The city of Copenhagen set up a website where they asked cyclists to mark points on an online map. The public was told to mark places where they thought that:

• a cycle link / path was missing (blue);
• the cycle path was too narrow (green); or
• the intersection was too congested (red).

This initiative is also similar to the "Give a beep" campaign done by Hövding in collaboration with London Cycle Campaign in 2016. Cyclists in London were given a "smart bell" which they put on the handlebar. Cyclists were asked to 'beep' when they cycled and felt at risk; whether from high traffic speeds or volume, or a poorly designed road layout, or anything that made them feel at risk while cycling. The smart bell of "flic" was connected via Bluetooth with an app that was downloaded to the cyclist's smartphone. When the button was pressed, data was generated from that particular place to a map on the campaign website, which was updated in real-time. An email was also triggered to the Mayor of London's Office, to make him aware and encourage him to keep his promise to 'make London a byword for cycling' and deliver LCC's three-point 'Sign for Cycling' agenda. The campaign has since been repeated in other cities around the world.

The webpage was set up by the Municipality of Copenhagen and required only some basic website set-up and GIS knowledge. The initiative was advertised in social media, but relatively little marketing was made for it. Approximately 10 000 points were marked on the map. Cyclists could mark more than one point on the map, and were instructed to set up to 5 points, although it was possible for them to place more than this. Participants had the opportunity to write a few sentences that motivated the placing of the dot, and thus had the opportunity to give a short explanation.

Foto: Hotspots marked in Copenhagen where cyclists believe that cycle paths/links are missing (in blue), where the cycle path is too narrow (green) and where the intersection is too congested (red).

Context

Copenhagen expects a population growth and a 25 percent growth of cycling traffic in the coming years and has formulated the goal of providing safe, fast and comfortable cycling from A to B. This also fits very well with the climate adaptation work formulated by the municipality. Even though the city has had a coherent network for a while, there are still improvements needed.

In order to cater for the expected cycle traffic growth, Copenhagen has identified the need to widen the cycle lanes. As in other cities, Copenhagen is working on catering for population growth through ongoing densification and re-development/development projects in the city, which in some cases changes the structure of the transport network.

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The hotspot map provided a way for citizens to communicate directly about their frustrations with cycling in Copenhagen, and for the civil servants working in the authority to have data to support their work in implementing the Copenhagen Infrastructure Plan: where to build new cycle lanes and where to prioritise investments. The large amount of input also provided a way to show politicians that the citizens actually wanted to make change, and provided a good way to communicate the need for improvements with the political level.

The suggestions for improvements from citizens coincided well with analysis from experts who worked at the City of Copenhagen. The final plan for improvements was built on input both from the citizens as well as analysis that was performed looking at future demand.

Driving forces

There were several reasons for this innovation being implemented. There was a need to support improvements in the cycling network, as well as the need to communicate with people who live and cycle in Copenhagen. There was also the need to improve the safety for cyclists.

Another driving force was to collect data that could be used to support discussions with politicians.

Success factors

Using this kind of data collection proved to be both reasonably simple and cheap. By promoting it on social media, the initiative got a relatively big awareness among the public considering the input.
The municipality also realized that many cyclists want to help support their city in improving the cycling network, and that people are most likely engaged in the cycling route they use the most.

Barriers

The municipality is aware that the method used resulted in some biased representation and that it could be abused by campaign groups that have their own interests / agendas.

Another barrier is that this kind of initiative cannot be repeated too often since the citizens needs to easily see that the city is making progress. Otherwise there is a risk that the citizens lose interest if they feel that they are not being heard.

Scaling potential

Both the website of the City of Copenhagen as well as the Hövding example are quite simple and easily scalable in other cities. It is quite a cheap method to collect data and is best done when backing is needed for infrastructure investments.

Find out more?

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