



ENABLING CYCLING CITIES INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

INTERVIEW WITH JEANINE VAN PINXTEREN

Chair of the executive committee of the city-centre borough of the city of Amsterdam





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AMSTERDAM

Interview by **Oliver Hatch**, Urbtrans.org

In your view, how important is political support and commitment for pro-cycling policies?

Everyone understands the importance of using a bicycle in Amsterdam - there are no political challenges here. We have to make better choices to accommodate the types of mobility we want, including pedestrians and cyclists. However the city is always being renewed / rebuilt and we also need to plan for cars where they are necessary (for shopping). There are also people who need cars for their business, for example builders and unloading for shops. Car use in the centre of the city is reduced to the necessary trips. cars should not have the shortest route, but they do need to unload goods etc. This is more or less accepted and it works. You can always drive to your destination by car, but it might take you 5 minutes more. Most people choose the easiest way. The city alderman travels to the office by bicycle, taking off his rain suit if it is wet - this is completely normal. Its all about priorities - cities need to organise and accommodate cars, but should give priority to low-speed modes.

Have you a particular success story you can describe in respect of this?

In cities, space is the big issue / challenge. Cycle parking is a challenge in cities because space is limited and therefore politicians / planners have choices to make. Cities need to think about the space that car parking represents - each car space uses 15 square metres - I can use that space very very well as public space. The same amount of effort that was given to reducing cars ownership / use in the centre of the city should be used to solve bicycle challenges such as parking - then we can get somewhere. Just 30% of households in central Amsterdam own a car. 'We need the courage to invest in bicycles' (in the broadest sense) 'The bicycle is the new car'. Amsterdam is lucky to have so many cyclists, but they need to be supported, for example with cycle parking in the limited space in the city centre.

Is a well-planned and steady flow of finance for cycling measures necessary?

400 years ago, Amsterdam planned the canals to meet the new mobility challenges - now its bicycles. Politicians in Amsterdam all believe that public space has a high economic value to residents, business and tourists - and cities need to use it well. The quality of the built environment and the quality of life are linked and important. The economic value of public space is an important asset to both companies and people. Amsterdam is the smallest capital city in the world with less than 1 million inhabitants, but it has a complete range of what a city needs in this small space. We should make cities more dense - it helps mobility, but leave the green areas (they have a big value).

What is the position of cycle planning within your wider land-use and transport policies?

The cycle planning team in Amsterdam is not big. Cycle planning is integrated into all the other work the city does and every town planner is skilled and trained to think of bicycles. In a good situation, you should not need a special cycle team - if everyone thinks bike, it's not necessary. However, the real challenge is not the city workers, but often is the politicians who must have the courage to support bikes.

Do you consult with your cycle user groups and neighbourhood groups on cycling and how useful are their views and their role?

The support of residents, shopkeepers and other civic groups are very important and have helped to promote cycle policies and provision. Things have changed in Amsterdam - shopkeepers used to believe that most of their customers came by car. It has taken time, but they now understand. Shopkeepers saw that other car-free streets were more attractive to shoppers and understood that change was good. Let's find another solution to the parking of the cars.

How necessary for cycling is it that different city departments cooperate and work together?

In Amsterdam, there is a hierarchy of decision-making and while local politicians can make changes in small streets, they only have limited influence on the bigger streets. These are controlled by the central government. But the cooperation works well.

Has your city been able to learn and adapt ideas from other cities for cycling - if so, how?

Cities need to think about the context of the streets - the use and design of the streets can change every 50m. The definition of the streets and networks needs to be discussed and reviewed all the time. Meetings with residents are very common and important. If streets are very popular with cafes, restaurants and pedestrians, let's slow down cyclists and remove all the cars we can. We can make fast routes for cyclists elsewhere. Slow streets also have an important role to play. The real challenge in cities is defining how we want to use space - that is the key. We also need to be flexible about the use of space - there should not just be one use for the space.

How necessary are the communications and marketing of cycling initiatives to all your city residents?

Cities and politicians must engage with residents. Sometimes cycle initiatives are unpopular initially, even in Holland, but after time are realised to be very useful and effective. Marketing has many aspects to it, in Amsterdam the challenge is now parking. Amsterdam is making marketing campaigns to inform people about the use of scooters and how to use / share the road safely - that is a new challenge

If you had one recommendation to make to another city starting to plan for bicycles, what would it be?

You can flirt very well on a bicycle'
'Riding a bike allows you to speak to strangers'

The interviews were taken by Oliver Hatch,
from Urbtrans in London
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THIS INTERVIEW IS PART OF 'ENABLING CYCLING CITIES: INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS'

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