

Increased bicycle helmet use in Sweden – cyclists' driving forces and the government's policy instruments

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SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

According to the national road safety strategy of Sweden, 70 per cent of the cyclists should use helmet by 2020. Swedish research suggest that an increased use of bicycle helmets has the potential to reduce the number of fatalities among cyclists by 25 per cent and the number of seriously injured cyclists by at least ten per cent.

In 2005, Sweden passed a law requiring bicycle helmets for children up to 15 years of age. There are no indications that policy-makers have any intention of extending this law to all cyclists. Thus, in order to reach the national helmet target for 2020, more focus needs to be directed on policies and measures that increase the voluntary use of bicycle helmet. Specifically, three questions need to be addressed by policy-makers: (1) What are the arguments and driving forces for cyclists in the local context to use bicycle helmets on a voluntary basis? (2) Which groups should be targeted for increased use? (3) What governmental policy instruments could be used to reinforce the voluntary driving forces?

Helmet use among Swedish cyclists in 2013 was 36 per cent. The rate of helmet use varies sharply amongst the nearly 300 municipalities in Sweden. In many smaller municipalities helmet use is lower than 10 per cent, but in Stockholm the rate reached 73 per cent in 2013. Cyclists in Stockholm use several arguments to explain their behaviour. The central arguments focus on the intense traffic situation, the wish to protect oneself and one's family and the perception that modern helmets are fashionable. Other cyclists cite personal experiences with accidents, mass media pressure and the perception that the use of helmets has become the norm. It is also argued that helmet use has reached a level where its growth has become self-sustaining. This study identified a total of 25 arguments and local driving forces for voluntary helmet use.

The study shows that policies and measures for the promotion of voluntarily helmet use are likely to be most successful when aimed at the following five target groups in Sweden.

(1) *Commuter cyclists*. The number of commuter cyclists is increasing, especially in larger cities in Sweden. These cyclists have the highest acceptance for helmet use in the whole society. The likelihood is high that helmet use among commuter cyclists will spread to other groups of cyclists.

(2) *Parents*. Awareness of the importance of being a good role model for their children is an incentive for parents to start using bicycle helmets. The importance of helmets can be communicated to parents via health care centres, preschools, elementary schools and parent associations.

(3) *Elderly cyclists.* Elderly cyclists are a particularly vulnerable group in the road traffic system. Their rate of helmet use is currently 30 per cent. Previous Swedish communication efforts suggest that information campaigns and educational efforts directed towards the pensioner associations in Sweden have a potential of being very successful.

(4) *Children.* Unfortunately, the majority of Swedish children aged 12 and 13 cease to use a helmet despite being subject to a legal requirement to wear a helmet. Since research findings underscore the importance of combining a helmet law with information and education, these children should be offered more information at school about the importance of wearing a helmet.

(5) *Cyclists at work.* An increasing number of employees at municipalities, county councils and companies use a bicycle during work hours. This group of cyclists is growing rapidly in Sweden and helmet promotion activities should be considered for them.

With respect to economic instruments, the government should consider the possibility of offering reduced VAT in connection with the purchase of a new bicycle helmet. Such an incentive is already being implemented in the UK. Helmet could also be more actively promoted among winter cyclists. Furthermore, larger municipalities could co-operate with smaller municipalities in their geographical neighbourhood in order to carry out joint campaigns for safer cycling.

In conclusion, cyclists' driving forces for voluntary helmet use, in combination with the government's policy instruments, could make it possible for Sweden to reach its ambitious target for 2020 of 70 per cent helmet use among cyclists.

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The full version of the report (in Swedish) is available at:

[http://www.trafikverket.se/Privat/Trafiksakerhet/Vart-
trafiksakerhetsarbete/Skyltfonden/Projekt/Slutforda-projekt/Ovrigt/Ovrigt/Okad-
cykelhjalmsanvandning--cyklisters-drivkrafter-och-statens-styrmedel/](http://www.trafikverket.se/Privat/Trafiksakerhet/Vart-trafiksakerhetsarbete/Skyltfonden/Projekt/Slutforda-projekt/Ovrigt/Ovrigt/Okad-cykelhjalmsanvandning--cyklisters-drivkrafter-och-statens-styrmedel/)

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