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Cycling in the city

Almost half of commuter cyclists in Newcastle do not cycle on designated routes which has implications for transport infrastructure policy, says a Northumbria University academic.

Godwin Yeboah, Postgraduate researcher in Engineering and Environment, tracked 79 cyclists using portable GPS devices together with self-report questionnaires for one week, creating detailed travel diaries of each participant.

His results reveal that 57% of the cyclists sampled prefer cycling on the cycle network, while 34% cycled outside the network and 9% cycled near the

network but not along it.

Male cyclists in the study were almost four times more likely to use cycle crossings than females, suggesting that female cyclists may tend to avoid cycle crossings perhaps due to safety concerns. Additionally, the data shows that more people travel to work by bike in North Tyneside and Newcastle than other parts of the region.

The research concludes that councils in the North East should work together to create an integrated cycling network with positioning of infrastructure based on the popular cycling routes identified by this study.

The research has, for the first time, collected and analysed bicyclists' route choices in a UK urban environment.

Godwin said: "With almost half of cyclists bike trips being outside the designated cycle network, it is imperative that policy initiatives are aimed towards investing in cycling research and infrastructure, such as cycle lanes, parking and crossings.

"Limited budgets mean that it is important for the councils to invest in improving cycling infrastructure and routes strategically. My data, and other analytical assessments of the existing infrastructure, will provide policy planners and engineers with accurate information of popular cycling routes and help them to understand the behaviours of cyclists.

"It contributes scientific-level empirical evidence to the research arena on how the built environment constrains or supports movement of cyclists in urban areas."

Godwin has been invited to attend the House of Commons Marquee on Monday, 18 March, to exhibit his research poster 'Everyday cycling in Urban Environments: Understanding Behaviours and Constraints in Space-Time' as a finalist in the SET for Britain competition. SET for Britain is co-sponsored by the Royal Academy of Engineering and runs during the National Science and Engineering Week. Next week's House of Commons event is sponsored by Andrew Miller MP, Chairman of the SET for BRITAIN organising group of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee.

“Being recognised in this way is fantastic,” Godwin said. “It shows that my research is meaningful and will help to make a better society, which motivates me to continue. The lessons I have learned can be applied to areas where cycling uptake is very low, such as Africa and the USA.”

Nick Brown, MP for Newcastle will accompany Godwin when he presents his poster at the House of Commons.

Godwin’s PhD supervisor at Northumbria University, Dr Seraphim Alvanides, said: “This is an outstanding achievement for a Northumbria postgraduate researcher, demonstrating the importance and relevance of our research to the wider society.

“Godwin’s work is looking at the physical and transport constraints that commuter cyclists are dealing with on a regular basis. This is a contentious topic with serious planning implications, if we want to increase sustainable transport, such as regular cycling, in our cities.

“Our research is pointing towards feasible solutions for improving the urban cycling infrastructure and encouraging more people to cycle as part of their daily commute.

“Godwin’s poster communicates succinctly a complex research issue to a lay audience, as well as to politicians and policy makers. I am delighted that he was shortlisted at this national competition for a prestigious medal and monetary prize.”

Godwin will carry out further analysis using complex spatial and statistical techniques to gather more accurate information on the popular routes used by commuting cyclists in the North East, while highlighting points on the current cycling infrastructure where people are and are not using the cycle lanes.

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