



PHOTO: HELEN TWOSE

Cykels in the city of sails

Denmark's bicycle culture is fast, fluent and free to use. AUT exchange student DYLAN QUINNELL reports from Denmark that breaking in the pedals could be what Auckland needs to cut traffic and dust off pollution.

Adopting a Denmark-style bicycle culture could ease Auckland's traffic problems and help reduce pollution.

Out of Denmark's population of nearly 5.5 million people, about 4.2 million own a bicycle, according to the Danish association of bicycle sellers, Danske Cykelhandlers.

Up to 500,000 new bicycles are sold there each year. Denmark's extensive traffic network is set up to make cycling easier. Major roads have wide bicycle lanes and many traffic lights have smaller bicycle traffic lights attached.

Most people use their bikes several times a day to get everywhere from work or school to sports and the shops. In Denmark, 18 per cent of all journeys are made by bicycles, the second-highest figure in Europe after the Netherlands.

"In the city everyone uses a bike, in the countryside it's different," one Dane explains. "My dad drives to work, but

mum often rides."

Rural families often own a car for longer journeys.

According to the United Nations, a main cause of global warming is carbon dioxide from car exhausts. The last issue of *Te Waha Nui* reported that pollution in Auckland's CBD, mainly due to car fumes, is causing 300 people to die prematurely each year.

Danish people use bicycles regularly due to Government "encouragement" of taxes on owning and running a car. When registering a car the owner is charged a "green" tax. The tax is 105 per cent of the first \$17,000 and 180 per cent of the rest of the car's price. A car priced at \$30,000 costs nearly \$41,000 to register, bringing the car's total price to \$71,000.

Cars also have a yearly excise duty based on fuel consumption. For a car using one litre of petrol for every 10km, the excise duty is approximately \$1700 a

year. Petrol is taxed at more than \$1 a litre on unleaded and almost 60c a litre on diesel.

At Shell, unleaded 92 currently costs about \$2.50 a litre and diesel about \$2.30 a litre. Revenue from the taxes is used to fund infrastructure for bicycles.

Cycling is cheap, healthy and quicker than driving, especially in the city. But if you ride early in the morning you can get caught in bicycle traffic jams.

Like the start of a race, a pack of cyclists mount up and stream off when the traffic light turns green.

The only difference to a race is the varied age and quality of the bicycles. One person rides a near-new racing bike alongside a student riding a bike that's older than herself. "This was my grand-ma's bike, it's very old," she explains. As the Danish say, "as long as it works, why by a new one?"

Parents ride with kids strapped on the front, back or middle of their bike. Children can ride a smaller, one-wheeled bike attached to their parent's bicycle. In Denmark it is legal to ride without a helmet, but you can be fined if caught without a bell. Bells are used to warn pedestrians and other cyclists to move out of the way.

Copenhagen and Aarhus have set up a "city bike" system. For \$5 you can hire a bike for an unlimited time and return it to one of many stands around the city to get a refund. Many tourists and students use this system to get home after a night out. The city council says it is effective but some bikes have been damaged. People living around Auckland's CBD could be encouraged to ride to work or university.

Aucklanders may use hills or miserable winter weather as an excuse, but Aarhus is just as hilly and Danish winters are cold. Often the temperature is close to or below zero.

MERLE FOSTER reports on the dangers faced by cyclists in the city of sails.

Cycling may be a cheaper and healthier option to get around town but most Aucklanders believe it is too unsafe.

Cycle Action Auckland chairman Bevan Woodward says research conducted by the Auckland Regional Council shows most Aucklanders feel it is not safe to cycle in their city.

While he believes cycling is not as dangerous as people may perceive, Woodward admits cyclists are over-represented in road crashes and accidents.

"The real problem is too many cars driving too fast and aggressively," he says.

"Meek Kiwis become impatient, aggressive people behind the wheel."

Anna Percy, Auckland Regional Transport Authority's sustainable transport manager, says it is important that roads in Auckland are safe enough for cyclists to get from A to B.

"We're building little bits now and working towards linking up cycle lanes but the overall network plan is slow-going," says Percy.

She says vehicle traffic volumes didn't grow last year in New Zealand by the usual 4 per cent due to oil price rises.

However, New Zealand has the highest rate of motor vehicle ownership in the world with 4.4 million people owning 3.2 million cars.

Roads that were once fine for cyclists to use are now too busy, says Percy.

"As traffic grows, roads become too busy and cycling as a transport choice gets a lot more dangerous," says Percy.

"First we have to make it safe for those who already cycle by understanding journeys cyclists take, identify high crash spots and build the infrastructure needed," she says.

There is 113km of cycle lanes across the Auckland region and 56km in Auckland city. This is only 13 per cent of the proposed regional cycle network.

But Percy adds that while quiet streets will never demand cycle lanes, cycling infrastructure is still in its early days.

"We are only a bit of the way to building a linked, logical regional network," she says.



PHOTO: DYLAN QUINNELL

CYCLE CITY: Bike riding is a popular way of getting around in urban Denmark.