

Era of cycling

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The Covid-19 pandemic has ushered in a new era for cycling culture on a global scale, as governments look to protect their public transport systems, boost public health, and to reduce carbon emissions by embracing a resurgence in the popularity of cycling.

Changes in cycling infrastructure can even be seen in Glasgow (not usually considered a leader compared to Europe's elite 'Cycling Cities'), and I've wondered why such changes in infrastructure were made so quickly. This made me think back to my experience of living in one of Europe's top 'Cycle Cities' - Munich.

On arrival in Munich, it is immediately clear that cycling is a central part of people's everyday lives; the bicycle is a vital tool for improving urban life and transportation. I quickly secured my own second hand bike and embraced the local culture, making the most of many, many cycle routes around the Bavarian capital.

I was amazed at how comfortable, quick, and efficient the cycle routes were. These routes covered approximately 1,200km and reached all key destinations in and around the city. Thinking back, I cannot recall using any form of transport other than the bicycle or the U-Bahn (underground rail system) during my time in the city.

All of this helps demonstrate that the cycle network is an integral part of Munich's logistics. Why is this not replicated back home in Glasgow?

German response to Covid-19

Despite the already stellar forms of cycling infrastructure in Munich and other German cities, the German government is still making improvements in provision; some in direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic. They have initiated programmes to further develop cycling infrastructure, pushing towards a cleaner, healthier, and more efficient transportation model.

Like many other major European countries, Germany has created both permanent and pop-up 'corona cycleways' - allowing their citizens to minimise contact with each other when required.

This new wave of investment also includes schemes such as free bicycle repairs and even cycling lessons, and the transformation of entire roads into bike lanes - accommodating both the increase in citizens avoiding public transport, and also meeting social distancing regulations.



Glasgow's Cycle Culture

The 2014 Commonwealth Games helped lay the groundwork for a strategic plan to make Glasgow “a vibrant cycling city where cycling is accessible, safe and attractive to all.” This plan seeks to extend the legacy of the Commonwealth Games, keep games facilities in use, and facilitate an increase in cycling activity in the city.

However, when compared to other European cities - who have much larger per-capita percentages of cycle users - Glasgow still has a long way to go. Nevertheless, there have been notable improvements in recent years, with investment in infrastructure and the emergence of groups such as the Glasgow Community Cycling Network (GCCN).

Positive change is happening throughout the city, but the pandemic reminds us that it must not stop if we are to nurture and support use of this very old style of public transport in the new post-covid world.

There is plenty of public support to do more. According to the GCCN, 78% of Glasgow's residents want more money spent on cycle-related schemes, and 82% support the construction of more cycling infrastructure. In recent years, and in response to this, Glasgow has developed several new, highly successful cycle routes. The Sauchiehall Street cycle path and South City Way - which both connect to the wider cycle network - are two encouraging examples.

Glasgow's Cycling Response to Covid-19

Glasgow City Council reacted to the increase in volume of cycle activity by introducing temporary measures to support physical distancing during the pandemic. This comes as the UK Government urges the British public to commute by bicycle as the country returns to work. Like Germany, 57% of the British public plan to avoid public transport due to fear of contracting Covid-19, and Glasgow has introduced new temporary measures to facilitate an increase in cycle traffic:

A new cycle lane on the Clyde Street-Brommielaw, which aims to reduce pressure along the Riverside.

The closure of Kelvin Way in Kelvingrove Park to traffic, with the aim to create a safe space for active travelers.

Note: at the time of publishing other measures are being implemented, primarily within Glasgow city centre.



What Next for Glasgow's Cyclists?

We cannot be satisfied with the advances made in recent years, and in a few short months during the pandemic. We must strive to follow European cycle cities such as Munich, Copenhagen, and Amsterdam in doubling, tripling, or even quadrupling our cycling activity and infrastructure.

There are countless benefits in creating this healthy urban environment, and increasing levels of cycling produce far-reaching benefits for the city, such as:

- Boosting the local economy
- Providing cheap, quick access to work
- Encouraging active lifestyles that improve the health of residents
- Alleviating traffic congestion
- Improving air quality
- Reducing carbon footprints
- Increasing awareness of green spaces, the natural world, and its benefits to citizens and wildlife.
- Connecting people with the places and each other.

If there was ever a time to act on this, it is now. The Covid-19 lockdown offers a unique opportunity to generate change. We must develop not only cycle routes leading to and from the city, but an integrated network of routes across greater Glasgow.

These routes must connect communities as well as establishing a connection with the inner-city and existing green spaces and parks. This network must be developed as a vision of a post-pandemic Glasgow, helping to make the most of a challenging situation.

Collectively, our vision of a post-pandemic Glasgow can help guide what must be done to achieve the goal of a cycle-friendly city. By working towards this goal, we can push for cleaner, healthier, and more efficient routes to and from our city.

