

Cycling Past 50: A Closer Look into the World of Older Cyclists, Year 4 Survey

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Introduction

This report provides results of the 50+ Cycling Survey, Year 4. The survey, which began in late 2017, captures information on cycling habits, preferences and experiences of older adults who cycle.

Taken as a whole, the 5,000-plus survey responses provide a rich database of information about older cyclists. The responses help answer questions such as who is cycling, when do they cycle and where, how far do they go, and how often. The analysis is premised on the fact that cycling remains a benefit for older adults. It contributes to their physical and mental well-being and offers mobility independence regardless of their ability to continue driving a motor vehicle. Thus, the analysis in this report can be used by transportation planners and engineers, public health professionals, those working on physical activity and wellness for older adults, cycling and aging policy advocates, and older adults themselves and their families.

Study Methods

The online survey was offered in English to people 50 years and older from 2021 through March 2022, and promoted through various national, regional, and local organizations in the United States and Canada via eNewsletters, social media, and websites. Organizations ranged from research, planning, cycling and walking advocacy, older adult non-profits, local governments and councils of government. Organizations whose audiences were specifically lower income or diverse racially were asked to promote the survey. This outreach was not successful, given the lower percentage of respondents fitting either of these two factors. Survey responses help explain how aging affects cycling habits in general, including any differences by age and gender, self-identification as a regular or non-regular cyclist, and as one of four types of cyclists. This allowed for parsing responses to other questions, such as the amount of weekly cycling for women and men in various age groups. Only those

answering all questions were used in each multi-questions analysis.

Survey questions were offered in different formats including 'select one' or 'select all that apply' for questions requesting 'reasons why.' Key questions with yes/no answers had follow-up questions based on the answer selected. The survey included a visual preference section comprised of a series of photos of cycling context. Respondents selected from four to six options for cycling through each context, then rated it on safety and comfort on a one-to-five scale. Some respondents completed a separate online journal for two cycling trips. Results of the online journal are forthcoming.

Findings

People who begin cycling at some point in their lives can continue cycling, even into their late 80s and 90s, as long as it remains safe and pleasurable. An older adult's family and social context is a contributing factor to continued cycling. Care-giving responsibilities can reduce cycling opportunities or create ways to include the partner in cycling such as using a tandem.

Attributes of the built environment, land use, and accompanying features impact how attractive cycling is for older adults. A safe and comfortable cycling environment that allows an older adult to satisfy health and wellness goals top the list. The social aspects of cycling with friends or in a group are important, but not at the expense of safety.

Adaptive bikes such as ebikes, tandems, and adult trikes are attractive for continuing to cycle. Of these, ebikes are more popular than adult trikes. In some respects, those who ride tandem bikes are a special group who specifically want the social benefits offered, along with the ability to ride 'further and faster.' Adult trikes are considered an admission of aging and have a lower rate of adoption, except perhaps for recumbent trikes.

Differences between women and men vary by age, risk inclination, and lifestyle. Examples include:

- As people age, health and safety factors are of greater concern.
- The fall rate declines for those beginning at age 71.

- More men than women mountain and gravel bike.
- More younger women own an ebike than younger men.
- More men than women cycle for fitness.

Policy/Practice Recommendations

Older adults will continue to cycle as they age if they can adapt their expectations and find safe and comfortable places to do so that connect to everyday destinations. Reducing social pressure to stop cycling and increasing high quality cycling infrastructure will keep them cycling. Results of this survey should be combined with further analyses that help answer fundamental questions about how to keep cycling in people's lives as they age by considering questions such as:

- How does the role cycling plays in the lifecourse of an older adult affect the amount of cycling they do and for how long they expect to continue?
- How can the effects of the aging process be mitigated to support cycling as people age into their 70s, 80s, and even 90s.
- What is important for people when they cycle? What do they want from cycling?
- What infrastructure design and operation benefits older cyclists?

About the Author

Carol Kachadoorian's work addresses the need to revise long-standing perceptions of older adults. She partners with several universities for research on older adult mobility and wellness.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2157.1



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