

Cycling towards energy independence



How the EU, national governments and individuals can lessen dependence on fossil fuels and achieve significant fuel savings with more cycling

Eight recommendations from the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF), Cycling Industries Europe (CIE) and the Confederation of the European Bicycle Industry (CONEBI).

As a coalition, ECF, CIE and CONEBI have always championed cycling as a way of overcoming the huge challenges of the climate crisis. Cycling can also help us move away from our dependence on fossil fuels for transport, which produces around 20-25% of Europe's total CO₂ emissions. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has provided further reason for the European Union and individual European countries to promote cycling as a sustainable mode of transport to quickly reduce our dependence on Russian oil and gas.

Every crisis poses new challenges, creating a chance to make things right and correct the mistakes of the past. In 2020 and 2021, European cities and national governments used the opportunity of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns to accelerate cycling plans and implement nearly 3,000 km of temporary cycling infrastructure that enabled more people to travel safely, efficiently, enjoyably and at a safe distance from each other. Many local and national

governments have since turned temporary measures into permanent cycling infrastructure, based on [data](#) showing that such measures resulted in more people cycling for daily trips and leisure.

Many people want to travel more sustainably and use their car less often. Individual actions are important. But European governments need to come through first and foremost to provide the right infrastructure and incentives to support a shift to cycling. A wide scale increase in cycling, mixed as well with walking and public transport, can enable Europe to lessen its dependence on fossil fuels. It can also provide Europe's inhabitants with the freedom to choose forms of travel that are sustainable, clean and healthy. This is the promise of more cycling.

How the EU can cycle to energy independence

1.0 Use the REPowerEU plan to maximise cycling's potential to save fuel

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, REPowerEU is the European Commission's plan to accelerate the EU's independence from Russian fossil fuels and its transition to clean energy. It must include measures to boost energy-efficient cycling over fuel-intensive motorised transport. The Commission can do this in several ways. It can financially invest in replacing polluting vans and trucks with cargo bike fleets all over Europe, helping to make businesses more sustainable. It can announce investments in thousands more kilometres of new cycle paths, tracks and lanes, and major investments in bicycle parking infrastructure. It can ensure that shared bicycles and e-bicycles are within reach of every EU citizen in every urban centre.

The Commission can also initiate a strategic approach to cycling in European cities and rural areas, giving cycling a central place in the mobility ecosystem. This would pull in all relevant capacities and resources at the EU level to invest in policy and financial frameworks that can significantly boost cycling's modal share in transport and increase our collective independence from fossil fuels. The Commission can do this by supporting the integration of cycling, and especially the EuroVelo cycle route network, into the EU's flagship transport policy, the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). It can also do this by creating a dedicated fund for cycling aimed at delivering €15 billion in investments by 2030, a measure that can dramatically increase cycling levels across the EU.

To make sure that the cycling industries can supply the bicycles that are needed reliably and sustainably, the Commission can fast-track supporting investments in resilient supply chains for bicycles and components as part of its Mobility Ecosystem Transition Framework.

How national and local governments can cycle to energy independence

2.0 Make cycling financially attractive

Governments should provide [direct incentives](#) to people so they can cycle more and drive less. Examples are reductions in VAT for the purchase and repair of bicycles and e-bikes, lower taxes on salaries for employees who cycle and policies that provide money directly to people to purchase or lease bicycles and use bicycle-sharing schemes. Such incentives are especially important for boosting the uptake of e-bikes, which have a very high potential for substituting car trips, and they can be provided by governments at a fraction of the cost of electric car subsidies and fuel tax reductions.

3.0 Put more cycling infrastructure on the roads

During the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous cities in Europe quickly rolled out temporary cycle lanes that led to significant increases in the number of people cycling. Europe's energy crisis and Russia's war on Ukraine represents a similar situation. Temporary, pop-up cycle lanes and other infrastructure measures are a good and pragmatic way of enabling more and better cycling for anyone who uses them, and they pave the way for permanent infrastructure afterwards that are built into long-term strategies.

4.0 Embrace the bicycle for business, goods and services

Cargo bikes have the potential to revolutionise the way businesses and service providers operate. With their ability to be customised for diverse needs, cargo bikes can help take inefficiently used trucks and vans off the roads, greatly improving transport flows, road safety, air and noise pollution – on top of decreasing our collective need for fossil fuels. Governments should encourage the uptake of cargo bikes by providing direct incentives to businesses and utility providers to use them instead of large vans and trucks. Local authorities should serve as role models and use cargo bikes for public services.

5.0 Make Sundays car-free

During the 1973 oil crisis, Switzerland, the Netherlands and West Germany all introduced car-free Sundays. In 2021, more than 3,000 European towns and cities held car-free days. This is a powerful way to create positive experiences for people of what cities and towns feel like with less or no motorised traffic. Moreover, car-free Sundays are a great way to collectively save fuel. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that around [380,000](#) barrels of oil a day could be saved in the short term if large European cities went car-free every Sunday. But even just one car-free Sunday per month saves 95,000 barrels of oil a day.

6.0 Reduce speed limits on roadways

Implementing a general 30 km/h speed limit within built-up areas is the gold standard. Slower car speeds reduce fuel consumption and encourage more people to cycle, since cycling feels much safer when motorised traffic is slower. Outside of built-up areas, even a 10 km/h reduction on roadways could save around [290,000](#) barrels of oil a day. Just like car-free Sundays, this is an action local authorities can take with immediate positive impact.

How individuals can cycle to energy independence

7.0 Use a bicycle instead of the car during the week

[Research shows](#) that replacing car trips with cycling is one of the most impactful things a person can do for our climate and environment. Even one trip per week made by bicycle instead of by car can reduce a person's annual CO² footprint by [half a tonne](#). All those new bike trips also add up to significant fuel savings. We estimate that an individual could achieve nearly €300 per year in fuel savings if they cycle an average of just 6 km a day, in place of taking a car for the same distance. In urban areas, cycling this distance takes just 30 minutes or less, meaning just two half-hour bike commutes per day to work or school during the week would lead to significant yearly savings.

8.0 Take a cycling holiday

Tourism goes hand-in-hand with transport of course, and we can make choices that lessen our dependence on fossil fuels. Tourism globally accounts for around 8% of greenhouse gas emissions, of which 95% are contributed by transport (in particular

flights and cruises) and the built-up environment. Cycling tourism can provide a solution. As millions more Europeans have discovered since the start of the pandemic, cycling tourism is safe, healthy, enjoyable and can lead to significant fuel savings, whether for exploring your own region, or venturing farther afield in combination with public transport.