

## Public Policy of Cycling Promotion in Mahasarakham City

*Pondej Chaowarat, Mathee Piriyaakannon, Suphathida Sawangchang, Worawan Natrephra, Lecturer Faculty of Architecture, Urban Design and Creative Arts Mahasarakham University, Thailand.*

### Abstract

The research aims to explore policy of cycling promotion in Mahasarakham city, regarding its obstacles and supportive factors. This study is a qualitative research with a descriptive data. Content analysis is employed for analyzing data collected from observation, in-depth interviews, a public hearing, literature review and trace evidence. A suitable assessment tool is set up for analysis involving 9 necessary issues. The results showed that 1) attitudes of relevant public decision makers towards the cycling promotion are both positive and negative; though all public decision makers supported it on speech, there is neither public policy written, nor cycling plan implemented; 2) The municipality as the main responsible organization has insufficient authority to push the cycling system forward; 3) There is a Cycling Plan available, but it is ineffective in terms of implementation; 4) There is no cycling plan renew process according to the lack of regular data collection; 5) There is no direct municipal budget for cycling, but only relevant budget sources are available; 6) There is insufficient cycling infrastructure to ensure safety and convenience to people; 7) Formal cycling education is missing; 8) There are campaigning projects that have high potentials to change the travel behavior of people and 9) supportive factors in cycling system are tourism promotion and local university policy of transportation.

**Keywords:** Bicycle / Municipality / Transport / Cycling Measure / Assessment / Public Policy/Mahasarakham City / Thailand

### Introduction

Bicycles were first imported to Thailand in the late 19<sup>th</sup>. It is supposed to be a relaxing instrument among aristocrats. In an early 20<sup>th</sup>, bicycles are used for military force mobility. Later they became an important means of transport among ordinary people. During the time of Thailand's progress oriented development, the government promoted cars and automobiles. Car streets are constructed across the country and within cities. City trams and boats are left behind; and finally the tram network is replaced. And cycling is declined as well. Currently, cycling had gained significance again in Thai society. This trend initiated by civil society; then the national administrations began to play an important role later (Thai Cycling Club, 2012). This phenomenon is similarly to any cities worldwide (Buehler and Pucher, 2012). Several attempts regarding cycling promotion had been realized in Thailand. This research aimed to assess the policy of cycling promotion in city. A main research question is 'To much extend had the cycling policy developed in a city level'. Eight issues are focused, including 1) attitudes of public decision makers, 2) authority of responsible organizations, 3) authorized policy and plan, 4) budget, 5) infrastructure development, 6) public relation and education, 7) campaign and 8) relevant supportive factors. These eight issues are taken from a study of a progressive cycling assessment tool combining with literature reviews on cycling measure, and adopted to suite with the

Thai circumstance. There are two main measures necessary for cycling promotion, including the soft measure and the hard measure (Lanzendorf and Busch-Geertsema, 2014; Aldred and Jungnickel, 2014). The hard measure intended to alter physical conditions towards safety, convenience and comfort (McClintock, 2002). Whereas the soft measures focused more on cultural attitudes (CTC, 1995). Bypad–Bicycle Policy Audit - is selected to be a modelling tool. It is official recommended by the central organization for local cycling plan assessment (Bypad, 2003). Mahasarakham city is chosen to be a research area. It is a medium-sized city, concentrated of university students. This condition made the city having high potential for cycling promotion.

## **Methodology**

This study is a qualitative research with a descriptive data. Content analysis is employed for analyzing data. It is collected from observation, in-depth interviews, a public hearing, literature review and trace evidence. For the observation phase, the researcher participated cycling activities taking place in the area, including Car-free Day event, relevant cycling campaigns, and cycling infrastructure. The in-depth interview are made with the mayor, the governor, the head of local police department, relevant provincial and municipal officials, school leaders, university leaders, cycling shop owners and local cycling activists. And finally, the public hearing is held, inviting all significant people to participate. The public hearing aimed to collect additional data, ensure the collected one and present the cycling plan, formulated from the research.

## **Results**

According to the review of policy assessment tools, there are eight points to discuss, including 1) attitudes of public decision makers, 2) authority of responsible organizations, 3) authorized policy and plan, 4) budget, 5) infrastructure development, 6) public relation and education, 7) campaign and 8) relevant supportive factors. The detail of each point is described below.

### *Attitudes of Public Decision Makers*

Public decision makers involving in cycling work are a governor, a mayor, a head of local police department and local and provincial administrators regarding in public works, city planning, traffic control and public health. They had both negative and positive attitudes towards cycling. They believed that the cycling associated to sustainable development. It benefited environment, provided people's fitness, reduced traffic congestion and cost of traveling, and promoted an anti-consumerism trend. These benefits are main considerations in urban management, however, there are least factors of people's consideration in choosing mode of transport. For the negative attitudes, the public decision makers believed that cycling is inconvenient and unsafe to use. Because of these factors are the main concerns of people, there are a few demands of public in cycling. Hence, the public decision makers had an ambiguity in attitudes towards cycling. If there is no inherent will of cycling promotion coming from the local decision makers, there should be the pro cycling policy from top like national administrations, or strong cycling will from bottom, like civil society organizations.

### *Authority of Responsible Organizations*

Thesaban or a municipality is supposed to be a leading organization responsible for cycling promotion in city (Decentralization to Local Administration Act 2542). However, it did not gain sufficient authority to drive the cycling promotion effectively. Thesaban needed to work coordinately with local police department regarding cycling way provision. As both organizations had mutual authority status, it must be a fully agreement of the two parties in determining cycling ways. This circumstance cause serious trouble to cycling way provision. Besides, some parts of city road network are under authorizations of different public organizations, for instance, Department of Rural Roads, Department of Highways and local administrations. In order to solve the broad organization involvement and mutual authority status, a leading public administration in cycling promotion must be appointed. It could be in a form of cycling committee having a provincial governor as a head.

### *Authorized Policy and Plan*

There are four authorized policies and plans in the city relevant to cycling promotion, including 1) Mahasarakham City Comprehensive Plan, 2) Mahasarakham City 3-Year Development Plan, 3) Mahasarakham City Transportation Plan, and 4) Mahasarakham City Cycling Plan. The Mahasarakham City Cycling Plan is the most direct authorized policy and plan regarding cycling promotion. At that time, it is unusual for cities in Thailand having a specific cycling plan. Mahasarakham is among another few cities chosen from the central administration to be a pilot project in this cycling initiation. The city cycling policy is highly supported by the city mayor at that time, and the City Cycling Plan is commissioned to an academic team in Suranaree University of Technology, located in Nakhon Ratchasima. The mayor and a relevant municipal official left the office just a short period after the Cycling Plan completion. There is only one project of the Cycling Plan is realized. There is no Cycling Plan renewal process. Besides, the cycling plan became unknown for new municipal administrators, and the plan report is missing. The main cause of this failure is this Cycling Plan is an occasional plan, emerged from the central policy with the support of a local individual, the mayor. This circumstance made the plan depending on individual persons rather than a legal duty. The solution might be that the central administration included the cycling plan in the City Comprehensive Plan which is a local administration's obligation.

### *Budget*

Budget in cycling promotion could be divided into two parts. The first part is for implementing hard measures like bikeways and infrastructure building; and the second part is for soft measures like campaigning, information provision or education. The budget for the hard measures took the biggest amount of money. According to legal statements, it is a duty of municipalities to deal with this cost. The research revealed that there is no concrete or regular budget for cycling infrastructure building. While the soft measure implementation gained budget regularly from various organizations, including the municipality, the national cycling organization, local civil society organizations, and local business organizations. This back behind condition of budgeting for the hard measure implementation implied the unclear cycling policy,

insufficient autonomy and budget of the local administration in dealing with the cycling issue. Solutions might be, first the attitudes of local administrations must be altered to be pro-cycling rather than neutral or negative. This could be done by the top-down policy, incentive measures, or education. Second, the local governments should be provided sufficient autonomy and budget so that they could process the implementation phase.

#### *Infrastructure Development*

There is one bikeway in the city. This less than 1 kilometer bikeway is built along the city boulevard. This bikeway is quite renowned for local people because it is equipped with traffic signage, a street island separated the cycling lane from the car lane, the beautiful tree lines and a clock tower as a landmark located on the roundabout at the end of the street. However, bicycle users found it is still inconvenient for cycling as it is a shared lane with motorcycles. The higher speed of motorcycles made bicycle users felt unsafe. Beside the current bikeway, the city included bikeways in the City Comprehensive Plan and the new street design. The municipality stated that streets with bikeways must be planned in the initial stage, rather than stuff up the current streets with a bike lane. The current condition of limited cycling infrastructure in the city showed the insufficient understanding in this issue. There are plenty of solutions to cope with the existing narrow streets in the city, like street calming elements. Therefore, this knowledge should be transferred to responsible administrations.

#### *Public Relation and Education*

Local cycling clubs played the main role in providing cycling information to public. Their messages are publicized mainly through Facebook, a website and personal conversation. These media are well accessible for club's members; however, it is difficult to reach for another who didn't have a smartphone or high technology devices. Therefore, the public relation done solely by local cycling club made a few impact in cycling promotion. The solution is that the national or local government had to be in charge in this issue. National events like 'Bike for Mom' and 'Bike for Dad' proved the abilities of the public administrations and the high impacts of the events.

Concerning the education, there are no official cycling class or training available in schools. Relevant training like a traffic safety training took place in every school. This one day activity is done by a local police department. It aimed to mitigate road safety problems. The course provided knowledge about traffic signage and safe riding behavior. The Department of Land Transport and local cycling clubs also provided a one-day cycling training course occasionally. Pupils could learn how to ride safely and try to ride in a cycling demonstration road. Unlike the training by the local police department, these cycling training programs did not take place in every school and irregular. Therefore, only a few pupils got a standard of cycling knowledge and skills. The cycling training is crucial and all pupils are needed to get trained. As the standard is an issue, this action must be done in a national level. The training could be included in the school curriculum, or it could be done via civil society organizations which is a British model.

### *Campaign*

There are various cycling campaigns taking place in the city. These campaigns could be divided into two groups: official campaigns and unofficial campaigns. The official ones are mostly annual events like Car-free Day, Bike Rally and Fitness Promotion campaign. Activities including a bike parade, rally, trade fair, or exhibition. As they are big events, high collaborations of public, private and civil society organizations are needed, and vice versa, they also gained public attention. The unofficial campaigns are done by local cycling clubs. As there are a lot of cycling clubs in the area, there are various cycling programs in various purposes available, like Bike Friday, Bike to City, or Bike to another town. These unofficial events are held more regular than the official one, the activities are more intensive and the participants had closer relationships to each other. Both the official and unofficial campaigns emphasized on a recreational purpose; while campaigns for daily transportation purpose are missing. Hence the relevant organizations should consider this issue.

### *Relevant Supportive Factors*

There are three obvious supportive factors having much impact in cycling promotion, including 1) cycling tourism, 2) cycling for fitness and 3) cycling to university. Concerning tourism, cycling is fun, relaxed, good for health and convenient in well prepared environment. Therefore, the cycling could be a mean of tourist transport to reach tourist attractions; or it could be an end of tourist activity. In many successful tourist area, there are always cycling infrastructure or programs provided like bikeways, bike for rent, cycling route or bike tours. In Germany where cycling tourism is highly successful, a national organization like ADFC is in charge of cycling tourism. Cycling infrastructure and necessary tourist elements are evaluated and standardized. In Mahasarakham city, the city tourism is still not a leading business. In order to attract local and external tourists, existing tourist infrastructure is needed to be improved including cycling infrastructure and program. Once the city made a one-day trip program for pupils called 'Historical Bike Tour'. It is a combination of learning and fun. Pupils learned the origin of the city by visiting some important historical places by bike. As tourist programs are necessary for tourism, they should be more variety.

In the last decade, the fitness had gained attention from people; and the cycling is one of the most popular activity regarding health promotion. There are high demand on a public park, especially equipped with cycling infrastructure. In Mahasarakham city, there are many public parks in various sizes and purposes available. However, there are no public park provided standard cycling infrastructure. As there is no cycling infrastructure provision in a park, people who did cycling for fitness must rode a bike on normal shared streets where accidents potentially happened. In order to promote cycling for fitness, public parks equipped with cycling infrastructure must be built close to residential areas, under the coverage of cycling distance. And the way from home to the parks must be designed with considerations in cycling, so people could reach the parks with bike safe and comfort.

For cycling to university, Mahasarakham city is nicknamed a 'Knowledge city' because there are many high academic institutions located comparing to another medium-sized cities in Thailand. Even, the numbers of university students exceeded

the numbers of registered population of the local administrations. Therefore, university students' trips dominated the entire city transportation. Currently, a motorcycle is the most means of transport of students. They had short trips from their dormitory rooms to university. It is still within a cycling coverage. Hence, the cycling to university had a high potential to promote cycling use. Collaboration of a university, a local administration and private organizations is needed for realization.

## Conclusion

To sum up, there are less attempts or progress regarding the attitudes of public decision makers and the authority of responsible organizations. This circumstance caused the absence or ineffectiveness of the authorized policy and plan, budget, infrastructure development, public relation and education and campaign. While the relevant supportive factors are still not well promoted. This poor attitudes of public decision makers and limited authority of responsible organization took place in the local administration level that is the spearhead in city cycling promotion. To solve this problem, both top-down and bottom-up supports must be done. The top-down supports is supposed to get done by national administrations. The supports are, for instance, the national cycling policy and plan, national budget provision, regular national cycling campaigns and education, and national incentives. The bottom-up supports are supposed to be taken by civil society organizations like local cycling clubs. Their supports are expected to collaborate with the national and local programs and also activities according to their wills. With these two-side supports, the local administrations would be able to have a clear statement in cycling promotion, then the cycling policy and plan would be produced by an appointed cycling committee.

## References

- Aldred, R. & Jungnickel, K. (2014). *Why culture matters for transport policy: the case of cycling in the UK*. **J. Transp. Geogr.**, 34, 78-87.
- Buehler, R., Pucher, J. (2012). *Big city cycling in Europe, North America, and Australia*. In Pucher, J., Buehler, R. (Eds.). **City Cycling**. (pp.287-318) Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bicycle Policy Audit (Bypad). (2003). **BYPAD, More Quality for Bicycle Traffic**. Retrieved From the Bicycle Policy Audit website: <http://www.bypad.org/>
- Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC). (1995). **More bikes—Policy into best practice**. Godalming: CTC.
- Lanzendorf, M. & Busch-Geertsema, A. (2014). *The cycling boom in large German cities – Empirical evidence for successful cycling campaigns*. **Transport Policy**, 36, 26-33.
- McClintock, H. (2002). **Promoting cycling through 'soft' (non-infrastructure) measures. Planning for cycling, Principles, practices and solutions for urban planners**. Cambridge: Woodhead
- Thai Cycling Club. (2012). **Evolution of Bicycle Use in Thailand**. Retrieved from Thai Cycling Club website: <http://www.thaicyclingclub.org/>