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# TRIMIS

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MONITORING AND INFORMATION SYSTEM

D I G E S T

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Transport and Older  
People

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Available [here](#)

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## Older people and cycling



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**Cycling offers an opportunity to promote active and sustainable mobility among the growing population of older people. However, few studies have examined how environmental factors can promote cycling among older adults. This study interviewed older cyclists to gain an in-depth understanding of how environmental factors influence their perceptions and experiences. It found that traffic safety has a major influence on older people's cycling experience.**

Cycling has the potential to reduce carbon emissions and traffic congestion, and offers the opportunity to integrate physical health activity into the daily lives of the growing, insufficiently physically active, population of older adults. Cycling can be used by older people for transportation (to reach a shop or service) and for recreational purposes (e.g. cycling for pleasure or health).

To promote cycling for transportation among older adults, supportive physical environments should be provided. The physical environment is characterised as the perceived attributes of the context in which people spend their time (e.g. home and neighbourhood). It includes elements of urban design (e.g. presence of cycling paths), traffic density and speed, distance to and design of venues for physical activity (e.g. parks), crime, safety and weather. A greater understanding is needed of the physical environmental factors that influence an older adult's decision to cycle for transportation. However, there are only a few studies that have examined the relationship between physical environment factors and older adults' cycling. As a result, there is little information for policy makers and planners to (re) design streets and neighbourhoods to make cycling for transportation among older adults an attractive transport mode.

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## TRIMIS

The Transport and Research and Innovation Monitoring and Information System (TRIMIS) supports the implementation and monitoring of the Strategic Transport Research and Innovation Agenda (STRIA) and its seven roadmaps.

TRIMIS is an open-access information system to map and analyse technology trends, research and innovation capacities, as well as monitor progress in all transport sectors.

TRIMIS is developed and managed by the Joint Research Centre on behalf of the European Commission.

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This study recruited 40 adult cyclists in Flanders, Belgium. Researchers and participants made a cycle trip, during which bike-along interviews were used to obtain in-depth and context-sensitive information about the environmental factors influencing their perceptions and experiences. This was then analysed. It was found that road safety was an important concern for older adults using cycling as a means of transportation. Cycling infrastructure, and road design and maintenance influenced traffic safety. This suggests that traffic safety is more important in promoting cycling to older adults than it is to younger people.

Evidence from other studies suggests that, despite the importance of traffic safety, older people often cycle in unsafe conditions. For example, streets where important cycling destinations are located (e.g. shops) often have heavy traffic. Older adults regularly experience unsafe traffic situations more than other cyclists experience and report them more easily.

Concern for traffic safety is not surprising given that older adults are over-represented in bicycle accident statistics and suffer more severe injuries than younger age groups. Participants in this study preferred cycle routes that were segregated from motorised traffic, especially along narrow streets with heavy and speeding traffic. Therefore, separated cycling spaces may reduce cycling injuries, which improves traffic safety and promotes transportation cycling.

The presence of safe crossings was another critical environmental factor that emerged in relation to participants' perceived traffic-related safety. Participants preferred to cross streets at designated spaces for cyclists or pedestrians such as traffic lights or zebra crossings. They also expressed a liking for wide cycling infrastructure, which is obstacle free and has an even surface. The cycling space should be wide enough to allow two cyclists to ride next to each other and allow other cyclists to overtake.

The findings of the study suggest that, to promote transportation cycling to an ageing population, policies should support investment in the provision of well-separated cycling tracks, especially along roads with heavy traffic. These tracks should be sufficiently wide, obstacle-free, even and well separated from pedestrians. In addition, designated crossings that minimise conflict with other road users should be provided.

Further research should examine the relationship between the environmental factors that emerged from this study. For example, examining whether separated cycle tracks lead to high levels of perceived traffic safety and whether it relates to higher levels of cycling. The study concludes by suggesting that traffic safety may have a major influence on older adults' transportation cycling experiences. The provision of segregated cycling may enhance feelings of traffic safety, so facilitating older people's transportation cycling. The bike-along interview method has the potential to provide important information for public health groups and planners in a wide range of countries and build environment contexts.