."

Exercise in general is "the most evidence-based, cheapest form of prevention and intervention that human beings can do for their mental health," says Dr. Allan Reiss, a professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at Stanford University School of Medicine.

While many forms of moderate-intensity exercise offer brain benefits, aspects of cycling give it a leg up on other physical activities, he says. "It engages all of these other parts of brain function, such as sensory perception," Reiss says. "You are looking at your hearing, you're balancing, you're navigating and turning. Oftentimes, you're doing it with someone else, so there's the positive effect of company or group activity."

Reiss, who is a child and adolescent neuropsychologist, says he often prescribes exercise to his young patients, though not necessarily cycling. "I try to prescribe what they like to do," Reiss says.

Of course, while exercise has powerful mental health benefits, it's not a panacea. For example, previous research has shown that adolescent girls are at higher risk of mental health problems like depression and anxiety than boys. The current study found that, while middle school girls reported increased well-being after participating in the cycling program, that increase "may just reach the kind of baseline level for male students," Walker notes.

And other pillars of healthy living are also important, notes Wilson. The study found that adolescents who didn't limit screen time to a maximum of two hours a day, or who got less than the recommended 8.5 hours of sleep, saw less improvement in their well-being, he says.

This story was edited by Jane Greenhalgh

Friday, 20 October 2023

'Pharmacy Deserts' Feared in Chapter 11 Plan

Rite Aid plans store closures in bankruptcy

Rite Aid's plan to close more stores as part of its bankruptcy process could hurt access to medicine and care, particularly in some majority Black and Hispanic neighborhoods and in rural areas, experts say.

The drugstore chain said late Sunday that its voluntary Chapter 11 process will allow it to speed up its plan to close underperforming stores. The company runs more than 2,000 stores, mostly on the East and West coasts.

It said it doesn't know yet which ones will close, but The Wall Street Journal reported last month that the company has proposed closing 400 to 500 of them.

When drugstore chains shutter stores, they often target locations in lower-income, Black and Latino neighborhoods with people covered through government-funded insurance programs like Medicaid, said Dima Qato, a University of Southern California associate professor who studies pharmacy access.

"They tend to close in these neighborhoods regardless of whether or not there is another pharmacy nearby," Qato said.

Rite Aid also has a lot of stores in smaller, rural markets that don't get as much business as locations in big cities, noted Jeff Jonas, a portfolio manager for Gabelli Funds who follows drugstores. He expects the company to close several hundred stores over the next couple years.

Closings can create so-called "pharmacy deserts," or neighborhoods without easy access to a drugstore. That can be poor neighborhoods where residents are less likely to own cars and a drugstore is more than half a mile away. It also refers to rural areas where drugstores may be miles away.

The Philadelphia-based company said in a fact sheet laying out its plan that it "will make every effort to ensure our customers have access to health services, whether at another Rite Aid or another nearby pharmacy."

AP's Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

US Bike Trips Have Soared Since 2019

New data reveals big gains in cycling since the start of Covid-19. But there's a warning, too.



A group of students commute to school on bicycles in San Francisco in 2022. Bike trips have soared in the Bay Area since 2019.
Photographer: Bryan Banducci/Bloomberg

By [Laura Bliss](#)

September 22, 2023 at 1:08 PM EDT

A new report from StreetLight Data reveals significant gains in cycling across the US since the start of the pandemic.

Out of the 100 largest US metropolitan statistical areas, New York City led the pack with 97% growth in bike trips from 2019 to 2022, reflecting a lasting shift towards cycling by commuters who previously relied on subways. San Diego, where bicycle sales soared during Covid and officials installed a raft of new bike lanes in turn, came in second with 71%

growth. Bakersfield, California, and Las Vegas had the third and fourth highest growth, respectively, while in Virginia, Richmond and Virginia Beach came in fifth and sixth place. Los Angeles and Chicago, the two largest US cities behind New York, also saw upwards of 50% growth.

Where Bike Trips Are Booming

Cities with the highest growth in bike trips since 2019

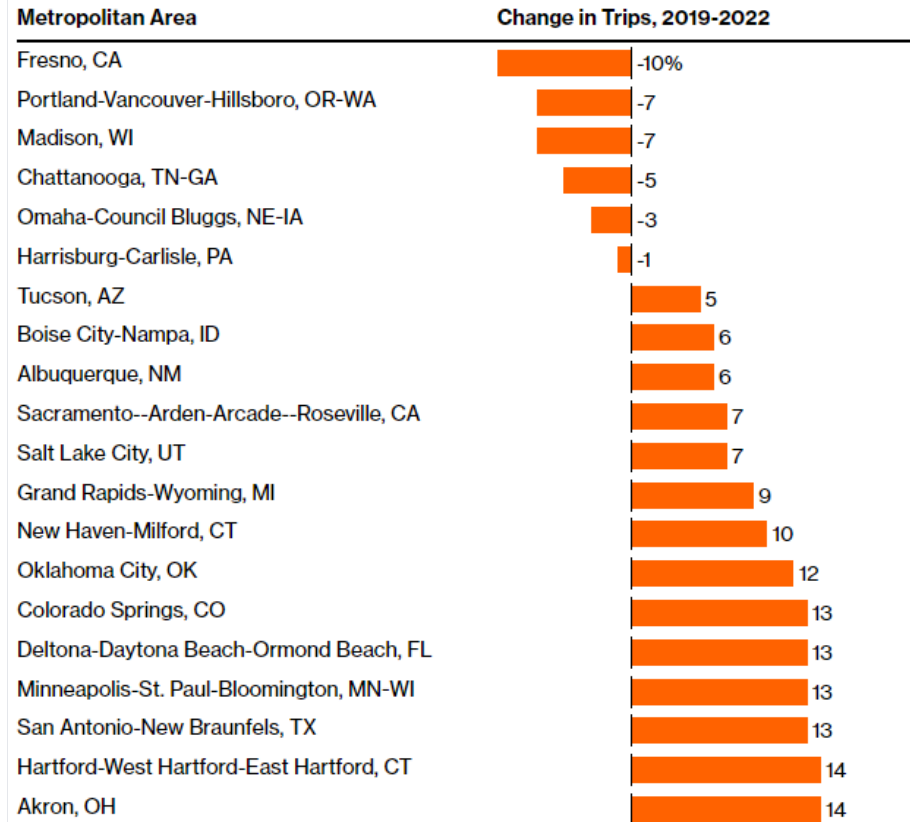
Metropolitan Area	Change in Trips, 2019-2022
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	96.9%
San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA	71.0
Bakersfield-Delano, CA	70.8
Las Vegas-Paradise, NV	69.6
Richmond, VA	68.5
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC	67.3
Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT	64.2
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC	59.3
Baltimore-Towson, MD	56.4
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	55.7
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	54.7
Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, FL	54.5
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	54.1
Toledo, OH	53.9
Lakeland-Winter Haven, FL	51.4
Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL-IN-WI	49.8
Baton Rouge, LA	49.4
Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, OH	49.1
Detroit-Warren-Livonia, MI	48.8
Cincinnati-Middletown, OH-KY-IN	48.0

Source: StreetLight

The report notes that the metros with the highest growth generally have better infrastructure for cycling and milder weather than those with more car-centric layouts. But this wasn't always true. Portland, Oregon, a city with a reputation for a strong cycling culture and networks of trails, saw bike trips fall 7%. It's one of a handful of metros, led by Fresno, California, that posted negative numbers on cycling growth.

Where the Wheels Aren't Turning

Cities with the lowest growth in bike trips since 2019



Source: StreetLight

Portland still ranks in the top ten for its share of bike trips per capita, a list topped by New York City, San Francisco and San Jose. Many of the cities with the largest absolute gains, such as Bakersfield and Richmond, were starting from relatively small bases of cycling activity.

Nationally, annual average daily bicycle trips per year climbed 37% between 2019 and 2022. Within that time period, 2020 and 2021 saw sharp gains, with bike trips flattening out in 2022. While there hasn't been any backsliding, the report states that "the flat line in 2022 is a warning that continued investment in safety-focused active transportation infrastructure ... will be critical to re-animating growth."

The data comes from StreetLight's Active Transportation Monitor, a set of bicycle and pedestrian metrics gathered primarily from location data off smartphones. The full report [can be found here](#).



FIRST NUMBERS: HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE USING THE ROUTE 434 GREENWAY?



Bob Joseph | Published: October 25, 2023

Photo: Bob Joseph/WNBF News

Traffic counts indicate several hundred people a week are walking, jogging and biking along the new Route 434 Greenway.

The two-and-a-half-mile shared-use pathway between Washington Street in Binghamton and Murray Hill Road in Vestal opened in early August.

The Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study has been tracking Greenway use since the construction barricades were removed.

A section of the Route 434 Greenway in Binghamton on September 14, 2023. (Photo: Bob Joseph/WNBF News)



Counters are set up at various points of the route to indicate how many people are using the \$25.4 million Greenway on foot and by bike.

There was limited use of the paved path in early August before Binghamton University students returned for the start of fall semester classes.

Overall Greenway use rose significantly as students learned of its availability.



An emergency call box on the Greenway in Binghamton. (Photo: Bob Joseph/WNBF News)

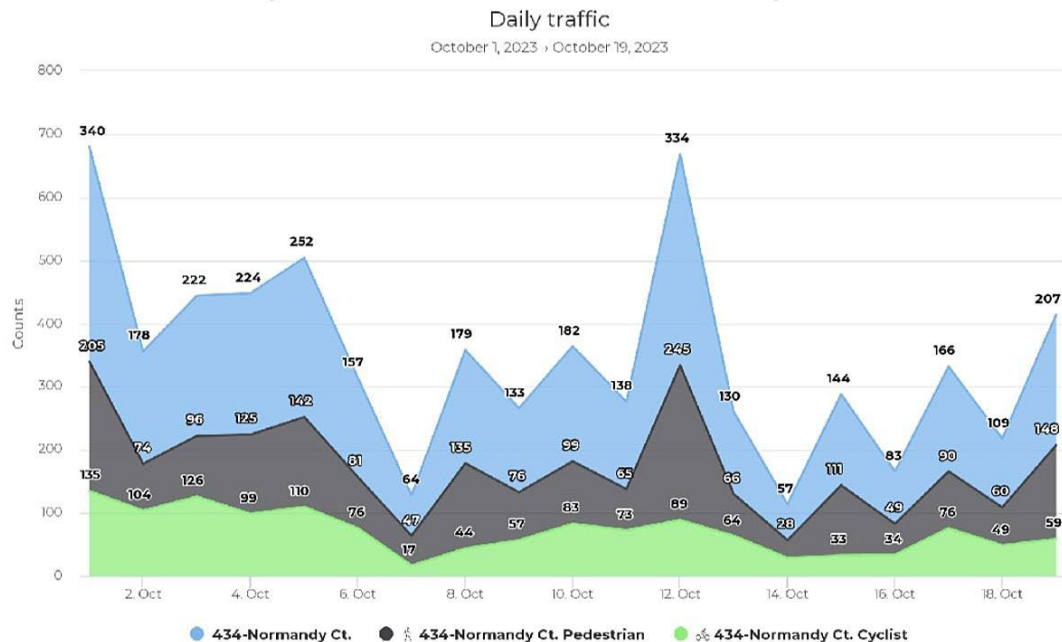
The highest number of users recorded in a single day was 550. That was on September 3 - the day before Labor Day.

BMTS executive director Jennifer Yonkoski said the numbers show "people are definitely using the trail." But she noted the numbers vary. She said it's clear that weather conditions affect usage.

The agency will continue to track the numbers in the coming months to determine whether the use will rise compared to the first few months of operation.

A chart provided by BMTS shows dramatic differences in use so far this month with a high of 340 on October 1 to a low of 57 on October 14.

October Daily Traffic- Normandy Court



BMTS has installed 13 bicyclist and pedestrian counters across the Greenway trail system in Broome and Tioga counties.

The long-established Vestal Rail Trail now averages more than 100 bicyclists and 500 pedestrians daily.

Bloomberg



Children ride through the Fyllingsdalen tunnel in Bergen, Norway, in June.

Photographer: Sergei Gapon/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

[Citylab](#)

Perspective

Secrets of the World's Coolest Bike Tunnel

Norway's Fyllingsdalen tunnel is a showstopping piece of urban cycling infrastructure — for a city where car-centric development still dominates.

By [David Zipper](#)

September 21, 2023 at 1:00 AM EDT

Corrected

September 22, 2023 at 5:55 PM EDT

History buffs know the Norwegian city of Bergen as a [hub of the legendary Hanseatic League](#), which dominated Northern European commerce as far back as the 1300s. Nestled

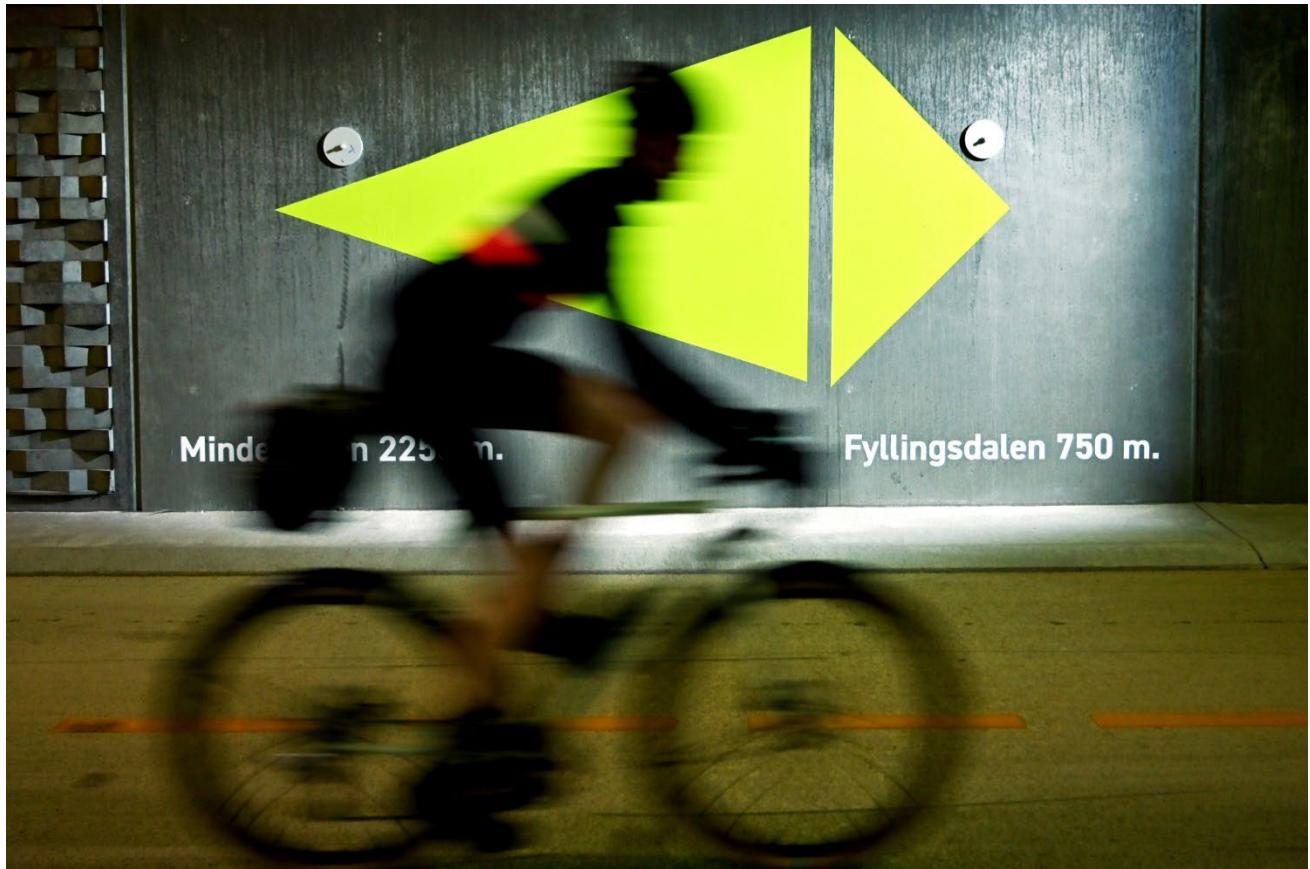
in a fjord-laden spot along the North Sea, the “[City Between the Seven Mountains](#)” offers breathtaking vistas (and lures boatloads of tourists).

Bergen’s most recent attraction is a unique one: In April, the city of around 270,000 opened the Fyllingsdalen tunnel, a three-kilometer bike-pedestrian pathway that was bored through a mountain. Local officials proudly [declared](#) Fyllingsdalen tunnel to be “the world’s longest purpose-built cycling tunnel.” (The [Snoqualmie tunnel](#) in Washington State is lengthier, but it used to be rail line.)

Fyllingsdalen tunnel is about as photogenic as an urban bike path can get. Inside, it offers art installations and creative lighting; at its exit, there are stunning mountain views. [CNN](#) and [Smithsonian](#) have lavished it with international attention, and visiting cycling advocates like the Netherlands-based authors [Melissa and Chris Bruntlett](#) have swooned.

Last month I hopped on a bike to traverse the tunnel for myself, and I can confirm that it is an ingenious piece of healthy, climate-friendly infrastructure; I have never seen anything remotely like it. The tunnel is also practical, providing a car-free connection between Bergen’s bustling city center and a fast-growing neighborhood on the other side of the mountain.

But — there is a big “but.” As awe-inspiring as Fyllingsdalen tunnel is, it is still only a Band-Aid fix for Bergen’s decades of car-oriented development. The tunnel reflects the city’s current efforts to shift local trips away from cars, but that goal clashes with a national government whose transportation policies still revolve around the automobile. In such an environment, even the most spectacular bike path can only do so much



The three-kilometer Fyllingsdalen tunnel is considered the world's longest purpose-built pedestrian and bike tunnel. *Photo by Sergei Gapon/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images*

To understand the Fyllingsdalen tunnel and how it fits into the Norwegian transportation picture, it helps to appreciate Bergen's geography. Historically, the local population and economy revolved around the harbor district full of old wooden buildings that now house boutiques and galleries. Towering mountains kept the city dense and compact — until residents began buying lots of cars.

“In the 1960s and 1970s, Bergen planned its future around the automobile,” said Ulrik Eriksen, the author of [A Country on Four Wheels](#), a book published in Norwegian. “It's now locked itself into car domination.”

As Norway's economy [boomed](#) during the postwar decades, the city expanded wherever flat land was available, connecting far-flung neighborhoods to the city center by blasting dozens of car tunnels beneath mountains. Bergen's extensive tram network was scrapped in the 1960s and dumped [into the North Sea](#).

“It's not like Bergen has one nucleus and lots of adjacent satellites,” said Aina Haugstad, who leads the [Miljøløftet](#) (“Green Pledge”), a regional body striving to reduce transportation emissions that played a key role in funding the construction of Fyllingsdalen tunnel. “It's a long way between the city and suburbs, and you have to use tunnels. But all those tunnels were made for cars, so now if you want to make space for public transit or bikes, you're stuck.”

During the last two decades, Bergen officials have sought to expand alternatives to driving, including constructing [two light rail lines](#). The regional Green Pledge seeks to eliminate future growth in car traffic through measures like improved transit service, congestion tolling and sidewalk expansions. The city of Bergen goes even further, [targeting](#) a 30% traffic reduction.

But Einar Grieg, who leads bicycling policy for the city, said that cycling's mode share has long hovered around 4%, well below [many European peers](#). "Biking has never been a big thing in Bergen," Grieg told me, citing the hilly terrain and sprawled development.

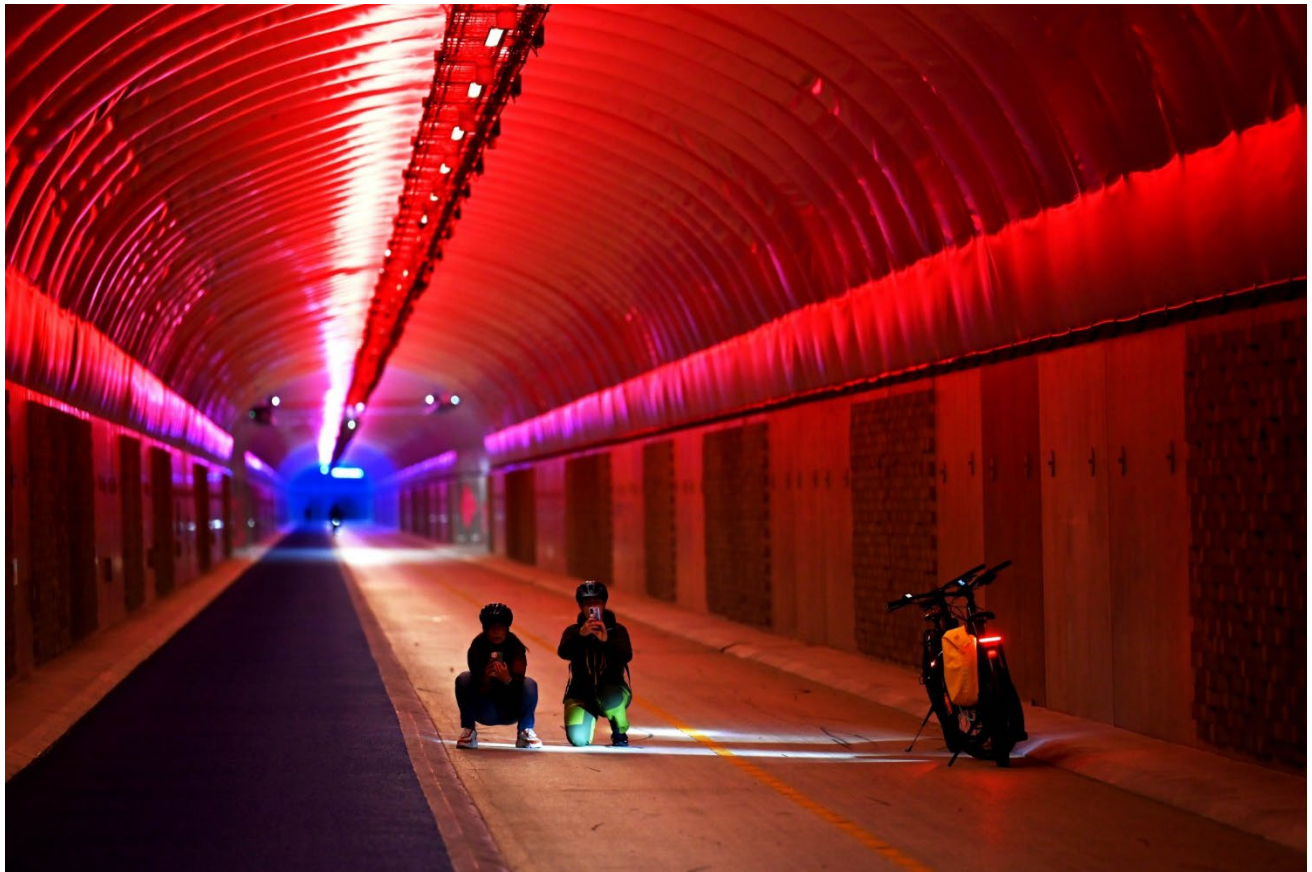


The construction of Bergen's new light rail lines led to the city's decision to create a bike tunnel network. *Photo: Thor Brødreskift*

The opportunity to build a bike tunnel was something of a happy accident. Constructing the new light rail line from Fyllingsdalen required boring both a path through Løvstakken and a parallel emergency tunnel. The city decided to spend an additional 300 million Norwegian kroner (around \$28 million) to expand that evacuation route to do double duty as path for cyclists and pedestrians.

Prior to the tunnel's construction, those biking between Fyllingsdalen and the city center would have to either climb over Løvstakken ("stack of leaves"), a 477-meter mountain just east of Fyllingsdalen, or cycle around it on a busy road. Neither option was appealing to most people. "You either had to really want to work out, or be an environmental idealist," said Haugstad.

The tunnel makes the journey far less daunting, shaving around 15 minutes off what used to be a 40-minute slog while also providing shelter from Bergen's frequent rainstorms. The temperature inside is a steady 45 degrees Fahrenheit (7 degrees Celsius) year round.



Local riders have swooned over the amenities inside the Fyllingsdalen tunnel. But elsewhere in Bergen, accommodations for cyclists are less spectacular. *Photo by Sergei Gapon/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images*

It's also a very delightful riding experience. The three-kilometer journey feels largely flat, with a barely perceptible curve. Next to the generously proportioned bike lanes there's a slightly elevated, bright blue walkway made from a rubber compound frequently found on running tracks. Overhead, colorful lights cycle through a rainbow of shades every few hundred meters. "The changing lights help me know where I am," said Eivind Kvamm-Lichtenfeld, a Bergen resident who regularly commutes through the tunnel.

At its midpoint, the city has installed benches and an artificial sundial, along with a brightly colored sculpture that looks like a heart when approached from the east but a spiral from the west.



Crowds gather at the midpoint of the Fyllingsdalen tunnel at the opening ceremony in April 2023. *Photo: Thor Brødreskift*

“The art in the middle of the tunnel is my favorite part,” said Ingrid Fjeldstad, Bergen’s commissioner for climate, environment, and urban development, who led me on a bike tour. “It makes the tunnel feel like an adventure, and it keeps bike trips from being boring.”

Future plans include holding public events and celebrations inside that central space. The city also installed colorful artwork at the tunnel’s one-quarter and three-quarter markers.

The Fyllingsdalen tunnel is the crown jewel of the city’s [new, eight-kilometer cycling path](#) running from the south into the city center. A few kilometers north, the shorter Kronstad tunnel runs along a repurposed rail corridor. A cyclist from the Fyllingsdalen area now passes through both tunnels en route to the city center.



The new Kronstad tunnel joins Bergen's burgeoning bike infrastructure network. *Photo: Einar J. Grieg/City of Bergen*

Grieg, the city's cycling coordinator, said that Bergen has projected 2,600 cyclists using the tunnel daily by 2040, with numbers rising as the Fyllingsdalen area continues to grow. So far, the tunnel is attracting around 650 cyclists per day, along with around half as many pedestrians and joggers — foot traffic that caught local officials by surprise.

“We didn't expect so many people walking and running,” Grieg told me. “Many seem to be using the tunnel for recreation or exercise. Sometimes senior citizens meet there and go for strolls.” I encountered athletic joggers, ambling families and dog-walking couples traversing the tunnel, along with those zipping along on a bike or scooter.



Cycles, scooters and other human-powered vehicles explore the Fyllingsdalen tunnel. Photo: Thor Brødreskift

Impressive as the new tunnel is, its lavishness makes Bergen’s remaining infrastructure gaps more glaring. No comparable route exists for those cycling into the city from the north, and bike lanes within city center itself leave much to be desired.

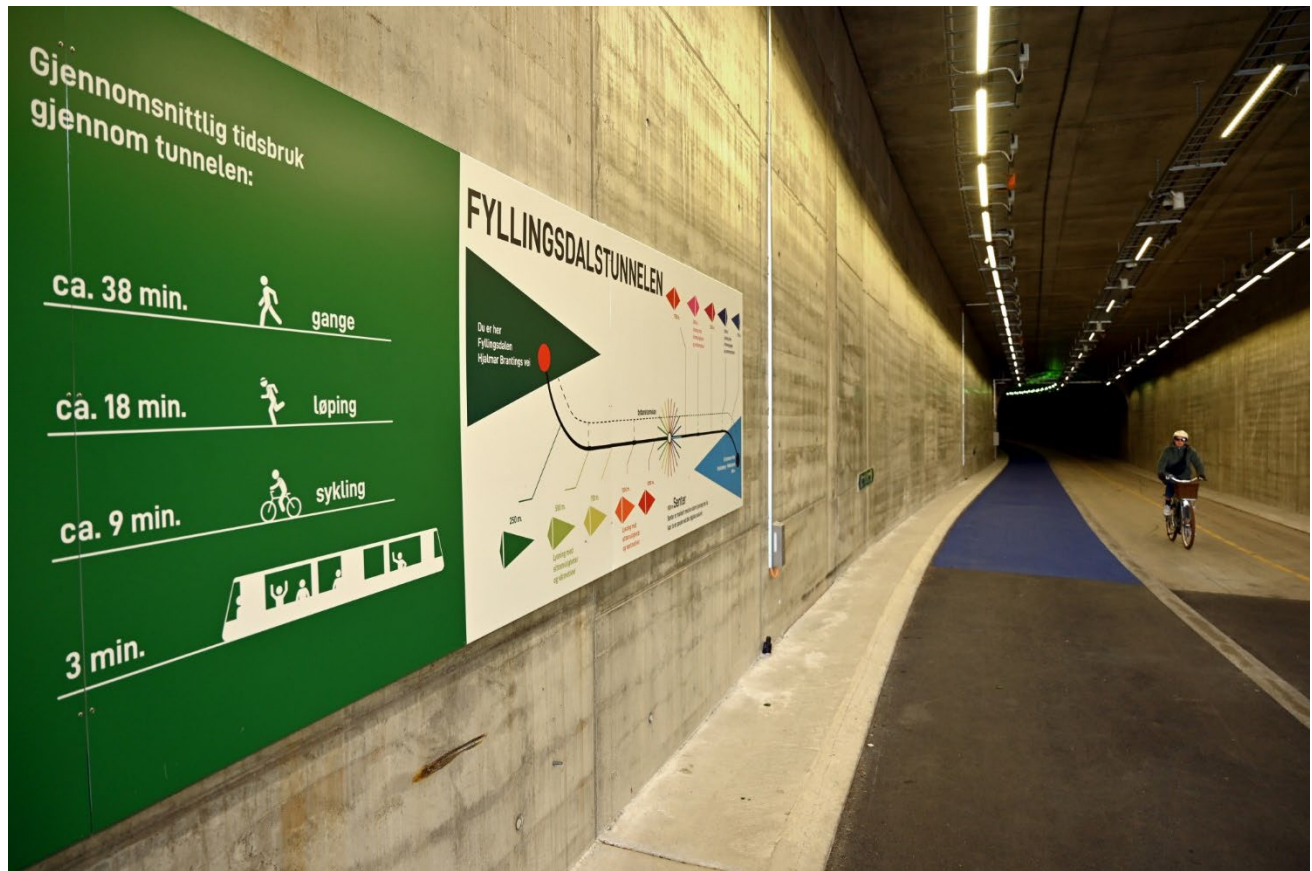
“It’s ridiculous that the new bike path from Fyllingsdalen stops at city center instead of going through it,” said Kvamm-Lichtenfeld, the local cyclist. “Many people won’t bike if they don’t know how to reach their final destination.”

Haugstad, the leader of the regional Green Pledge program, agreed that Bergen’s historic center should be bike-friendlier. “Every time I cycle across it, I choose a different route,” she said. “That’s a sign that there isn’t an obvious way to go.”

The city has promised to upgrade its network, building more bike lanes and offering residents a [limited number of e-bike rebates](#), with a [goal](#) of nearly tripling cycling’s mode share to 10% by 2030.

But Bergen’s pursuit of car alternatives is complicated by national policy: The Norwegian government has been [an enthusiastic promoter of electric vehicles](#), including [subsidies](#) that can take tens of thousands of dollars off an EV purchase price in addition to cheaper parking and tolls. [More than four in five](#) new cars sold in Norway are now fully electric, the highest share in the world. A [recent academic assessment](#) of Bergen’s efforts to limit transportation emissions concluded that “national policies that encourage EVs to reduce

emissions are at odds with [local] goals to avoid travel through spatial planning and modal shifts.”



The Fyllingsdalen tunnel was built to help trim Bergen’s car dependency. But the city has a long way to go. *Photo by Sergei Gapon/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images*

At times the divergence in local and national mobility goals is more overt. Despite local objections, last October the Norwegian Public Roads Administration opened [E39](#), a new four-lane highway into Bergen from the south. Lars Ove Kvalbein, a city advisor on sustainable mobility, said that up to that point, roughly 70% of those traveling into Bergen from that direction rode public transit while 30% used a car, but by December transit’s share had tumbled to 60% while driving surged to 40%. “E39 was part of a national plan that smashed all the positive local plans to pieces,” he said.

That frustration may sound familiar to residents of US cities like [Houston](#) and [San Antonio](#), where climate activists and community members have clashed with their state department of transportation over urban highway projects.

Autocentricity is affecting Fyllingsdalen tunnel, too. Politicians are pushing to build a carpark at the tunnel’s southwestern terminus, a move that Fjeldstad, the local climate department director, adamantly opposes. “If we build vehicle parking, that will encourage more people to buy cars — and then they will drive them all over,” she told me. “That goes against our transportation goals.”

Of course, such tensions do not diminish the joys of riding the Fyllingsdalen tunnel. Bergen's leaders are rightly proud of creating such a showstopper piece of bicycle infrastructure. But as they labor to untether their city from its reliance on the automobile, they know that their impressive new bike tunnel will not be a panacea. In a car-oriented place, no single project can be.

[David Zipper](#) is a Visiting Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School's Taubman Center for State and Local Government, where he examines the interplay between urban policy and new mobility technologies.

(Corrects goal of regional Green Pledge in 10th paragraph)
