



BICYCLE RESEARCH REPORT NO. 20

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TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Cycling largely ignored in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia

The Key Facts

The sharp increase in motor vehicle use in Eastern Europe is leading to rapidly growing environmental damage. This is provoking more and more criticism, mainly in Hungary, but also in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile the bicycle as an alternative transport mode is being almost completely ignored.

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Following a visit to the area, Malcolm Ferguson and Andrew Rowell of Earth Resources Research, London, have produced a report on traffic-generated pollution in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. It shows that motor vehicle ownership is rapidly increasing throughout Eastern Europe. The new private cars are mainly used for leisure; work-related journeys are comparatively rare.

Under the former communist governments heavy industry always had priority; as a result, town planners paid little or no attention to pedestrians and cyclists. Road networks as such are extensive but their state of repair is often poor; there are few motorways or by-passes. The emission factors of cars on the roads at present are comparatively high.

In Poland there were 120 private cars per 1000 inhabitants in 1990. A typical example is the town of Katowice where up to 4000 car-hours are driven on roads unsuitable for motor vehicles. Cars are hugely expensive in proportion to the average income - a new Polski Fiat costs 30 million zloty. Government traffic policy relies heavily on import duties, intended to keep to a minimum the number of older cars brought in from the west with poor-quality exhaust and energy efficiency.

About 1/3 of all Poles own bicycles, but polluted air and undisciplined drivers create poor conditions for cyclists in cities such as Warsaw, so the use of cycles in the country as a whole is probably falling. In Krakow, there are 100,000 cycle trips daily, of an average length of 2.5km each. Environmental pressure groups there are calling for cycleways, but have met with little



success so far.

In Hungary there are about 200 cars per 1000 inhabitants. Here complaints about traffic-generated pollution are on the increase. In Budapest, cars are the main cause of this pollution. There is limited use of bicycles for transport outside the city centres and in the countryside.

Budapest City Council is now also supporting public transport, though not cycling. In Budapest traffic jams, illegal parking, dangerous driving and the lack of cycling facilities all lead to anti-cycling behaviour, and on the bridges between Buda and Pest cycling is even forbidden. Even most of the environmental groups do not support cycling.

In Czechoslovakia the air pollution caused by industry is so high that traffic-generated pollution appears insignificant by comparison. In 1989, in an attempt to increase state revenue, the government doubled the price of petrol. People reacted to great effect - medium length journeys have now fallen by around 20%.

There are hardly any cyclists in Prague, but in the flatter towns of Bohemia cycles can form as much as 20% of all traffic. Cycling has long been well-established in eastern Bohemia and the Elbe valley, but in many parts of Czechoslovakia, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the bicycle is not seriously regarded as a means of transport.

Report "Transport and the Environment in Central and East Europe. A Report on a recent visit" by Malcolm Ferguson and Andrew Rowell, c/o Earth Resources Research. London. September 1991.

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