

Active Travel Network Consortium Study Visit to Aarhus, Denmark

Report by Wolfgang Fischer, University of Graz, Austria and Robert Pressl, Austrian Mobility Research FGM-AMOR

The consortium which had a partner meeting in the partners City of Skanderborg, Denmark used the opportunity to visit one of the most impressive cycle cities of the world. During their City Tour the consortium was guided by the Vice President of the Cycling Embassy of Denmark <http://www.cycling-embassy.dk/>, Ms. Marianne Weinreich (maw@vekso.com) who supported the consortium know how and knowledge. The Cycling Embassy of Denmark is one of the big players in cycling policy and knowledge worldwide.

Aarhus – cyclists everywhere!

The Danish have been using their bicycles as a normal alternative to the car for many years. But it is not tradition alone that leads to so much active travelling like cycling and walking in place of the use of motorised transport. It is also the result of policies to improve the environment (reduce climate change) and, increasingly, to improve public health. The Danish policy transport strategy is a green one and at the beginning of 2009 this is adopted to the governmental policy, too.

In 2007, Aarhus city council decided to develop a Cycling Action Plan full of innovative ideas for cycling traffic. Aarhus is now one of several Danish cities which are famous for their ambitious cycling projects and initiatives. Of course it is necessary to have a certain budget for these projects, and so the city council has allocated around 10 Mio. € for the period 2009 – 2012 for improving conditions for cyclists. This budget is used for:

- a coherent network of cycle routes,
- connectivity,
- bicycle parking facilities,
- traffic safety measures ,
- intermodality,

- maintenance and
- information and dialog with users.

Aarhus also has a free bike sharing system (with a total of 57 stations), available between April 1st and October 30th (target group mainly tourists).

The Active Travel Network study trip to the Danish city of Aarhus showed how a Danish city with around 250.000 inhabitants in its inner urban area manages its urban mobility. Whereas many other European cities have adopted a more favorable attitude towards cycling only in the past few years, Aarhus started that process many years ago. Aarhus' urban mobility policy has steadily improved the modal split, recently hitting around 20% for cycling. Almost 48 % of the city's school children ride their bikes to school. Aarhus has 450 km of cycle tracks and lanes and 2.5 km walking streets, a bus street and a cycle street with priority to cyclists (photo 1). A new traffic sign will be designed too.



Photo 1: The cycle street at Mejlgade with priority to cyclists.

The two storey parking structure in front of the main railway station is an impressive solution for parking around 1000 bicycles; it also offers direct access to the tracks (photo 2). This encourages commuters to combine the train with the bicycle and vice versa. It is not only important for cutting car trips in Aarhus, but also in helping people to hit their target of half an hour's physical activity per day. It is part of the Aarhus Cycling Action Plan to offer even more adequate bicycle parking facilities in the near future. The success in increasing cycling also causes problems which require even more covered multi-storey parking facilities. These protect the bike from weather and from theft, the risk of which is further reduced by on-site staff who also check that bikes have not been left for too long – if they are, staff affix a warning sign in the form of a bow and, ultimately, remove the bike if the owner does not claim it (photo 3). The provision of safe secure covered parking is a key measure to encouraging even more cycling in Aarhus.



Photo 2: Bicycle parking opposite the main railway station with direct access to the tracks.



Photo 3: Yellow bow as a sign that the bicycle has been parking for a too long time and might be removed from the City to get more space.

In Frederiks Allé (Frederiks Street) a so called cycling barometer or cycle counter (photo 4) has been installed to count passing cyclists. Along with the value of the statistics it provides, it also has a psychological impact: because of the way it is set up, the barometer allows an approaching cyclist to see his personal contribution to total cyclist numbers (and to a better environment) just as he reaches the screen. This helps cyclists to feel that they are one part of a big community helping to make Aarhus a better place to live. Cycle counters like this one which are produced and maintained by the Danish Company Vekso <http://www.veksoe.com> can be found in many other Danish cities like Odense, the Danish Cycle Capital, Fredericia or Copenhagen.



Photo 4: Bicycle barometer in Frederiks Allé with up to 7,900 cyclists per day.

In future Aarhus will go on focusing on health, climate and preventing car congestion by improving and better organising bicycle parking around the main railway station. In the city centre special projects will improve conditions for cyclists who need to travel from one side of the city centre to the other. Some more cycling counters will be prepared and it is planned to upgrade the operation and maintenance of cycle paths and routes by developing the cycle network within the inner ring road. Expanding infrastructure such as service stations is already part of the daily work of the cycle planning department (photo 5). Further measures to facilitate multi-modal trips involving cycling and public transport will be implemented, and black spots with high numbers of bicycle accidents will be targeted for remedial and preventive action.



Photo 5: Service stations are ready to for use by cyclists and they do so!

Last but not least Aarhus started a campaign to further raise awareness of cycling, even though it is already common: the campaign is called “8000 reasons to cycle”, referring to the area’s post code. Specific sub-campaigns are targeted at young children, schoolchildren, transport to and from work, cycling in the city, and safety.

Aarhus is looking for ways to engage cyclists in direct dialogue. To do this, new media are being used, such as a Facebook group, a YouTube channel and a Twitter profile. Furthermore a special website about cycling provides all the information about cycling in Aarhus that its citizens could ever dream of (www.aarhuscykelby.dk).

Aarhus’ experience shows us that along with improvements to cycling infrastructure, increased awareness of the benefits of cycling is absolutely crucial to improve the modal split. Denmark’s environmental policy is one which emphasises reduced motor vehicle use to cut CO2 emissions, and on that basis a city like Aarhus follows. The municipality has reserved a certain budget for campaigns and shows its willingness to improve the environment by promoting health through cycling and walking, reducing CO2 in order to try to slow down climate change and preventing car congestion by improving the modal split. These campaigns have helped to make it trendy to be a cyclist, and to instill a sense of pride from being a member of that group.



Photo 6: Sculpture of the cycling mayor in Aarhus

