



ARTICLE FROM THE BOOK:

### **Cyclists & Cycling Around the World – Creating Liveable and Bikeable Cities**

Edited by Juan Carlos Dextre, Mike Hughes & Lotte Bech

Published by Fondo Editorial, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2013

ISBN: 978-612-4146-55-8

# How to Get Started - Ten rules that have increased cycling in Bogotá and other cities

By Carlos Felipe Pardo, Bogotá, Colombia (Mesa de la Bicicleta)

## Introduction

Getting started in moving forward a bicycle-related policy in a city is a difficult but fulfilling challenge – it implies a lot of work and takes considerable time. I will describe my experience in taking part in various activities and groups that promote bicycle policies in Bogotá and other cities where I have worked. I must clarify that I will discuss bicycle policies in the broader sense of the word, meaning that it relates to promotional activities but also regulation (i.e. modifying laws) and infrastructure interventions and projects.

Photo by Carlosfelipe Pardo (in Bogotá, Colombia)





Photo by Claudio Olivares (in Santiago, Chile)

I have organised this article into ten lessons. For more detailed descriptions of technical issues of bicycle policy, designs and regulations, I direct readers to the works of other authors, predominantly Goodefrooij, Sagaris and Pardo, eds 2009 (For specific references, See Appendix). This article relates to very specific issues that will kickstart discussions and get the agenda moving.

I am not an engineer but a psychologist and urbanist, and before getting those titles I used to ride a bicycle mainly as a competitive sport. The ten lessons below reflect my experience as a person who has ridden bicycles for many years, but also as an advocate, a policy advisor and a citizen.

## 1. Get a (proper) bicycle

In many cities across the world (including Bogotá, a city with a long history of cycling as a competitive sport), the generalised perception is that a bicycle is a vehicle for sports or recreation. Regardless, whoever wants to promote bicycle policy must have a bicycle designed for use in the city. The bicycle doesn't have to be sophisticated or expensive, it should actually be rather basic. Getting a single-speed bicycle with adequate frame design, a comfortable saddle and fenders is enough, and definitely the first step to becoming a person who understands what it means to ride a bicycle in a city and promote its use.





Photo by Carlosfelipe Pardo (in Amsterdam, Netherlands)

Helping others in getting bicycles is also a fundamental step in changing /creating a cycling culture, especially where bicycles “equal” lycra and helmets. In doing so, one must prepare suggestions, land tips, talk with local bike shop owners and convince them that city bikes must be part of their stock.

## 2. Embody your message: ride the bicycle

Someone who is promoting bicycle use must use the bicycle, and be aware of the difficulties that may arise in its use, while also knowing details of the infrastructure that exists for bicycles. Riding a bicycle makes people better aware of what needs to be changed and it literally provides a hands-on approach to understanding a problem.

It is also indispensable to have other people ride bicycles, and to do so as frequently as they can. Getting friends, family, colleagues and “influential people” to ride bicycles is a promotional activity in itself but also a way to present the issues of urban mobility in a city every day.

One must also be conscious of the fact that one represents a culture, and that one must do so adequately: not following traffic rules is not the best way to promote a bicycle policy in a city, especially because the notion of “the irresponsible cyclist” may be perpetuated.



Photo by Carlosfelipe Pardo (in Copenhagen, Denmark)

### 3. Cycling as transport

There are three reasons to ride a bicycle: for leisure, sport and/or transport. The history of bicycle use has followed a similar progression in many cities: from leisure to transport to sport and the cycle continues or stops at a practice of riding bicycles for one or more of these three reasons.

The experience in Bogotá, for instance, is one where the bicycle was identified with sports from the 1950s with its “Vuelta a Colombia” road race, and was then enhanced by an image of leisure from 1974 when it implemented its Sunday Carfree Day (an event that continues to this day).

How useful is it to promote cycling for leisure or sport as leverage to its becoming a mode of transport? Nobody has been able to answer this question completely. What is true is that the development of schemes like the Sunday carfree initiatives definitely puts bicycles on the public agenda and in people’s minds as something that actually exists and can be used.

In general, it is advisable to promote recreational or sports cycling as part of a city agenda, but with a view to promoting the bicycle as a mode of transport.



#### 4. Learn about the topic

The past indications were related to the actual practice of using a bicycle properly and embodying the issue that is being promoted. But it is also necessary to become knowledgeable about the topic and to be reliable in providing information to others.

Knowing about experiences in other countries, understanding if and how specific activities have worked, and learning how to adapt those solutions to the local context is not only strategic in terms of becoming an expert in the topic, but it is also greatly beneficial for a city that relies on one's expertise for improvements. Promoting cycling must be seen as a truly technical issue and is not an idea that emerged overnight.

In Bogotá, knowledge of bicycle policies has been enhanced by visits from technical experts from various countries in Europe, and even through training courses on cycling-inclusive infrastructure supported by international cooperation agencies. The fact that Bogotá made huge investments in bicycle infrastructure from 1998-2000 also led to a greater level of technical knowledge and awareness amongst its citizens and experts.

The good news regarding knowledge and capacity development is that there are many free and easily available resources on various websites (see appendix) where anyone can learn a lot.



Photo by Jonas Hagen  
(in Rio de Janeiro,  
Brazil)

## 5. Work together

The experience of Bogotá is particularly useful in that, despite having various advocacy and technical groups promoting bicycle policies, there have been no strong arguments between them nor any significant conflicts or false leadership – the same cannot be said of other cities where, despite having a strong advocacy culture, bicycle policy promotion has not been particularly effective due to group clashes.

The key to arriving at this common understanding of working together despite differences was the common agreement in 2008 that, regardless of the intricacies of each group's interests and working strategies, all would agree on one thing: to promote policies that included the bicycle in a favourable manner, and to respect each other. This was mainly the work of the "Mesa de la Bicicleta", a group of experts and advocates who worked to promote bicycles in Bogotá but invited others to do so in parallel and complementary fashion. Some basic rules of this cooperation between groups have been to respect others' views, recognize the work of others explicitly, forget antagonisms, and invite others to think in the same way (or actively indicate when someone is "crossing the line"). This has been effective in creating a strong agenda for cycling and in generating specific positive effects in bicycle policies in the city.

## 6. Get support

Working as an advocate is an interesting activity, but it needs support from strategic stakeholders. Getting interest from specific groups is very important:

Photo by Bogotá Chamber of  
Commerce (in Bogotá, Colombia)





- Government: policymakers are the ones who will enact policies, promote their implementation and create budget allocations for cycling policies. They should be approached and engaged in promoting cycling, and sometimes the only way to do this is through strong (but decent) opposition. One risk of “over-including” policymakers in the game is that they may use bicycles as a political instrument, working against one’s intentions.
- Private sector: bicycle shops, importers of bicycle brands, and any company that supports bicycle use (directly or indirectly) can be used strategically to promote a bicycle policy. The risk here would be to generate too many commercial links to bicycle use.
- International organizations: there are many organizations that can provide support, advice or just generally support the actions of a group promoting bicycle use. There is seldom an opportunity to get financial support from them, but their knowledge and advice is most useful, as well as their written support (for instance, when presenting proposals).
- Citizens: many citizens are supportive of bicycle policies, even if they are not bicycle users. They must be actively sought to support actions related to the promotion of a bicycle policy, and that support can range from “liking” a Facebook page to taking part in activities.

Clipping from El Tiempo newspaper (Bogotá, Colombia)

**EXPERIMENTO EN HORA PICO**

## La bicicleta le ganó al TransMilenio en Bogotá

Una carrera experimental realizada ayer en Bogotá evidenció que, como ocurre en otras grandes ciudades del mundo, el mejor vehículo pa-

ra moverse en una hora pico es la bicicleta.

Los viajeros que utilizaron la bicicleta tardaron 20,6 minutos, en promedio, en cubrir el trayecto entre la calle 125 con carrera 21 y la calle 72 con carrera séptima.

Entre tanto, los que optaron por buses de TransMilenio emplearon 32,1 minutos y los que iban en automóvil se demoraron 34,7 minutos, en promedio.

John Jairo Salazar, uno de los participantes de la carrera organizada por Fenalco, dice que las bicicletas son ‘campeonas’ porque aseguran una velocidad constante desde la partida hasta la llegada y en las ciclorrutas no se padecen trancones.

**1-20**

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**ARMADO: GUA LUNA**

**Los datos**  
El proyecto...  
relló una sonda...  
del Polo Sur,  
ó que el líquido...  
télite natural...  
hallazgo aviva la...  
tomar las...  
adas. **1-26**

**ELTIEMPO.COM**

**César Ocampo,**  
ingeniero colombiano vinculado a la misión, habla de la importancia del hallazgo.



Photo by Claudio Olivares  
(in Bogotá, Colombia)

## 7. Provide reliable information

Communicating a message (e.g. why cycling should have a more prominent role in city or transport policy) needs to have arguments, reliable statistics and in general must follow the same guidelines as a scientific report. This is especially the case when cycling is regarded as an inefficient form of transport or just neglected as a mode of transport.

If one is to promote cycling, one must provide thorough details of any example, and also be able to respond to questions that may challenge assertions. There is nothing worse for cycling promotion than someone giving the wrong statistics.

## 8. Be creative and visual

Presenting a message with enough visual appeal is one of the most effective ways to catch people's attention. Promoting a bicycle policy will involve presenting the use of the bicycle as something easy and joyful, where people can use their bicycles with normal clothes and they will not sweat when riding.

There are two champions who should be credited for bringing forward this image of cycling in a most visually appealing way. One of them is Cycle Chic, the other is Ciclismo Urbano. The first of these initiatives (Cycle Chic) was born in Denmark and has now expanded throughout the world with its Cycle Chic City model, where cities promote the use of Bicycles following the "Cycle Chic Manifesto". The second example is that of





Photo by Carlosfelipe Pardo (in Bogotá, Colombia)

Ciclismo Urbano in Chile, which are very similar to Cycle Chic but their aim is to promote cycling as part of an “urban experience”.

The lesson drawn here is that cycling has great potential to be presented visually to others, and that one can use photography and other visual aids to promote a bicycle policy adequately while persuading others to be part of that agenda and to support it.

## 9. Write, speak, ride

In order to complement visual information, one must be able to write and speak clearly. Having a good relationship with the media implies that one should also be able to deliver useful press releases, key fact sheets and give crucial information to journalists and editors so that they can support a bicycle policy in a city through their media. It is definitely “a must” to be able to communicate with people effectively in order to get them onto a bicycle or to gain their support.

## 10. Have fun while promoting cycling

Having fun while promoting cycling is something that is not so difficult to do, but I want to repeat that idea since there are times when promoting cycling is frustrating or difficult. However, it is always good to get on a bicycle and go for a ride.

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