

Cycling Past 50: A Closer Look into the World of Older Cyclists, Year 4 Survey

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This report provides information on 2700 older adults who cycle and answered the 50+ Cycling Survey, Year 5. Taken as a whole, these responses provide a rich set of information about older cyclists – when and where they cycle, why they cycle, and importantly, how cycling contributes to their mobility, social connections, and wellness. often. The analysis shows that cycling remains beneficial for older adults. It contributes to their physical and mental well-being and offers mobility independence regardless of their ability to continue driving a motor vehicle. Thus, the analysis in this report can be used by transportation planners and engineers, public health professionals, those working on physical activity and wellness for older adults, cycling and aging policy advocates, and older adults themselves and their families to understand the habits and needs of this population.

Study Methods

The online survey and journal were offered in English to people 50 years and older from March 2024 to March 2025, promoted through various national, regional, and local organizations in the United States and Canada via email newsletters, social media, and websites. Organizations involved in promotion ranged from research, planning, cycling and walking advocacy, older adult non-profits, local governments and councils of government. Survey responses offer information on how aging affects cycling habits in general, including differences by age and gender, self-identification as a regular or non-regular cyclist, and as one of four types of cyclists. This allowed for parsing responses to

other questions, such as the amount of weekly cycling for women and men in various age groups, and factors that affect where they cycle.

Survey questions were offered in different formats including ‘select one’ or ‘select all that apply’ for questions requesting ‘reasons why.’ Key questions with yes/no answers had follow-up questions based on the answer selected. The survey included a visual preference section comprised of a series of photos of cycling context. Respondents selected from four to six options for cycling through each context, then rated it on safety and comfort on a one-to-five scale. In response to comments received on the Year 4 survey, all visual preference photos included context information. Several also included a link to Google Streetview, allowing people responding to the survey to virtually ‘cycle around’ the area. Some respondents completed a separate online journal for two cycling trips. Results of the online journal are forthcoming.

Findings

People may learn to cycle at any age and can continue cycling into their 80s and 90s, as long as it remains safe and enjoyable. Family and social contexts are contributing factors to continued cycling. Caregiving responsibilities can reduce cycling opportunities or create ways to include the partner in cycling such as using a tandem.

Attributes of the built environment, land use, and accompanying features impact cycling’s attractiveness. A safe and comfortable cycling environment that allows an older adult to satisfy health and wellness goals top the list. The social

aspects of cycling with friends or in a group are important, but not at the expense of safety.

E-bikes, tandems, and adult trikes are attractive for continuing to cycle, with e-bikes being most popular. In some respects, those who ride tandem bikes are a special group who specifically want the social benefits offered, along with the ability to ride ‘farther and faster.’ Adult trikes are considered an admission of aging and have a lower rate of adoption.

“[I fell due to my] inability to maintain balance with bike that had a bar when stopped. Solution: purchased a step through e bike! NO MORE FALLS!! Am LOVING the [e-bike]!” (Man, 71 to 75)

Other findings include:

- Past-year fall rates are highest due to ‘operator error’ unrelated to the effects of aging. The second highest cause is poor pavement quality, including maintenance practices that are calibrated for cycling infrastructure.
- Reducing car use is a stronger motivator for women until age 65.
- A desire to be healthier and fitter is a stronger motivator for increased cycling for men, while gaining cycling partners appears to be a strong reason for women in all age groups to increase their cycling.

Policy/Practice Recommendations

Older adults will continue to cycle if they can adapt their expectations and find safe and comfortable places to do so that connect to everyday destinations. Reducing social pressure to stop cycling and increasing high quality cycling infrastructure will keep them cycling. Results of this survey should be combined with further analyses that help answer fundamental questions about how to

keep cycling in people’s lives as they age by considering questions such as:

- How does the role cycling plays in the life course of an older adult affect the amount of cycling they do and for how long they expect to continue?
- What cycling infrastructure design, operation, and maintenance fit the needs of older cyclists?
- How can needs such as for caregiving be fulfilled while allowing cycling to continue?
- How can we increase the tolerance of people driving for people cycling, especially older adults?

About the Author

Carol Kachadoorian’s pioneering work on mobility and wellness for older adults aims to revise long-standing perceptions of this population. The 50+ Cycling Survey is an example of this work, along with a typology of physical activity for older adults, and a study of how well bike-on-transit configurations and policies fit cycling trips for older adults.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/2443.html



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