



# WOMEN CYCLING PROJECT



WHY DO YOU USE YOUR BICYCLE FOR TRIPS?

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BY ANDREA GARLAND



*"Biking makes me notice things in my neighborhood and gets me outside even on a rainy day"*  
(30+, Seattle, WA)

## Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals

### Background

Why do fewer women than men use their bikes to get around in the United States (U.S.)? This was the question that the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycling Professionals (APBP) asked when they launched the Women Cycling Project in spring of 2010. APBP wanted to open a national dialogue about why the rate of women using their bikes for transportation in the U.S. is less than half that of men and what could be done to get more women of all ages riding in their community.

The idea for the project arose from discussions about the findings and recommendations of a group of U.S. experts who went to Europe the previous year to look at everyday bicycling over there. Kit Keller, Executive Director of APBP and member of the group said: "After seeing so many women cycling in

*Copenhagen on the 2009 International Scan on Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety and Mobility<sup>1</sup>, I began to wonder why we don't see more women cycling in cities in North America". APBP member Fionnuala Quinn made that question come alive through her volunteer work with APBP on the survey and free webinar."* The APBP Women's Cycling Project team wanted to use the voices of women to suggest fresh ideas for policy makers, engineers, planners, public health and other professionals. As a first step, APBP conducted an on-line survey directed at U.S. women that asked lots of questions about bicycling. APBP quickly heard from over 13,000 women not only in the U.S., but also in many countries from all around the world. The APBP team wanted to hear from women and it turned out that they

wanted to tell us all about bicycling and their experiences and thoughts.

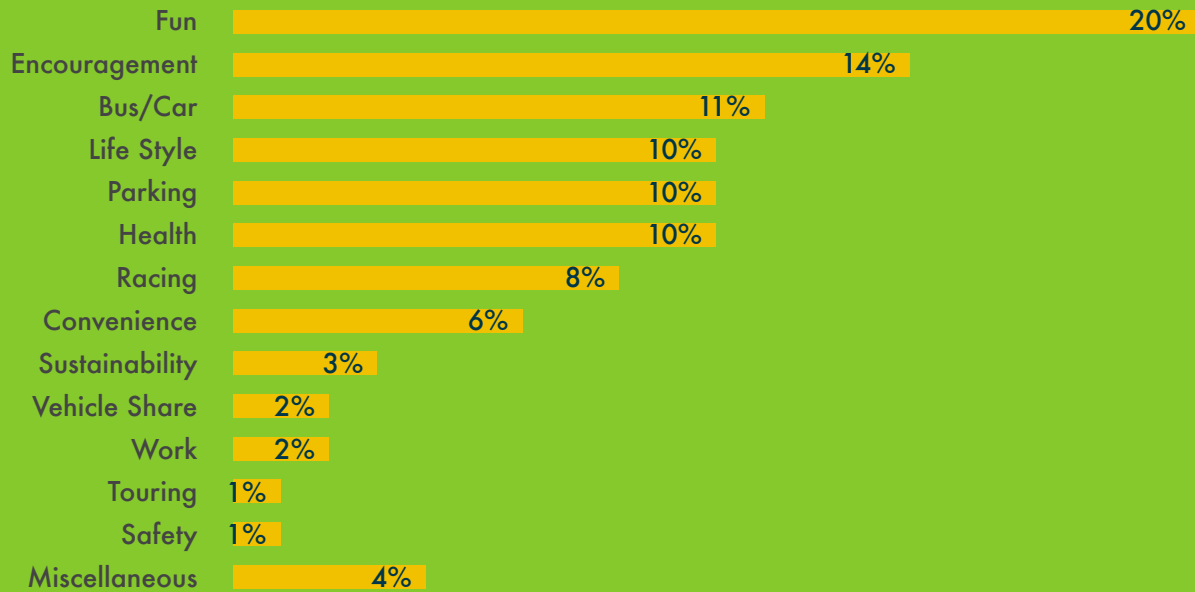
As well as asking specific questions about behaviors, the team asked for personal opinions about a whole range of bicycling issues. Thousands of separate comments were received from women of all ages expressing views about the joy of cycling as well as insights into their concerns. Three articles were prepared to look in more depth at some of the open-ended questions. In this article we will look at the responses received to the following question asked.

### QUESTION

Why do you use your bicycle for trips?

<sup>1</sup> Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO), National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) International Scan on Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety and Mobility

Figure 1: Why do you use your bicycle for trips?



## Why do you use your bicycle for trips? (1,027 Responses)

### Life Style

We asked women why they use their bicycles and gave them the opportunity to write an open-ended response to the question. We received 1,027 diverse and interesting answers, confirming in the process that many bike for the pure joy of cycling. We sorted the answers into categories by percentage as shown on Figure 1.

About ten percent of the women who wrote said that bicycling is simply a "life style" choice for them. They either cycle for trips out of habit, or because it makes sense and they would not want to make the trip any other way.



*"It's a habit! I've organized my life so cycling is the most convenient choice. Switching back to the car represents a hassle factor: gas in the tank, money for parking, repacking my stuff, finding/paying for parking."--(Woman in her 40's from Spokane-WA)*

### Enjoyment

In looking at the relative merits of modes of travel, it is easy to overlook the fact that riding a bicycle is pure fun. About 20 percent of the women said things like cycling "gives them freedom" and "it's beautiful and pleasant." Some talked about how they enjoy spending time with their spouses and kids, or feeling and looking younger when riding a bike.

*"Riding soothes my soul. Riding is an expression of me...like art. It also allows me to take a break from my roles as "mom", "boss", "wife", "community volunteer"..... (Woman in her 50's from Morgan Hill, CA)*

*"Bicycling, especially with my husband, is my favorite thing to do. We spend almost all our leisure time on our bicycles."-- (50+ from Tucson, Arizona)*



*"Simply love the feeling of riding a bike"-- (woman in her 50's from Ontario-Canada).*



*"I love riding with Superheroes and volunteering"--(30+ from Roanoke, VA)*

*"It's so fun! Also, I can get to know the community better, see things I might miss speeding by in a car, notice the smells, sounds, sights, and people of the community, know and be known more as a part of the community, see the first buds in the spring, crunch through the leaves in the fall, slide around on ice in the winter, splash through puddles in the summer! it builds community in so many ways, and it's so fun!"--(20+, Fargo, ND)*



Sacramento CA  
Age 20+

*"It may sound silly, but I often try to look good when I'm cycling so as to prove to/set an example for other women/girls that cycling doesn't have to equal spandex fashion. I also want to help cycling become more common."*

West Hartford, CT  
Age 50+

*"The only way I have ever been able to keep in shape long term has been to have physical exertion a regular part of my day. Biking to work keeps me active on a regular basis. I feel good, it gets me outside, and I feel good about myself."*

Chapel Hill, NC  
Age 30+

*"I'm the founder of a new USA elite women's team and development squad and I train almost daily on the bike- and make it a mission to get others (especially women) on the bike first, training second, and then racing!"*

## Encourage & Support Bike Community

Interestingly, a major reason that many women stated they ride is to motivate other women to cycle or because they feel encouraged and supported by their community. It appears that many women who are already cycling wish to see more of their counterparts cycling too. Many of the women in this particular group are also interested in setting a good example for their kids, along with proving to other women that cycling is possible, safe and empowering.



*"It promotes transportation choices! If everyone biked a little bit more, there would be more users, and more users would increase the demand for more infrastructure." --(20's - Madison, Wisconsin)*

## Parking Fees & Hassles

Some women specifically prefer riding because dealing with parking a car in the city is both expensive and problematic.

*"In the City, it's easier and more convenient to bike up close to my destination, than to drive around searching for parking with a car, and have to walk from a few blocks away; no parking hassles, more exercise- it's a no-brainer! -- (50's - Berkeley, California)"*

*"It makes me more conscious of my shopping habits. It's easier to park." -- (20's Sterling, Virginia)*

## Mental & Physical Health

Many women said that riding is a great way to keep in shape and can also help with lifting their mood, relieving stress, and improving general mental and physical health. Moreover, some women said that because of existing physical limitations, bicycling is the best exercise to help them during the rehabilitation process or in dealing with their condition.

*"It helps keep me youthful in a healthier and more positive way than cosmetics or clothing. It gives me a sense of independence and confidence in my body to carry me great distances. It gives me a greater appreciation for local geography. It is one of the better physical fitness activities that you really can do while wearing a skirt or a dress. I do like to maintain a feminine appearance that is functional." (50's - Evanston, Illinois)*

## Training & Racing

We found that about 8 percent of the comments came from those whose main interest is in cycle racing but who also appreciate commuting or running errands by bike as an addition to their training program.

*"I love racing bikes and riding bikes. I mostly only have a car to get me to bike races."--(20's Seattle, Washington)*

## “Women speak”

Arlington, VA - Age 30+

*"I want others to see, especially women, that commuting or using your bike to do errands is very doable. It's not just the fellas out there. I hope they can experience the empowering feeling that cycling can have."*

Charlotte, VT - 30's



*"My family looks great bicycling. I am a single mother with two children in a rural community-when people see that we can ride our bikes to school, they think 1) we're hard core 2) maybe they can do it, too!"*



Washington, DC  
Age - 40+

*"I'm a triathlete. It helps me to be able to use my bike for my commute - this way I'm traveling to/from work AND getting my training miles in at the same time."*

Ann Arbor, MI - Age 60+

*"I have polymyalgia rheumatica and the only time I am pain free is during and a few hours after cycling."*

## “Women speak”

From San Diego, CA - Age 50+

*“I can get some exercise AND get a task done (shopping, errands, etc) at the same time.”*

From Chicago, IL - Age 20+

*“Saves time, don't have to go to the gym.”*

Vancouver, Canada - Under 20

*“My parents tell me to.”*

From Lansing, MI - Age 20+

*“It allows me to be mobile without petroleum fuels.”*

From Washington, DC - Age 20+

*“I can carry more things with me: it's easier to carry my bag, laptop, and anything else I may need for the workday in my bike baskets than to schlep it around walking, riding the bus, etc.”*

From Somerville, MS - Age 20+

*“I feel safer biking at night rather than walking (so I bike for safety reasons).”*

From Philadelphia, PA - Age 20+

*“As a woman, bicycling feels safer than taking public transit at night.”*

From Bellingham, WA - Age 40+

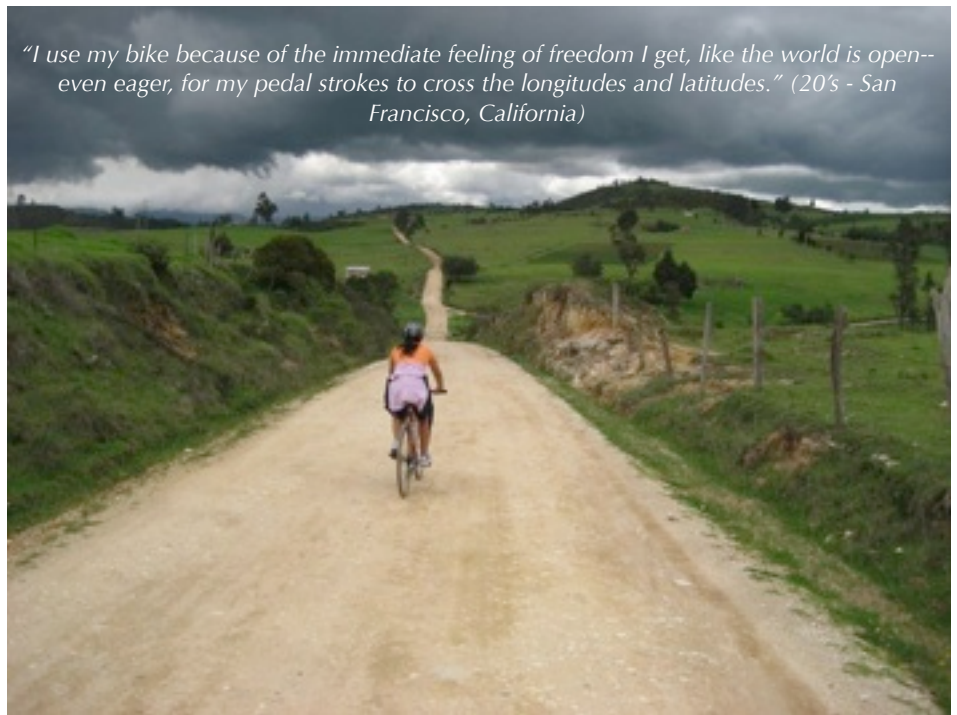
*“My husband and I share one car, which we use only when bicycling isn't practical.”*

From Emeryville, CA - Age 40+

*“It makes me happy, better than any antidepressant. It wakes me up before work and winds me down after.”*

*“We are a Buddhist family, and it's a kinder way to travel. Accidents by bicycle tend to cause less suffering than those by car.” (Woman in her 40's from Eugene, Oregon)*

*“I use my bike because of the immediate feeling of freedom I get, like the world is open-- even eager, for my pedal strokes to cross the longitudes and latitudes.” (20's - San Francisco, California)*



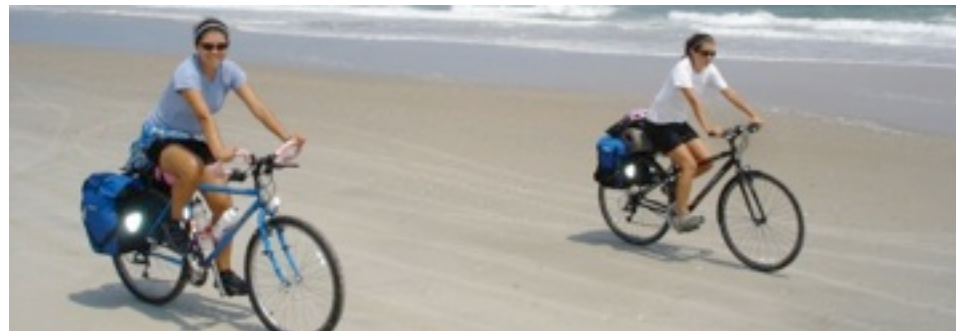
## Other reasons to bike daily

The remaining 30 percent of reasons given for riding included convenience, preference over public transportation or a car, commuting, touring and even safety reasons.

For many, biking is just more **convenient**, because they can exercise and travel at the same time. They save money by avoiding car-related expenses and biking takes care of burning the extra calories. For others, given the choice between **public transportation, driving**, or biking, it seems that their number one choice is riding a bicycle. These women report that they don't like waiting for or sitting in the bus and they can also carry more on a bike. Some just dislike driving or sitting in traffic.

For others, riding a bike is a conscious choice in living in a **more sustainable** fashion as they are not using fossil fuels for transportation. Some **share a vehicle with their spouse**, or they like **bike touring**. Furthermore, they have jobs which either require riding a bike, or provide financial incentives for bike commuters.

We also heard from a group of women who consider biking a **safer** way to get around. As between walking alone at night, riding the bus by themselves, or even driving, they feel that they are safer when cycling and that they themselves are less likely to cause injury to anyone else.



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### Disclosure:

The quotes included in this report were selected out of the responses from the open-ended answers to the survey. They are not associated with the people shown in any of the pictures used in this report.

## Conclusion

Most of us can probably recall the excitement of riding a bicycle when we were children. With bicycling, that feeling of freedom and enjoyment never needs to go away. We heard about that from women saying why they cycle. We heard many other positive reasons for cycling from women. Women bike because they want to be good role models and they find biking more convenient for commuting and short trips. Many choose to bike because it is better for the environment and others like how it keeps them fit and improves their health and general well-being. Some also consider cycling a safer option than their other choices and called bikes a 'kinder' mode of transportation.

It was interesting to hear from so many women that they specifically want to get more of their counterparts out riding too. As the article published by Scientific American<sup>2</sup> states, 'Women are an "indicator species" for bike-friendly cities'. Many of the women we heard from want to be part of the effort to increase the rates of women cycling. Reading through these comments it is easy to understand why cycling is a great mode of transportation for women too.

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The Women Cycling Project group is a project of the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals (APBP). APBP is a unique national and international association that brings together the knowledge and expertise of professionals in the discipline of pedestrian and bicycle transportation. APBP members are planners, engineers, architects, landscape architects, transportation researchers, suppliers, advocates, Safe Routes to School, trails and public health professionals. APBP members work at all levels of government, in consulting firms and with non-profit organizations. APBP offers resources and training for building sustainable transportation.

To find out more about this project, view resources and learn how to get connected with others interested in the topic of women bicycling, visit the APBP website at [www.apbp.org](http://www.apbp.org).

<sup>2</sup> How to get more bicyclist on the road: Scientific American. Linda Baker



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