

Traffic experts, parents don't always see eye to eye on safe cycling routes for children

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Parents often disagree with transportation experts over what streets are safe for children to ride bikes, a Rutgers-led study finds.

The study, in the journal *Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour*, assessed the Level of Traffic Stress system, which traffic officials use to determine the safety of bicycle routes. The system helps to classify streets from low to high [stress](#).

The study found that 88 percent of parents would allow their children to bike on multi-use pathways, but many are unwilling to let them ride on other streets classified as low stress. Just 44 percent of parents would allow their children to bike on wide residential streets and only 32 percent would do so on narrow residential streets. More parents were willing to allow their children to ride on buffered lanes along busy streets than on narrow residential streets.

"As we encourage more bike riding, we need to make sure people of all ages and abilities feel comfortable in places where vehicles and cyclists

share a roadway," said lead researcher Kelcie Ralph, an assistant professor at Rutgers University-New Brunswick's Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy.

"It's important to remember that lay and expert knowledge are not always aligned. Practitioners should incorporate more diverse perspectives in their work," Ralph said. "Our research does not suggest the Level of Traffic Stress system is broken. Our hope would be that [traffic](#) practitioners consider differentiating more finely between low-stress streets, perhaps by designating some as very low stress."

The researchers surveyed 187 [parents](#) in Highland Park, N.J. Parents were asked whether they would ride alone and let their children ride alone on six separate routes. The routes included a multi-use path in a park, a wide residential [street](#), a narrow residential street and a busy street with a shared lane marking. To assess how infrastructure affects willingness to ride, the researchers included a busy road with a buffered bike lane and a protected lane on a quiet street. The researchers then compared their responses to the Level of Traffic Stress methodology.

More information: Kelcie Ralph et al, Will parents let their children bike on "low stress" streets? Validating level of traffic stress for biking, *Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.trf.2019.07.013](#)

Provided by Rutgers University

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