

SHARING THE LOAD

What will promote or prevent greater cargo bike uptake in London's non-commercial sector?

Charles Critchell



FARE
C-I-T-Y

ABOUT

Fare City

Fare City is an award-winning London-based think tank and social enterprise. Our mission is to co-create fairer cities through the promotion of more accessible, equitable and sustainable city transport. Our team of built environment professionals uses an evidence-based approach which strives to empower city users to make reasoned mobility choices which are right for them and others.

The author

Charles is Fare City's founder and managing director. A qualified architect, he has experience of working across multiple sectors, including construction, public policy, and journalism. Charles oversees Fare City's research, consultancy, and community services, which address both local and international issues, and to date has included two award-winning pieces of work. He is chiefly interested in cities, governance and the ways in which city transport can be made to work harder in providing opportunities for the empowerment of the individual.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the individuals who have given me their time and provided me with their insight over the course of this research. In particular Tim Lennon at *Richmond Cycling Campaign*, Ben Knowles at *Pedal Me*, Harry Walton at *Flying Dutchman*, Michael Barratt at *Transport for London*, Alix Stredwick at *CarryMe Bikes*, Carl Myhill and Bori Kiss. I would also like to thank the Fare City team for their input and support. Any mistakes or omissions are, of course, my own.

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FOREWORD

I'm very pleased to see the growing recognition that cargo bikes and other non-standard cycles are getting as an important part of sustainable mobility systems. Cargo bikes can potentially be transformative for a range of uses, from last-mile logistics to travelling with small children. As the report notes, a range of barriers still exist to greater uptake. While shifting trips and deliveries from cars and vans to cargo bikes can have multiple societal benefits, this is not reflected in incentives and support for uptake.

Cargo bikes for carrying children are a high cost outlay for parents and carers, and many people struggle to store such bikes. The report finds that accessibility to these cycles needs to be improved for a wider range of people to have the chance to use them. It also highlights the need to improve infrastructure and facilities taking into account the range of cycles that might be used; for instance, in designing cycle parking.

The findings and recommendations of the report will be useful for planners and policy-makers thinking 'beyond the bicycle' to the role a range of human-powered vehicles can play in transforming our cities.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2020s are going to be an important decade for the cargo bike. At the end of the 2010s, the UK government introduced several initiatives designed to increase the uptake of this mode in the freight carrying commercial sector, while the dawn of the 2020s has necessitated a renewed focus on the benefits of the cycle more broadly, given the global pandemic and ongoing climate crisis. Though the commercial role that cargo bikes can play in UK cities has been well documented, what about their communal and non-commercial credentials?

This report draws upon fifteen qualitative stakeholder accounts to understand who uses cargo bikes in London specifically, and whether a range of interdependent factors will either promote or prevent their greater non-commercial uptake. The non-commercial cargo bike sector represents a fast-growing market in London. At the same time, the current pandemic has led the UK government and city authorities to prioritise cycling over other modes. This policy may, therefore, lead to more Londoners considering the use of a cargo bike.

Though this report focuses on cargo bike use in London, within the parameters of a city-specific policy and regulatory framework, its recommendations are not limited to the UK capital alone. A range of issues associated with the use of cargo bikes, and the uptake of cycling more broadly, are very much present in other cities across the UK. The recommendations outlined below may, therefore, serve as a call to action for UK city authorities and their residents in promoting greater cargo bike use in the decade ahead.

01

Recommendation

Finding: Londoners must be enticed to cycle

There is a role for cargo bikes to fulfill across London's commercial, communal, and non-commercial transport sectors. Regardless of sector, cargo bike riders are typically experienced cyclists. Therefore, lowering the barriers to cycling for as many Londoners as possible is critical in building a broader and deeper base of experienced cyclists, who may then be more likely to consider using a cargo bike.

Recommendation: City leaders must pair London's COVID-19 response directly with cycling

More must be done to entice Londoners to cycle, including making cycling safer, more accessible, and more inclusive. **Fare City** calls upon city leaders to pair London's COVID-19 response directly with cycling as a means of sustaining, and growing, the number of those cycling in the capital. This will require that city leaders stand resolute in the face of opposition in passing pro-cycling measures and will necessitate that they are consistent in communicating that doing so will enable cycling to become the most equitable choice for all Londoners

Recommendation

Finding: The profile of cargo bikes needs to be raised among Londoners

There is still too much public ambiguity as to what cargo bikes are, and what they are capable of. While any public events which aim to promote cycling or cargo bikes are undoubtedly important, Fare City believe that cargo bikes need to be introduced to the public in a more nuanced way. This will require pairing their use to an issue that resonates with the widest possible range of Londoners, such as clean air.

Recommendation: Establish cargo bike clean air markets

Fare City recommend a 'cargo bike clean air market'. This is a marketplace where both goods for sale and physical market infrastructure are brought to a location in London regularly via cargo bike. While the emphasis of the market is to be placed upon its low-emission credentials, it is important that the public can make the connection between how the inherent advantages of the cargo bike – its capacity, versatility and sustainability over other modes – contribute to making such a market possible.

Recommendation

Finding: Access to cargo bikes must be made easier for Londoners

Cost and commitment are big considerations for potential non-commercial users when deciding whether to purchase a cargo bike, while users may typically take a long time between thinking about purchasing one and doing so. Suitable home cycle parking is a further consideration which may ultimately deter users from hiring or purchasing a cargo bike.

Recommendation: London boroughs must provide more options for cargo bike use

Fare City recommends that boroughs make access to cargo bike hire and purchase easier while providing improved infrastructure levels to facilitate their use. Partnerships between boroughs and suppliers that allow residents to hire and purchase cargo bikes need to be expanded and promoted and must be more financially equitable to residents' needs. Boroughs must also allocate sufficient on-street parking for cargo bike use, while dedicated cargo bike parking at retail, work, leisure, and transport facilities must be considered.

INTRODUCTION

The global outbreak of COVID-19 at the start of 2020 has forced many city authorities to reconsider how city users can travel safely. The need to socially distance has resulted in a dramatic fall in public transport use, and in turn, a sharp rise in the number of those walking and cycling. In many global cities, the cycle has been turned to instinctively as the tool of choice, while the delivery of subsequent cycling infrastructure has been largely determined by the cultural value which cities place on cycling.

London finds itself in a paradoxical position. Despite bold measures from city authorities to promote higher levels of cycling in response to the COVID-19 outbreak,¹ many of the city's roads are once again becoming choked with private motor vehicles. This is especially evident in outer London boroughs where the provision of adequate cycling infrastructure is typically lower, while the demand for those cycling is typically higher. Allied with the shorter-term implications of the pandemic are longer-term issues. These issues include climate change, the advent of smart technology, and changing work and leisure patterns, all of which affect how goods and people move around the city.

The prioritisation of a nineteenth-century invention to address complex twenty-first century issues is testament to the enduring versatility of the cycle – and the rediscovered potential of the cargo bike. Cargo bikes did first appear on the city's streets in the 1880s and were widely used by bakers and greengrocers; however, up until the last five years, the cargo bike has gone largely unnoticed, unloved and under-utilised. In the intervening years, other countries have forged ahead in their use of this mode. Most notable is the Netherlands, while in other pockets of continental Europe, including Copenhagen, the cargo bike has thrived.²

The cargo bike's popularity in countries such as the Netherlands is largely due to the broader culture of cycling, where the cycle is considered a legitimate mode of transportation, as opposed to an object for recreation. As a result, the Netherlands has embedded the use of the cycle, and that of the cargo bike, within its laws, societal protocols, and physical infrastructures.³ By way of comparison, the UK government has only recently identified the potential of the cargo bike.

Businesses in London have been quick to use the government's *eCargo Bike Grant*⁴ funding to unlock greater commercial gain from the use of cargo bikes. The efficiency, versatility, and sustainability of the bikes, allied with more route options over motorised modes, have enabled some companies to establish a distinct competitive advantage over others. This competitive advantage has been further facilitated by London-specific policy measures, including the introduction of the *Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ)*, in 2019.⁵ While the commercial case for greater cargo bike use in the capital is increasingly apparent, what about the case for cargo bikes in the non-commercial sector?

This report seeks to determine the factors that will either promote, or prevent, a greater uptake of the cargo bike in the capital's non-commercial sector. The first part of the report identifies the commercial, communal, and non-commercial potential of the cargo bike in the capital. The second part goes on to scrutinise this potential against six key interdependent metrics: safety, regulation, infrastructure, demand, accessibility and culture. The report then draws together conclusions and makes recommendations for how a greater uptake in the non-commercial sector may be realised.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative research methodology. This includes the analysis of both primary and secondary data. This methodology was selected for two reasons: first, the nature of the study is aimed at understanding the attitudes, experiences, and motivations of different stakeholders. Second, no existing statistical evidence base exists to truly understand non-commercial cargo bike use in London.

The selected research methods were one-on-one interviews and open-ended written questionnaires. Using these methods, fifteen separate accounts have been obtained with eleven different stakeholders. These stakeholders cover a broad range of cargo bike users, suppliers, and transport authorities in both London's commercial and non-commercial sectors.

Most of these accounts were obtained between October 2019 and January 2020. A second round of accounts was obtained in July 2020. This second round included several of the original stakeholders, in addition to several new stakeholders. The purpose of this second round was to understand whether the outbreak of COVID-19 has had any implications on the use of cargo bikes in London's non-commercial sector.

WHY DO LONDONERS USE CARGO BIKES ?

What Are Cargo Bikes ?

For the study, cargo bikes are defined by the two most common types. First, is the 'box bike', which has a platform, or box, between the rider and the front wheel(s). Second, are the 'mid' and 'long-tails', which feature a regular riding position with additional capacity to carry cargo at the back of the bike, or at the front of the bike – directly ahead or behind the handlebars.



3.1

The Commercial Case

London's commercial cargo bike sector has been bolstered in the last two years, owing to a combination of national and London-specific measures. These include the March 2019 Department for Transport (DfT) 'Last Mile' paper,⁶ quickly followed by the launch of the DfT's *eCargo Bike Grant Fund* in April 2019. While the former made the case for greater cargo bike use, the latter served to unlock a £2million funding stream designed to encourage the uptake of cargo bikes for businesses nationwide. In London, these measures have complemented the enterprise shown by logistics companies and their commercial clients, which are typically smaller, independent businesses.

Freddie's Flowers is a London business which used the DfT funding to purchase its first six cargo bikes. Along with cargo bike logistics companies *Pedal Me* and *Zedify*, its in-house couriers enable the company to complete approximately 3,000 deliveries a week by cargo bike across London.⁷ For the company, the biggest advantage of using cargo bikes is that customers are receiving their flowers. Previously, many deliveries were stolen owing to van couriers delivering earlier in the day to beat London's traffic, meaning that deliveries were being left outside closed offices and un-serviced apartment blocks. Drops using cargo bikes in dense urban areas are more efficient than vans as they are typically quicker and cheaper owing to the ease of parking a cargo bike and the ability to take shorter routes.⁸

These productivity gains are confirmed by Ben Knowles, the CEO of *Pedal Me*. Knowles states that cargo bikes are 35% quicker than a motor vehicle in London as they are not only able to access more routes, but are less likely to be caught in traffic. Though Knowles confirms that the company's primary market is business-to-business (B2B), it is unique in offering a passenger service. While small in comparison to its B2B jobs (approximately 92-93% B2B versus 3-4% passenger), passenger work is important for the company in demonstrating the potential of what cargo bikes are capable of to the wider public.⁹



Top left: *Pedal Me* rider with freight delivery (source: *Pedal Me*)

Top right: Rachel's children getting a lift via *Pedal Me*'s passenger service (source: R. Wrangham/*Pedal Me*)

Bottom right: TfL's Michael Barratt (third from left), onsite, at a cargo bike parking bay (source: author)

Bottom left: A *Freddie's Flowers* courier at a depot in London (source: *Freddie's Flowers*)

Rachel, a mother of three who lives in central London, considers safety to be a key advantage of using *Pedal Me's* passenger service.¹⁰ She often relies on the service to transport her children to activities in a way which she doesn't believe would be possible via taxis or public transport. The advantage for Rachel is that unlike taxis and buses, cargo bikes can travel door to door, under the full supervision of the rider, ensuring her children are accompanied at all times.

Both demonstrating and utilising the potential of cargo bikes is important to Transport for London's (TfL's), Michael Barratt. Barratt is TfL's Development Assessment Impact Manager and is currently working with contractors to pilot delivery to construction sites by cargo bike. The construction, operation and maintenance of the built environment accounts for almost 47% of total UK carbon emissions.¹¹ Distribution, including construction site deliveries and pickups, is responsible for an estimated 1% of this.¹² Barratt believes that the versatility of the cargo bike could enable it to take over many of the deliveries and pickups currently completed via motorised modes.

3.2

The Communal Case

The communal value of cargo bikes has long been recognised, both in the UK and abroad.¹³ In London, charities such as *Cycling without Age*, and *Wheels for Wellbeing*, use a combination of cargo bikes and non-standard cycles, respectively. The cycles provide greater inclusivity whether users are being carried or riding themselves. The communal case for cargo bikes has been further reinforced since the global outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020.

In London, many communities immediately turned to the cargo bike. This is because the 'last mile' role, which the cargo bike excels at in the commercial sector, is a perfect fit for the 'hyper-local' nature of community deliveries. In Lambeth, *Pedal Me* worked in partnership with the council, to both deliver essentials to vulnerable users and transport residents to hospital. The door to door nature of the bikes, their limited number of surfaces, and the fact they carry users outdoors, as opposed to in an enclosed space, were recognised by both the authorities and users themselves in limiting the potential spread of the virus.



SUPPLIER // ALIX STREDWICK

"A lot of customers came to me at the beginning of the lockdown as they wanted to use cargo bikes to help their local community"

Image source: CarryMe Bikes



3.3

The Non-commercial Case

The primary motivation for non-commercial cargo bike users, in the UK and elsewhere, is for families to transport children.¹⁴ Each of the four non-commercial interviewees explained that they had initially purchased a cargo bike for the purpose of undertaking school runs and activities with their children. Two prominent cargo bike suppliers are *Flying Dutchman Bikes*, based in north London, and *CarryMe Bikes*, based in east London. Both confirmed that the growth of cargo bike use among families is predominantly a result of cargo bike owning parents meeting and influencing others at the school gate.¹⁵ Both additionally stated that the advent of electric assist was a game changer in making the cargo bike a more attractive option among parents.

West London cargo bike owning parents, Tim, Carl, Alison and Bori all suggest that while transporting children is the primary use of the bike, the convenience of a cargo bike extends beyond the school run. Tim will use the bike to go shopping, or take rubbish to the tip,¹⁶ while Carl will push the capabilities of his bike to carry ladders, cement bags and even a canoe.¹⁷ Even though Alison's children are now too big to be carried, she continues to use her cargo bike for shopping and other errands. She attributes her continued use of the bike to the sheer flexibility it affords her in carrying out tasks she previously completed using her camper van.

The desire to be less reliant on a private motor vehicle is a further motivation of purchasing a cargo bike. Tim and Bori have replaced many short car journeys with their cargo bike, while Carl, who shares a car, uses a cargo bike for all but the longest journeys. Though the role of a cargo bike as a genuine car replacement is viable for some, for those interviewed it was clear that it was a complimentary mode of transport, as opposed to an out and out replacement. Understanding the role which the cargo bike can play as part of a multi-modal London is therefore crucial in encouraging its wider non-commercial uptake.

NON-COMMERCIAL USER // TIM

"A cargo bike enables me to do all sorts of things more quickly, and more pleasantly as well"

Image source: Fare City



CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

There exists a range of interdependent factors which will either promote, or prevent, a greater uptake of cargo bikes in the capital's non-commercial sector. These include safety, regulation, infrastructure, demand, accessibility, and culture. Many potential non-commercial cargo bike users may take years to decide whether to purchase a cargo bike, or in some cases, even whether to try one. Potential users could, therefore, find themselves on a lengthy decision-making continuum, which each of the above six factors feeds into.

4.1

Safety

Safety is the biggest single barrier to cycling in London and, by extension, greater cargo bike use in the non-commercial sector. Cargo bike users Tim, Carl and Bori assert that cargo bikes are safer than regular cycles.¹⁸ They state that cargo bikes are not only more visible than regular cycles, but their size means that users must hold a more central road position. This is something which Bori believes encourages other road users to exercise more caution, whether approaching from behind or in front. Despite these advantages, Alison has been hit by cars twice in the space of a year – once with a child on-board. Additionally, Carl has experienced many close passes when on his cargo bike, often by fellow parents, when doing the school run.

Fear of collision was, in fact, identified in TfL's 2018 'Cycling Action Plan' as being one of the biggest factors which prevents Londoners from cycling.¹⁹ Michael Barratt, TfL's Development Assessment Impact Manager, often takes construction contractors out on cycles to highlight the issues which those cycling in London must contend with. Many in these groups, which typically represent a broad demographic, dismiss cycling as a form of transport owing to safety concerns.²⁰ The comparison between cargo bikes and regular cycles is important. This is because despite the interviewees reporting that they felt safer on a cargo bike, the underlying safety issues identified in TfL's report remain true for all types of cycling in London.

TfL MANAGER // MICHAEL BARRATT

"From the pre-ride discussions the idea of cycling being a form of transport was dismissed by many due to safety concerns"

Image source: Michael Barratt/TfL



4.2

Regulation

The safety of commercial cargo bikes themselves when transporting large or unusual loads is sometimes queried on social media. TfL's Michael Barratt believes that developing regulatory standards which govern the transportation of loads is important. He considers this to be the right approach in promoting the advantages of cargo bikes to Londoners.²¹ Some of the respondents in the DfT's 2019 'Last Mile' paper suggest that while there was a need to implement common standards, they were worried that doing so may stifle innovation.²²

The logistics company, *Pedal Me*, has established self-regulatory protocols which include cargo bike name plates, a soon-to-be automated near-miss log and City and Guild's assured training.²³ A stipulation for commercial recipients of the DfT's *eCargo Bike Fund* is that cargo bike users must have completed Bikeability 'Level 3'²⁴ training, but at present there are no such stipulations for the non-commercial sector. Despite this, the need for some training in helping potential users' transition from a regular cycle to a cargo bike is one area upon which all interviewees agreed.

Cargo bike suppliers, *Flying Dutchman Bikes* and *CarryMe Bikes*, believe that it is important that cargo bikes are introduced to users in the right way. *Flying Dutchman's* Harry Walton is careful to set aside an hour and a half for cargo bike test rides, while *CarryMe's* Alix Stredwick ensures that people can ride both purchased, and hired, cargo bikes safely before they take them away. Stredwick says that, in addition to the actions of other road users, whether an individual feels confident in handling a cargo bike is often the first hurdle which many non-commercial users face when deciding whether to buy.

OPERATOR // BEN KNOWLES

"We regulate ourselves and if we didn't it wouldn't make sense from a business point of view"

Image source: Fare City



4.3

Infrastructure

After safety, fear of theft is considered a major barrier for non-commercial cargo bike uptake. Both Walton and Stredwick confirm that this is of universal concern for potential customers, while the fear of theft scored highly in TfL's 2018 'Cycling Action Plan.' The plan makes an explicit link between fear of theft and Londoners being 'deterred from cycling due to a lack of cycle parking.'²⁵ The fear of theft and the inability to securely park a cargo bike was enough to prevent one interviewee from purchasing one, despite trialling several.

West London mother of two, Gwen, spent three weeks trialling two different cargo bikes, but ultimately decided not to purchase one.²⁶ She attributes this to a lack of secure home parking, a situation facing many Londoners who do not have suitable outdoor, or indoor, space. Unlike regular cycles, which can be carried upstairs or stored in front rooms and hallways, the sheer size and weight of even the smallest cargo bike makes this prohibitive.

SUPPLIER // HARRY WALTON

"People don't want to spend so much money on something that might be stolen, thats their number one concern"

Image source: Fare City



Walton believes that alarmed locks are particularly effective for cargo bikes left in public view, while Stredwick believes that cargo bike manufacturers should look to car manufacturers for ideas, including immobilisers, to make their bikes more theft resistant. Both asserted that local councils should be doing more, including supplying cargo-bike friendly cycle hangars and dedicated parking. While there is currently a concerted drive among many of London's boroughs to provide on-street cycle hangars, those installed do not typically accommodate either cargo bikes or other non-standard cycles.

While some boroughs have been more pro-active than others in providing cycle-specific infrastructure, such as parking and cycleways, it is TfL who are responsible for managing the capital's strategic road network. TfL's 2018 'Cycling Action Plan' aims to deliver more than 450km of cycle routes across London by 2024,²⁷ while TfL's 2018 'Cycle Freight Study' cites the need for segregated routes, cycle access points and dropped kerbs to assist cargo bikes.²⁸ In response to the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, the mayor's office announced the London *Streetspace* plan.²⁹ The plan proposes a range of temporary infrastructural measures, including widened cycleways and shared space, which enable Londoners to travel more safely.

The *Streetspace* plan coincided with the UK government's official guidance, including the DfT policy paper 'Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking', which announced a £2 billion package to support active travel.³⁰ This guidance has encouraged a sharp uptake of cycling in both the country and the capital, making it crucial that additional London-wide cycling infrastructure is implemented. *Pedal Me's* Ben Knowles observes that while the plan predominantly focuses on delivering cycle infrastructure in inner London, there is a greater need for measures in outer London boroughs. Here, increased user demand is arguably negated by lower levels of cycle connectivity than enjoyed in central London.

4.4

Demand & Accessibility

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, demand for cycles in London has grown rapidly.³¹ *Flying Dutchman's* Harry Walton states that interest in both cargo bikes and cycles in his shop has increased by a factor of four or five times. Walton further states that interest in cargo bikes specifically has led to a tripling in the number of sales, when compared to monthly totals prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. *CarryMe's* Alix Stredwick confirms this trend, but states that a tripling of cargo bike sales in her shop has happened over the course of a whole year (July 2019 – July 2020).

Though cargo bikes have undoubtedly enjoyed a recent boom, both suppliers confirm that the sale of cargo bikes was steadily rising in London prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. This rise in demand correlates to an increasing level of accessibility to cargo bikes for potential non-commercial users. The most accessible step for would-be non-commercial users is to see a cargo bike on the city's streets, at the school gate, or even being able to experience a ride in one via *Pedal Me's* passenger service. These are all types of exposure to cargo bikes which do not require any commitment.

The next step is the ability to try a cargo bike. Some boroughs and most suppliers provide opportunities to use a cargo bike for minimal commitment. Though there are several borough-run hire schemes, two boroughs in particular, Waltham Forest in the east³² and Ealing in the west,³³ offer residents the opportunity to hire cargo bikes, but differ in the length of the hire and their requirements of riders.



NON-COMMERCIAL USER // BORI

"It's the question of one last push as I'd wanted one for a while...this scheme made it possible without any commitments"

Image source: Peddle My Wheels

For many, the final step prior to purchasing a cargo bike is a longer-term hire, as part of a supplier – or borough – run initiative. *CarryMe Bikes* offer up to £500 worth of hires on different cargo bikes, which can then be taken off the overall cost of any subsequent purchase. Similarly, west Londoner, Bori, has used a partnership between Richmond Council and supplier *Peddle My Wheels* to trial a cargo bike for £90 per month, for up to three months. If Bori chooses to keep the bike, the balance of the payment will be spread across an interest-free instalment plan; if she chooses not to, the bike will be returned.

Ultimately, cost and commitment feature strongly in the decision to purchase a cargo bike. Walton states that people may consider buying one for years before they finally decide to do so, especially as new cargo bikes range from between £1,500 for a non-electrically assisted bike, to £5,000 or more for a top of the range model. Both Walton and Stredwick confirm that the lifting of the £1,000 *Cycle to Work* scheme cap in June 2019³⁴ has made access to cargo bikes more viable. However, despite this and similar initiatives, they acknowledge that purchasing a cargo bike is typically viewed as a financial investment, which requires a level of commitment to be able to justify that outlay. The pandemic, they believe, has simply provided the necessary push for many.

4.5

Culture

Raising the profile of cargo bikes among Londoners is one thing, but enticing them to try, let alone to buy, seems to be another. It certainly appears that some of this reluctance can be attributed to attitudes about cycling more generally, rather than towards cargo bikes specifically. *Flying Dutchman's* Harry Walton asserts that in the UK, cycling is predominantly seen as a recreational pursuit – rather than a legitimate means of transportation. This contrasts with many European countries where the cycle is an entirely functional part of a user's daily life.³⁵

Both Walton and Stredwick confirm that many of their early customers were continental and therefore familiar with both 'utility cycling' and the cargo bike. Though British customers have since followed suit, TfL's 2018 *'Cycle Action Plan'* suggests that, regardless of nationality, many Londoners simply do not see cycling as 'convenient compared to other alternatives.'³⁶ Walton reasons that the unique conditions of the pandemic, and its timing, may begin to shift this perception. He attributes this potential shift to the need to socially distance, the good weather during the spring 2020 lockdown, and the fact that cycling is being encouraged by the government.

A more fundamental issue than cycling's suitability as a mode of transport is the distinction between being a 'cyclist' and being 'somebody who cycles'. In TfL's 2018 *'Cycling Action Plan'* the single largest factor identified as preventing people from cycling was 'not identifying as a "cyclist"'.³⁷ The study suggests that this was attributed to 'the image of the stereotypical 'cyclist' [as being] off-putting to many'. TfL's Michael Barratt confirms that many in his constructor cycle rides were put off by perceived high cycling speeds, which has since been reflected in the rebranding of London's 'cycle superhighways' to 'cycleways'.³⁸

Closely allied to the perception of how a 'cyclist' may behave is the perception of who a 'cyclist' may be. There is an impression among many Londoners that cycling is still the preserve of white, middle-class, middle-aged males. This is supported by TfL's 2018 *'Cycle Action Plan'*: "Cycling does not yet reflect London's great diversity. There is still a higher proportion of men cycling than women; a higher proportion of white people than black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people".³⁹ All those interviewed for this study were white and middle class, while both Walton and Stredwick confirm that while they do have customers from ethnic minorities, these are very much the minority.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the last decade London's transport landscape has undoubtedly changed. There has been a steady decline in car ownership,⁴⁰ while the emergence of a transport disruptor movement has paired smart technology with car, cycle and now e-scooter sharing. In the last year, the pandemic has challenged Londoners' travel choices as existing habits and behaviours are being simultaneously broken or reinforced. Arguably, determining what will either promote, or prevent, greater cargo bike use in the capital's non-commercial sector comes down to the type of future that Londoners want, the choices they make and their reasons for making them.

The report demonstrates that there is clearly a role for cargo bikes across the commercial, communal, and non-commercial sectors. What is also clear is that wider cargo bike uptake will be dependent on the success of cycling in London. Cargo bike users are typically experienced cyclists, therefore lowering the barriers to cycling for as many Londoners as possible is critical in building a broader and deeper base of experienced cyclists, who may then be more likely to consider using a cargo bike.

Allied with this is the challenge of making the cargo bike the best choice for Londoners in meeting their transport needs, whether this be motivated by ease, economics, or the environment. Getting Londoners on this cargo bike decision-making continuum and providing the necessary tools to help them accelerate this process, will ultimately determine the wider uptake of cargo bike use in the capital. The report outlines three recommendations to promote the non-commercial use of the cargo bike in London:

01

Recommendation

City leaders must pair London's COVID-19 response directly with cycling

The pandemic has illustrated that the cycle, in its many different guises, has the potential to become the most inclusive mode of transport available to all Londoners, regardless of age, ethnicity or class. To realise this potential more must be done to entice Londoners to cycle. This includes making cycling safer by delivering improved infrastructure, making cycling more accessible by providing additional financial initiatives, and making cycling more inclusive by challenging perceptions towards those who cycle in London and why – via mainstream media campaigns and public events.

Fare City calls upon city leaders to pair London's COVID-19 response directly with cycling as a means of sustaining, and growing, the number of those cycling in the capital. This will require that city leaders stand resolute in the face of opposition in passing pro-cycling measures and will necessitate that they are consistent in communicating that doing so will enable cycling to become the most equitable choice for all Londoners.

Recommendation

Establish cargo bike clean air markets

There is still too much public ambiguity as to what cargo bikes are, and what they are capable of. While any public events which aim to promote cycling or cargo bikes are undoubtedly important, Fare City believe that cargo bikes need to be introduced to the public in a more nuanced way. This will require pairing their use to an issue which resonates with the widest possible range of Londoners, such as clean air.

Fare City recommend a ‘cargo bike clean air market’. This is a marketplace where both goods for sale and physical market infrastructure are brought to a location within London regularly via cargo bike. While the emphasis of the market is to be placed upon its low-emission credentials, it is important that the public can make the connection between how the inherent advantages of the cargo bike – its capacity, versatility and sustainability over other modes – contribute to making such a market possible. Buy-in from local authorities, in addition to cargo bike suppliers, operators, and users, would be prerequisites in ensuring that the market is widely promoted, serviced, and attended.

Recommendation

London boroughs must provide more options for cargo bike use

Raising the profile of cargo bikes must be done with a view to providing more options for their use. Cost and commitment are big considerations for potential non commercial user’s when deciding whether to purchase a cargo bike, while users may typically take a long time between thinking about purchasing one and doing so. Suitable home cycle parking is a further consideration which may ultimately deter users from hiring or purchasing a cargo bike.

Fare City recommends that boroughs must make access to cargo bike hire and purchase easier, while providing improved levels of infrastructure to facilitate their use. Though boroughs such as Waltham Forest, Ealing and Camden do run cargo bike hire schemes, more boroughs must aspire to do likewise. Partnerships between boroughs and suppliers that allow residents to purchase cargo bikes need to be expanded and promoted, and must be more financially equitable to the needs of residents.

Boroughs also need to start allocating sufficient on-street parking for cargo bike use, while dedicated cargo bike parking at retail, work, leisure and transport facilities needs to be considered. This is important if cargo bikes are to form a truly integral part of a multi-modal London in the decade ahead.

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