

# What can a long-term historical perspective teach us about cycling policy?

A history of cycling governance in the Netherlands, 1920 – 2000  
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## Problem

Cycling = seen as a solution to climate change and unlivable cities. Globally, cities want to increase levels by learning from The Netherlands. But we know little about the emergence of the Dutch cycling tradition. How can we explain to countries with low cycling levels how they can build up a cycling system if we only know about the recent history of Dutch cycling?

A long-term perspective on the governance network around utilitarian cycling will shed light on the emergence of cycling in the Netherlands and the role of engineers, political movements and non-governmental actors in giving cycling a place within mobility policy. Cycling policy was made before *Masterplan Fiets*, but where, and by whom?

We want to know what the place of cycling was in mobility policy over the last century: how did we go from a cycling to a car society, and how did the bicycle make a comeback over the last decades?

## What we know

Cycling historiography: focus on bourgeois nineteenth-century recreational cycling, utilitarian cycling twentieth century underexplored. Literature that I build on:

- Albert de la Bruhèze & Veraart (1995), *Fietsverkeer in praktijk en beleid in de twintigste eeuw*: explained different levels of cycling historically in context of *Masterplan Fiets*
- Oldenziel, Emanuel, Albert de la Bruhèze, Veraart, *Cycling Cities: The European Experience* (2016) builds and expands on this
- Ebert, *Radelnde Nationen* (2010): focus on cultural role ANWB in promoting cycling as an explanation of high cycling levels in NL
- Huré, *Les réseaux transnationaux du vélo* (2013) explores transnational circulation of knowledge and organization of cycling activists to explain revival cycling >1970.

Unclear what weight factor politics has. Is Dutch cycling a success despite of or because of politics?

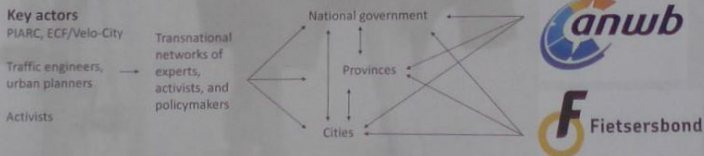
## What we need to know

Research question: How and why has the place of cycling in the mobility policy of the Dutch government changed the last hundred years?

### Themes

- Role of government and governance at different levels: national, provincial and municipal politicians and engineers (Rijkswaterstaat) user organizations (ANWB, Fietsersbond, cycling path organizations) other lobby groups for or against cycling
- What were the key debates and policy conflicts that concerned cycling? e.g. bicycle tax, place of cycling on the road, conflicts with mopeds (and e-bikes?)
- What was the place of cycling in larger visions on cycling, mobility and spatial development? e.g. bicycle as nuisance in emerging car system, bicycle as green solution

### Cycling Policy in the making



## Method

Archival research > Dutch cycling policy in infrastructure, transport policy, urban planning, 1920-2000. Possible comparison with other countries.  
 Discourse analysis: Attention to cultural framing of cycling: obsolete technology for the poor? Or sustainable form of mobility?  
 + apparently neutral expert knowledge = often a way to legitimate and depoliticize car  
 Focus on (funding of) cycling infrastructure and traffic rules



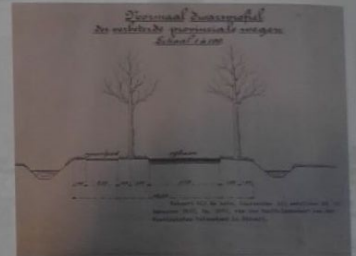
Utrecht, Leidseveer, 1959 - What did politicians, engineers and users think about the place of cyclists on the road and in mobility policy? [L.H. Hofland, Collection Het Utrechts Archief, nr. 43231]

## Levels of governance in pictures



National Policy - The bicycle tax (1897-1919, 1924-1941) made cycling more expensive and was used to build roads that cyclists were not allowed to use.

But national policy also made cycling lanes on major roads the standard. Standard profile for provincial roads as designed by Provinciale Waterstaat Utrecht, 1927 [Het Utrechts Archief, Gedeputeerde Staten (1203) inv. nr. 5316]



Before



After

Provincial policies: reconstructing provincial roads around 1930. This is the provincial road De Meern - Oudewater at Ijselstein: the road was paved, and a separate cycling lane was added [Collection Het Utrechts Archief, nrs. 220746 and 220747]



Before



After

Urban Policy - Utrecht: after working-class users, backed by social-democrat council members, complained about long waiting times at the railway crossing in the Utrecht - 's-Hertogenbosch line, a tunnel was built for pedestrians and cyclists at Westerkaade. A similar tunnel was built in the Amsterdamsstraatweg [Photo 21-01-1933 by H.J.M. Valk, collection Het Utrechts Archief, nr. 400029]

## Sources

Archives: Dutch Ministry of Public Works (Rijkswaterstaat)  
 Provinces and cities (selection)  
 Social movements/users (ANWB & Fietsersbond)

Interviews  
 Photographs  
 Newspapers and magazines