

Fietsbare stad, ville cyclable, cycling city: The top five priorities for cyclists in Brussels by EUCG, Fietsersbond, GRACG

Mobility in the Brussels region is becoming more difficult. Roads are congested. Public transport lines are often saturated. Brussels will also grow significantly over the coming decade. Fortunately, cycling is fun, fast and affordable.

Increasing the share of trips by bicycle to 20% by 2018, the goal of the IRIS II plan, will improve everyone's mobility by reducing the number of cars on the road and freeing up places on public transport. This is essential to improve the quality of life in Brussels. But more action is needed to make Brussels a world-class cycling city, which is why we are presenting our top five priorities.

1. Improved air quality

Everybody who lives and/or works in Brussels suffers from the poor air quality, with health warning thresholds breached every year. Bad air reduces life expectancy and makes respiratory problems more likely. During peak pollution times, outdoor physical exercise is discouraged. Obviously poor air quality makes people less willing to cycle. It also encourages people to move out of the city, which makes it more difficult to cycle to work and increases congestion.

2. Improved road safety

Traffic in Brussels is stressful. Many streets and intersections are poorly designed and/or poorly maintained. Enforcement of traffic laws is erratic and not focussed on road safety. The main concern seems to be to keep cars moving instead of creating a safe and attractive environment for people to live, work and play as well getting from a to b on foot, by bicycle or public transport safely.

3. An efficient parking policy for cars and bicycles

Currently many drivers waste time and energy looking for somewhere to park. This increases congestion and pollution. Car traffic should be reduced and primarily steered to off-street parking with clear information on availability.

Bicycle parking is still underdeveloped and insecure at many trip destinations and lacking in many neighbourhoods where people have nowhere to keep their bikes indoors. Without sufficient, secure and varied bicycle parking, cycling will not become popular.

4. Improved cycling infrastructure

The bicycle routes decided in 1995 are far from being completed. Many bicycle lanes and paths are designed and/or maintained in such a way that cycling there is unpleasant and unsafe. Completing and maintaining these routes should be the top priority. Other road infrastructure that facilitates cycling, including 30 km/h zones, home zones and bicycle streets should be promoted.

5. Reduced bicycle theft

Many people have had their bicycle stolen. This is one of the main reasons people stop cycling. An integrated plan is needed, covering actions by the police, the justice system, the creation of a central depot and an efficient registration system, and awareness-raising as to how to lock a bike securely with a solid lock.

Possible actions that support the five priorities

Below is a list of possible actions that can contribute to the five priorities listed above. These actions are options to be explored by politicians and administrations at all levels in Brussels and Belgium. The list is consciously not limited to areas under the explicit and exclusive control of the Brussels Region or its 19 communes.

We believe that to successfully promote cycling in Brussels, all relevant political levels and authorities need to make changes in a coordinated way. The above priority list, together with the possible actions set out below, is meant to encourage a more integrated and coordinated approach to solving the mobility problem of Brussels and exploiting the incredible potential of cycling.

1. Improved air quality

Measures to promote air quality should wherever possible follow the polluter pays principle.

Possible actions to improve air quality:

- Create more zones for exclusive use by pedestrians and cyclists, including shopping streets and city squares.
- Create low-emission areas by banning the most polluting cars (diesel with no or sub-standard particle filter) from all urban areas on days with high air pollution, and from the city centre all year round (see for example, German system with colour dots).
- Reduce through traffic in Brussels as stated in the Regional Development Plan). For example, by creating loop systems as has been done in Strasbourg and many Dutch cities.
- Reduce the number of lanes on major thoroughfares inside Brussels, such as rue Beliard, rue de la Loi, the inner ring and the intermediate ring.
- Reduce truck traffic in Brussels. For example, by limiting their access to certain roads and setting up logistics centres where goods can be transferred to smaller vehicles for local distribution.
- Reduce the number of mopeds, especially those with a two stroke engine.
- Introduce congestion charging.
- Reduce congestion by charging more for parking, especially in the city centre.
- Reduce the fiscal advantage of company cars and/or allow employees to get the equivalent cash benefit of free parking + company car if they chose not to use a company car.
- Reduce the fiscal advantage of diesel cars relative to other cars.
- Reconsider the need to expand the motorway ring in light of demand management measures and the need to improve air quality.
- Ensure that all buses driving in Brussels are low polluters.
- Ensure that all Brussels taxis are low pollution vehicles.
- Promoting a shift from cars to bicycles will also help.

2. Improved road safety

Possible actions to improve traffic safety

- Focus traffic law enforcement on increasing safety, including speed limits.
- Adjust the road design to take into account the speed limit (especially when the speed limit has changed), the hierarchy of the road and the needs of non-motorised road users.
- Increase enforcement especially of behaviour which creates the most risks: speeding, running of red lights, parking on sidewalks or cycling lanes.
- Introduce a driver's license with penalty points (as is already the case in most neighbouring countries).
- Improve street design and maintenance taking into account the needs of active road users.
- Improve street cleaning, including leaves and snow on cycle lanes.
- Introduce intelligent speed adaptation to ensure that cars do not break the speed limit.
- Promote the use of underrun protection on trucks to reduce injuries and fatalities.

3. An efficient parking policy for cars and bicycles

Possible actions to create an efficient parking policy

- Concentric circles for car parking charges: high in the centre, less high in the periphery. The parking plan the Brussels region is working on should be a step in the right direction.
- The parking card for residents should not be free, but more in line with pricing in other large European cities.
- A parking route with clear information about availability of car parking spaces in Brussels.
- Parking garages with long(er) opening hours to accommodate also people visiting concerts, restaurants and other nightlife activities.
- A wide distribution of solid and safe bicycle parking racks and bicycle lockers/cages in visible locations.
- Secured or guarded bicycle parking should be available at popular destinations, including major public transport stops, and it should preferably be free.
- A simple Brussels-wide system to request the installation of bicycle parking close to home, especially important in areas where flats and houses do not have room for bicycles.
- Further develop the Villo network.

4. Bicycle infrastructure

- All major roads should have a high-quality, segregated cycle track.
- Ensure that all bicycle routes (ICR) are completed and properly sign posted.
- Ensure that all bicycle infrastructure follows the guidelines set out in "Le vademecum vélo en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale", with penalties for non-compliance.

- Construct cycle paths and sidewalks which are safe and easy to maintain (i.e. avoid using cobble stones and get rid of them whenever possible).
- Create a central point (including online) for complaints about the maintenance of bicycle routes and paths and streets in general throughout Brussels (regardless of the administration responsible for the individual street).
- Create bicycle routes to the surrounding regions by developing an RER vélo/FietsGEN.
- Connect to the fietsknooppuntennetwerk.

5. Bicycle theft

Addressing bicycle theft is currently not a priority for the Brussels police zones or the judiciary. To reduce bicycle theft in the region, an integrated plan is needed that addresses bicycle theft on all fronts. The London Cycle Security Plan proposes the following fronts: enforcement, education, environment, engagement, evaluation.

In Brussels, some actions have been taken on education and engagement. Actions on enforcement, environment and evaluation are almost entirely lacking. Real progress is needed to ensure that bicycle thefts are investigated and prosecuted, secure bicycle parking is increased and, last but not least, bicycle theft is monitored (including by measuring non-registration rates) and evaluated.

Evaluation:

- Analyse bicycle theft: by monitoring reports of stolen bicycles, checking for underreporting, identifying bicycle theft hot spots.
- The police should encourage people to report bicycle theft. Make it easy to report a stolen bicycle (for example, online for all residents of Brussels, not just those with a Belgian digital ID).

Enforcement:

- Persuade the six police zones to give priority to monitoring, pursuing and reducing bicycle theft, including catching thieves in the act and stopping organised bicycle thefts.
- Ensure that the public prosecutor (Procureur du Roi) deals efficiently with the resulting court cases.
- Create a central depot for all stolen bicycles in Brussels with an online photo library to identify your bicycle.

Environment:

- Provide secure and supervised bicycle parking at major destinations, including all main train stations.

Engagement with bike shops, communes, cyclists, associations and manufacturers:

- A bicycle should have a passport with a permanent ID.
- A common database which indicates if a bicycle is stolen based on permanent ID. This database should be managed by the police and accessible to bicycle retailers and repairers.
- A charter covering the sale and purchase of bicycles (including eBay)

Education:

- Encourage people to report bicycle thefts in action.
- Continue to inform people about how to lock a bicycle securely.
- Continue to offer a security marking service for bicycles without a permanent ID.