

# Change in cycle track policy needed to boost ridership, public health

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Bicycle engineering guidelines often used by state regulators to design bicycle facilities need to be overhauled to reflect current cyclists' preferences and safety data, according to a new study from Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) researchers. They say that U.S. guidelines should be expanded to offer cyclists more riding options and call for endorsing cycle tracks – physically separated, bicycle-exclusive paths adjacent to sidewalks – to encourage more people of all ages to ride bicycles.

The study appears online May 16, 2013 and will appear in the July 2013 print edition of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

Standards set by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) in its Guide for the Development of [Bicycle](#) Facilities generally serve vehicles well but overlook most bicyclists' needs, according to lead author Anne Lusk, research scientist in the Department of Nutrition at HSPH, who has been studying bicycling patterns in the U.S. and abroad for many years. "In the U.S., the default remains the painted bike lane on the road," she said, which is problematic since research has shown that women, seniors, and children prefer not to ride on roads with traffic.

According to the researchers, the AASHTO guidelines discouraged or did not include cycle tracks due to alleged safety concerns and did not cite research about [crash rates](#) on cycle tracks. This study analyzed five state-adopted U.S. bicycle guidelines published between 1972 and 1999

to understand how the guidelines have directed the building of bicycle facilities in the U.S. They also wanted to find out how crash rates on the cycle tracks that had been built compared with bicycle crash rates on [roadways](#) in the U.S. They identified 19 cycle tracks in 14 cities in the U.S. and found these cycle tracks had an overall crash rate of 2.3 per one million bicycle kilometers ridden, which is similar to crash rates found on Canadian cycle tracks and lower than published crash rates from cities in North America for bicycling in the road without any bicycle facilities.

Anne Lusk stressed the new overlap of transportation and [public health](#). "Bicycling, even more than walking, helps control weight and we need to provide comfortable and separate bicycle environments on existing roads so everyone has a chance for good health."

The authors concluded AASHTO bicycle guidelines should be based on more rigorous and up-to-date research. If policies could allow for easier construction of cycle tracks, studies have indicated that more individuals would be willing to bicycle. Encouraging more cycling would be helpful for weight control, heart function, and would boost physical fitness for children and adults in addition to helping to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution from vehicles, said the authors.

**More information:** "Bicycle Guidelines and Crash Rates on Cycle Tracks in the United States," Anne C. Lusk, Patrick Morency, Luis F. Miranda-Moreno, Walter C. Willett, Jack T. Dennerlein. *American Journal of Public Health*, online May 16, 2013; July 2013 print edition.

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