CYCLING AND THE MODERN WORKPLACE

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British Council for Offices

ABOUT THE BCO

The British Council for Offices' (BCO) mission is to research, develop and communicate best practice in all aspects of the office sector. It delivers this by providing a forum for the discussion and debate of relevant issues.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The findings of this online survey were written by Melanie Thompson, technical communications professional.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The BCO thanks all of the people who gave their time to participate in the online survey.

IMAGES

COVER
Bicycle commuters in London
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Bicycle at office building
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Riding bicycle
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INTRODUCTION

In Spring 2012 BCO invited its members and other interested parties to take part in a quick and easy survey, Cycling and the Modern Workplace, in order to investigate the cycling habits of office users and, significantly, of those who design, develop and manage office buildings and who are therefore in a position to raise awareness of the health and sustainability benefits of cycling.

One hundred and sixty people participated in the survey (see Appendix for details). Seventy per cent of respondents are based in and around London, followed by Manchester (5.6%), Birmingham (4.4%) and Bristol (3.8%). A handful of respondents were based overseas, including six from North America and two from continental Europe.

This report presents the key findings of the survey, and will be of particular interest to clients, tenants, facilities managers, human resource managers, and architects and other design professionals.

KEY POINTS

Cycling to work

- Well over a third of the cyclists get on their bike to go to work every day (38.9%), and more than three-quarters (77.8%) cycle on three days or more.
- ‘Fitness’ is the key motivator for cyclists, ahead of ‘enjoyment’ and ‘convenience’.
- Although a fifth of respondents work in offices where there are no facilities for cyclists, more than twice as many (42.1%) have had facilities for over 5 years.
- Showers are the most sought-after workplace facility, followed closely by lockers and safe cycle storage.
- Safety is the main reason given by the non-cyclists for not cycling to work, followed by ‘lack of clear cycling routes/cycle lanes’.

Building for cyclists

- The quality and availability of workplace cycle facilities influences the career choices of more than half of respondents.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents (92.6%) say there has been an increase in demand for cycling facilities in the offices sector, mainly driven by occupiers rather than developers or investors.
- Most respondents think that providing high-quality facilities is not significant to rental values, suggesting that the provision of cycling facilities is well on the way to being regarded as the norm.

CONTEXT

In 1999 the Finance Act paved the way for the introduction of an annual tax exemption scheme that enables employers to loan cycles and related safety equipment to their employees under what has come to be known as the Cycle to Work Scheme. This was one of several measures designed to ease congestion, encourage healthy lifestyles and begin the move away from fossil-fuel-driven vehicles towards more sustainable modes of transport.

According to statistics published by the Department for Transport, the number of pedal cycles has increased by around 18% since 2007, compared with cars/taxis (slight decline) and motorcycles (reduced by about 20%). In London, the Mayor is aiming for a 400% increase in cycling by 2026 (based on 2001 levels), and other cities are implementing similar campaigns to ease congestion and reap environmental benefits.

There have been numerous pro-cycling campaigns in recent years, including the development of the National Cycle Network by Sustrans, and the benefits of cycling – reducing pollution and congestion, improving health, saving money, added convenience – are now well understood and widely promoted. These factors are even acknowledged in sustainability guidelines such as BREEAM for Offices and the Code for Sustainable Homes.

Against this background, the BCO set out to investigate the cycling habits of office users – in particular those who design and manage office buildings, and who are therefore in a position to raise awareness of the benefits of cycling to both owners and occupiers of office buildings.

SURVEY FINDINGS

CYCLING HABITS

Of the total respondents (see Appendix for details), only 3.8% do not cycle at all, while over two-thirds (67.5%) cycle to work.

Safety is the main reason given by the non-cyclists for not cycling to work (cited by five out of the six non-cycling respondents), followed by 'lack of clear cycling routes/cycle lanes' (half of non-cyclists). In practice, these two factors are not mutually exclusive.

Insufficient facilities at work (see page 7), not being fit enough and the inconvenience/incompatibility with work requirements (e.g. needing to transport equipment) were also mentioned (Figure 1). Only one person stated categorically that they do not like cycling.

Of the cyclists, well over a third get on their bike to go to work every day (38.9%), and more than three-quarters (77.8%) cycle on three days or more.

Asked why they choose the bike over other modes of transport, most people ranked 'fitness' as the key motivator, ahead of 'enjoyment' and 'convenience'. Interestingly, 'saving money' came only halfway down the list of suggested motivators, ahead of 'dislike of crowded public transport', 'fresh air' and 'thinking time'. These results, however, should be viewed alongside the respondents' cycling habits. For instance, while over two-thirds of the respondents cycle to work, an even greater proportion (80%) cycle for fun, with 20% of the total sample (i.e. 32 individuals who cycle for any reason) also taking part in competitive cycling.

In addition, the vast majority of the cycle-to-work group use their own bike, a fact that is perhaps reflected in the relatively low importance given to 'saving money' as a motivator. On the other hand, more than three-quarters of respondents (78.7%) mentioned that their employer offers a Cycle to Work Scheme (see page 7),

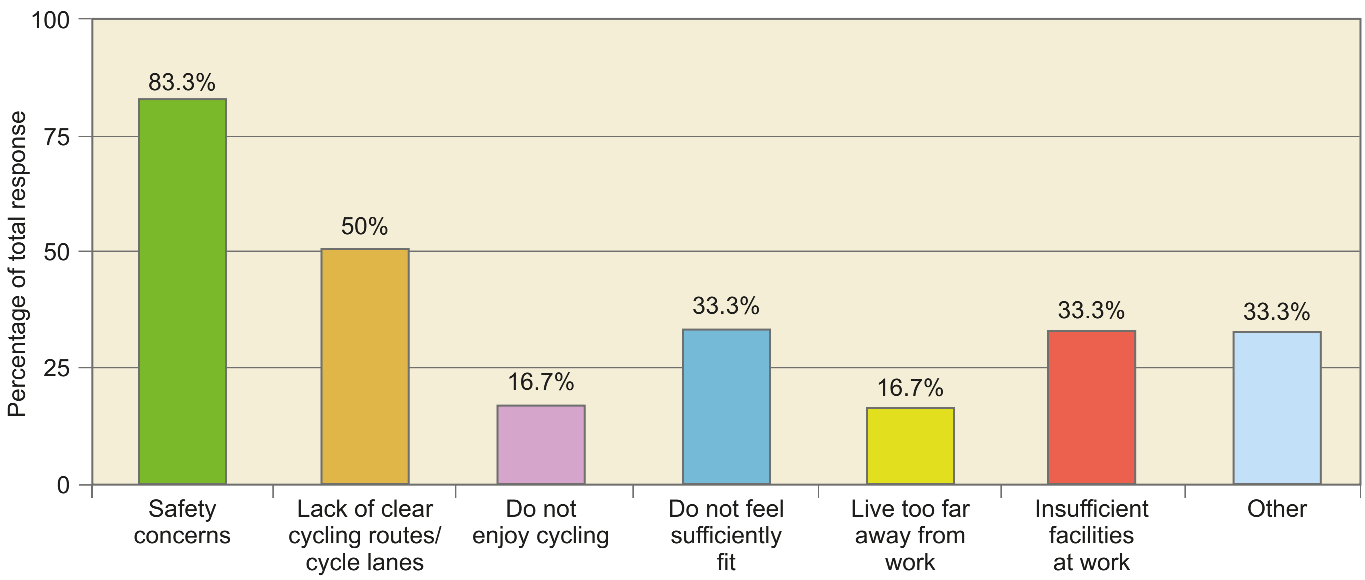

Figure 1 *If you aren't a cyclist, what is the reason you don't cycle to work?*

which will also have an impact on the perceived cost of choosing to cycle.

What about Boris?

Although most respondents are based in or around London (107; 66.9%), the penetration of the Barclays Cycle Hire scheme (popularly known as the 'Boris bike' scheme) is relatively low in this survey, with only 20 individuals saying they use this low-cost bike hire service and three people using other 'borrow a bike' schemes.

Cycling as a team-building activity

These days there are large number of cycling events for all levels of proficiency, from family fun rides of a few kilometres to charity fund-raising extravaganzas such as the annual London to Brighton ride.

Of all the cyclists who participated in the BCO survey, 60% said that they do take part in organised cycling events, and just under a third (31.8%) have joined in with events organised by their industry sector. There is also evidence that cycling can successfully cross the work/leisure divide: 31.2% of respondents cycle for fun with work colleagues; and a larger proportion (38.3%) report that they cycle with colleagues in their wider network.

WORKPLACE CYCLING FACILITIES

Within the context of this survey (see Appendix), the provision of cycling facilities appears to be reasonable. Although one-fifth of respondents work in offices where there are no facilities for cyclists, more than two-fifths (42.1%) have had facilities for over 5 years, and only 4.2% have had cycling facilities for less than a year.

Current provision

The survey asked the cycle-to-work practitioners to assess the facilities provided for them at their current place of work, rating these on a five-point scale from 'very poor' to 'excellent''. Of the ten options provided in the question, four were predominant in the results in terms of provision and adequacy:

- Showers – 29.4% said these were 'good' and 21.3% said 'excellent', although 12.5% reported their facilities to be 'very poor'.
- Clothes storage/lockers – 24.7% reported these to be 'average' and 19.6% said 'good'.
- Cycle parking/storage (uncovered) – scored as 'average' by 24.5% and 'good' by 16.1% of those who had these facilities.
- Cycle parking/storage (covered) – came out top, where these facilities are provided, with 27.4% scoring them 'excellent', 22.9% said 'good' and 20.4% reported their company's facilities to be 'average'.

The other options – the provision of personal grooming equipment (towels, hairdryer/hair straighteners, iron and ironing board, complementary toiletries); cycle maintenance/shop on site; dry cleaning/laundry service – were ranked as either 'not applicable' or predominantly 'very poor'.

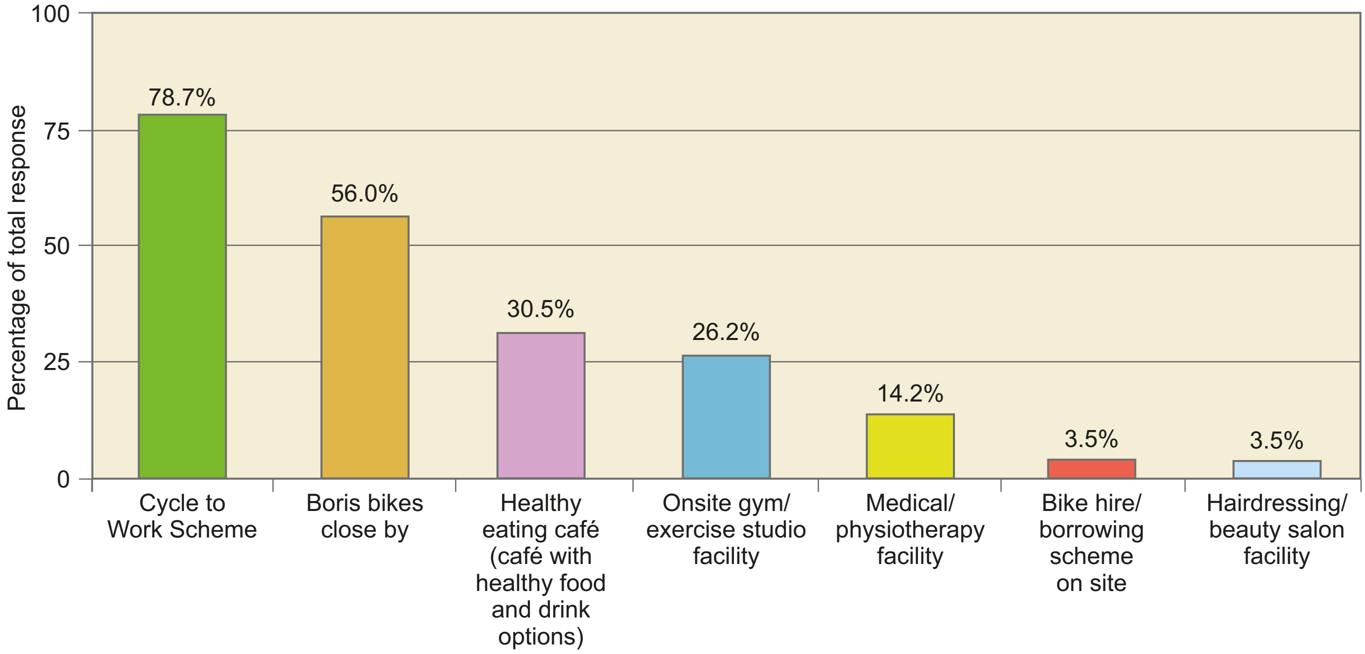

Figure 2 *What cycle-related facilities are available to you at work?*

Additional comments on existing facilities included:

> [provision] *varies from office to office' and 'technical and practical advice from colleagues is very good.*

A similar follow-up question took a broader view of employers' provision, asking whether health and fitness facilities and financial aid for cyclists are available. The results are shown in Figure 2 (most popular first).

What do cyclists want?

Having assessed the existing (or non-existent) facilities at their current workplace, participants were then given the opportunity to comment freely on the facilities they would most like to be provided. Unsurprisingly, given the responses already discussed, 'showers' are the most sought-after facility, followed closely by lockers and safe cycle storage. Facilities for drying soggy cycling gear and wet towels was also mentioned several times, as was sufficient space for impromptu cycle maintenance such as puncture repairs. One respondent just asked for 'all the other things on the list above'; another sought severe punishment for bike thieves!

What is perhaps most significant, though, is the respondents' attitude to the workplace overall. Asked 'Would the quality and availability of cycle facilities at your workplace influence your decision to take a job there?', 41.3% said 'yes' and 28.7% said 'maybe'. In addition, lack of facilities could deter more than half of respondents (approximately 55%) from accepting a job offer (Figure 3).

IMPACT ON OFFICE DESIGN AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Having captured the insight of construction/facilities professionals who are also keen cyclists makes this survey particularly valuable to the offices sector. A series of questions at the end of the survey probed these experts' views on the impact that the growing popularity of cycling is having on the offices sector.

An overwhelming majority (92.6%) say that there has been an increase in demand for cycling facilities in the offices sector (Figure 4). This is perceived to be driven by occupiers (cited by 95.6% of respondents who answered this part of the survey) rather than developers (14.4%) or investors (6.7%).

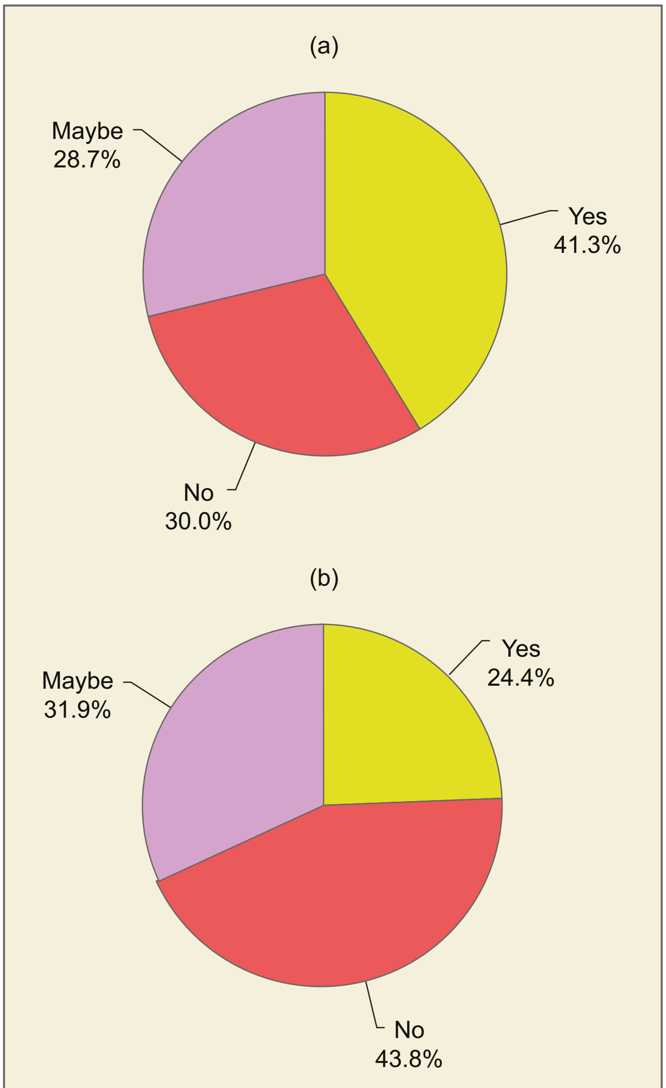

Figure 3 *Cycling facilities influence the recruitment process. (a) 'Would the quality and availability of cycle facilities at your workplace influence your decision to take a job there?' (b) 'Would lack of facilities put you off accepting a position there?'*

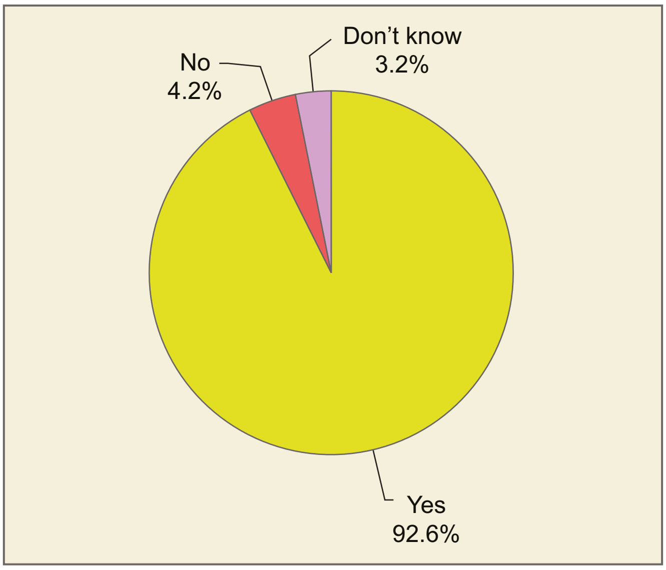

Figure 4 *In your experience/opinion, has there been an increase in demand for cycle facilities in the offices sector?*

The growth in provision is being reflected in both the quality and the quantity of cycle parking spaces and associated cycling facilities, according to 75% or respondents.

What is driving the demand for cycling facilities?

In order to investigate these perceptions further, respondents were asked to rank the significance of a number of factors, including sustainable design guidelines, government policies and perceived company image. Only around half of the total number of respondents participated in this section of the survey, yet their responses are telling:

- An increase in demand for cycle facilities by tenants/staff – Over 70% of respondents said this is a 'very significant' or 'extremely significant' factor driving the provision of enhanced cycling facilities. Only one person thought this had no impact at all.
- Cycle storage gains crucial BREEAM points at the development stage of projects – This was ranked 'somewhat significant' or higher by more than three-quarters (76.6%) of respondents, with 18.1% ranking this as 'extremely signficant'.
- A building or company's image as being a socially and environmentally responsible place to work is crucial to gaining and retaining tenants/staff – Almost three-quarters (88.3%) regarded this as 'somewhat significant' or higher, with most respondents (46.8%) ranking this factor as 'very significant'.

Factors that were generally regarded as 'somewhat significant' or 'very significant' in affecting the provision of cycling facilities include:

- 'The implementation of the Cycle to Work scheme has encouraged an increased amount of staff in

your organisation to use bikes rather than public transport' (41.3% and 33.7%, respectively).
- 'People are generally more health conscious these days' (55.4% and 27.2%).
- 'Public transport is becoming increasingly crowded and unpleasant and people are seeking an alternative' (41.3% and 31.5%).

A lower number of respondents rated the statement 'A general increase in the number of people cycling to work in London', presumably because a significant proportion are not London based. Nevertheless, of the 86 responses received to this question, almost half (48.8%) ranked this as a 'very significant' factor. In other words, the more people cycle, the more people cycle!

Perhaps most significant of all, though, was the respondents' views on the statement 'The presence of high-quality facilities allows the landlord to charge a higher rent'. With over half of the responses saying

this was 'not at all significant' or only 'slightly significant' and 27.7% ranking it 'somewhat significant', and in view of the other factors at play (listed above), this suggests that providing cycling facilities is well on the way to being regarded as the norm.

APPENDIX – ABOUT THE SURVEY

The survey was conducted using the free online survey system surveygizmo.com.

The survey invitation was emailed to BCO members, who were encouraged to forward the request to participate to interested colleagues. One hundred and sixty people participated in the survey. The ratio of BCO to non-BCO respondents was approximately 40:60. The respondents were predominantly male (ratio 7:1), and mostly in the age range 40–50 years (57.9%) followed by the age range 30–40 years (27.7%).

Almost 60% of participants in the survey work in the commercial property sector, with most working in architecture and interior design (17.9%) and the construction and office fit-out sector (10.5%).

Other sectors include: legal (8.4%), project management (8.4%), agency (7.4%), engineering & technical services (7.4%), and development (6.3%). There were also respondents involved in property management, facilities management, quantity surveying and town planning. The public sector (5.3%), education/charity (3.2%), and occupiers made up a small proportion of respondents (3.2%).

Participants include architects, engineers, consultants, programme managers, managing directors, partners and a number of non-building-related functions.

Companies represented in the sample include: BBC, Broadgate Estates Ltd, BT, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, Eversheds LLP, Feilden Clegg Bradley Studies, Jones Lang LaSalle, Lend Lease, Mace Limited, Metropolitan Police, Savills and Wilmot Dixon.