



Maastricht



About Maastricht

Maastricht is a city situated in the southeastern part of the Netherlands, close to the border with Belgium and not far from Germany. It has a population of around 122,000 residents. Unlike the typically flat landscape of the Netherlands, Maastricht is surrounded by more hilly terrain characteristic of the South Limburg region. Bicycle use in Maastricht peaked in the 1950s, but the post-war shift towards car-oriented planning led to car travel becoming dominant by the late 1970s. Despite a refocus in urban planning towards promoting cycling in the 1990s, the region's share of cycling remains among the lowest in the Netherlands.

To enhance bicycle use, the city is currently developing an Action Plan for 2026–2030, which builds on the current 2020–2025 plan. The current plan aims to reduce rush-hour (car) traffic, create more space for non-motorised transport, and increase the share of cycling trips both within the city and for trips to and from it by 5% by 2030 - from 31% (within) and 10% (to/from), respectively. The strategy focuses on strengthening both the city's and the region's cycling infrastructure to achieve this goal.



Photo: Tim Kohlen on Unsplash



Cycling in Maastricht

Various bicycle-promoting initiatives have been introduced in Maastricht and South Limburg over the past two decades to encourage a shift from car use to more sustainable modes of transport. These efforts are diverse but can be grouped into four categories:

1. E-bike trials, which offer commuters financial incentives to try an e-bike;
2. Cycling infrastructure improvements, which strengthen bike lanes to shorten cycling trips and/or make rides safer;
3. Bicycle parking improvements, which provide secure parking facilities and reduces bicycle clutter in the public space (which is a serious source of nuisance); and
4. Soft campaigns that create positive attention for bicycle use and promote good mobility behaviour.

Most initiatives in the four categories ran between 2013 and 2023, with e-bike trials being one of the most widely applied initiatives, particularly targeting car commuters. The municipality and regional public-private partnership (PPP) primarily led these efforts.

Examples of cycling promoting initiatives

E-Bike trials

Try an E-bike (from 2012)

E-bike trials have been carried out by the public-private partnership Maastricht Bereikbaar (now Zuid Limburg Bereikbaar) since 2012. The trials vary slightly in duration and incentives, but they generally offer e-bikes for employees to use. Initially, the A2 motorway construction near Maastricht provided an opportunity to involve car commuters in trying transport alternatives more easily (i.e., in the context of road constraints). During 2014–2017, two types of trials dominated: temporary financial rewards for e-bike use and discounted purchase options.

Burn Fat Not Fuel (2013)

Burn Fat Not Fuel (BFNF) was launched in 2013 by Maastricht Bereikbaar to assess the impact of rewarding employees for cycling instead of driving to work. Employers paid a fixed monthly fee per participant, while participants earned 10 cents per kilometre travelled. GPS devices installed on the bicycles tracked the distances, and the BFNF app (now the GoodMoovs app) managed financial compensation.

Bicycle campaigns & offers

Posifiets (from 2021)

#posifiets is a communication campaign designed to raise awareness of cycling and its culture. Launched in 2021 in Maastricht, it initially focused on cycling safety and promoting proper cyclist behaviour, including responsible bicycle parking. The campaign has since expanded nationwide and now covers a variety of bicycle promotion initiatives, such as e-bike trials, cycling challenges, and facilities for bicycle recycling.

Fietsbank (from 2012)

Fietsbank is an initiative run by volunteers who repair abandoned and defective bicycles in collaboration with Maastricht Municipality, the University of Maastricht (UM), and Kringloop Zuid (thrift store/charity). The bicycles, either donated or collected from designated drop-off points, are repaired and then distributed to people with limited financial resources through an application process. The initiative is also connected to similar concepts, such as Broodbank, a food bank that provides free bread to those in need.





Photo: Denis Jans on Unsplash

Bicycle infrastructure

F2 – Fast cycling route (from 2018)

The Sittard-Maastricht fast cycling route, also known as F2, runs parallel to the A2 motorway and is the first fast cycling route in the South Limburg region. F2 spans 23 kilometre, and is part of the national public-private alliance Tour de Force, which aims to increase cycled kilometres by 20% in 2027 (compared to 2017). Its development started in 2018 and is still (early 2025) under construction. Parts of the route are completed connecting towns such as Beek and Meersen, and include features like the curved bicycle bridge.

Parking facilities in/outside the city (2013 & 2022)

To support bicycle parking and reduce car parking in the inner city of Maastricht, several efforts have been made. Two notable projects are the large underground bicycle facility near to Central Station (CS) and the Park & Ride (P&R) facility north of the city.

In addition to the underground facility, there is a smart bicycle facility at street level near CS, offering free parking with solar-powered digital signboards showing available spots.

At P&R North, car users can park for free and travel the final distance to the city by public transport or (shared) bicycle. The facility has +500 spaces, including charging stations and accessible parking.



Factors enabling cycling in Maastricht

Reward for cycling

Bicycle programmes that offer rewards for cycling appear to positively impact bicycle use in the wider area of Maastricht, according to data on self-reported behaviour. The initiatives also seem to influence the decision to purchase an e-bike, as the rewards provide a way to recoup the investment. The e-bike initiative that gives participants the opportunity to try an e-bike for a limited period also seems to encourage e-bike purchases. Ideally, there would be a permanent offer to commuters try an e-bike for a limited time.

Employer-based transport approach to promote cycling

Maastricht/Zuid-Limburg Bereikbaar's (MB/ZLB) approach to collaborating with local companies appears to effectively establish bicycle initiatives, promoting cycling for commuting, and achieving results in practice. A clear strategy is important for the initiatives' success and for future improvements. MB's focus on the entire customer journey seems impactful and involves creating the trial design, employer support for incentives and reimbursement policies, and measuring and evaluating bicycle use results.

Responsible use of bicycle apps

Bicycle apps, some of which are employer- designed, help facilitate commuting by bicycle. For example, the BFN app has supported employers' mobility plans and the incentivising employees' e-bike use. By providing data on health and the environment, GPS-based apps improve transparency regarding benefits, as well as monitoring and rewarding bicycle use. Thus, integrating bicycle apps seems valuable, though ethical concerns about when and how travel distances are measured must be carefully addressed.

Awareness through campaigns and ambassadors

Broad bicycle campaigns, such as #posifiets, are an effective tool for raising awareness of bicycle culture and highlighting opportunities. Data indicate that people aware of this campaign tend to make fewer car trips. To build trust and increase awareness, ambassadors can play a key role. They can help promote sustainable commuting options and provide knowledge about the health benefits of cycling. These ambassadors may be former participants or professionals.

Redefining spaces: Decentralised parking and peri-urban centres

Parking the car outside the city core helps reduce congestion. Stricter inner-city parking support this, and P&R facilities enable commuters to switch to public transport or bicycles for the final leg of their journey. However, work commutes extend beyond the inner city. Many workplace clusters are near highways, often accessible only by car. Connecting these "isolated" clusters to cities via bike paths or public transport like Bus Rapid Transit support sustainable transition.



Factors hindering cycling in Maastricht

Bicycle trials are working – for now!

The various e-bike trials illustrate some positive outcomes as a collaborative approach to promoting e-bike commuting. However, the e-bike is no longer the novelty in the Netherlands that it was ten years ago, when these initiatives began to emerge. Recent data indicate a decline in support for e-bike trials in the South Limburg region compared to earlier periods (The ‘early and later majority’ may be reached, but what about the other 40%?). This highlights the need to rethink the design and structure of initiatives to encourage changes in mobility behaviour.

Lack of diversity in bicycle trials

While the bicycle and e-bike trials offer enticing incentives, the target groups for such initiatives are mainly employees of companies cooperating with the mobility-PPP in Maastricht and South Limburg. This limits opportunities for social groups who are not employed or do not work for cooperating companies to gain experience with e-biking, such as freely trying an e-bike, receiving rewards for using an e-bike, or purchasing an e-bike at a discount.

Barriers to expanding bike routes

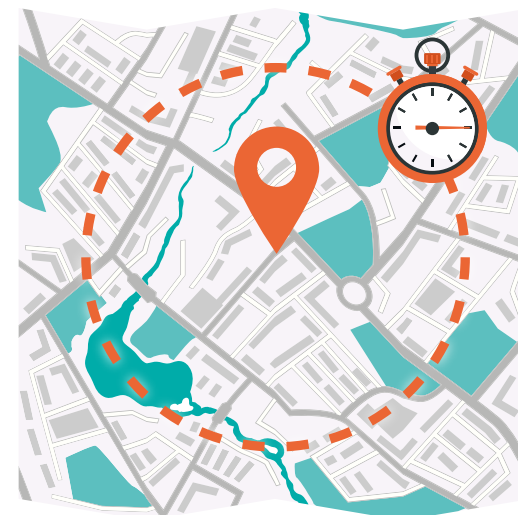
Long bicycle lanes improve bikeability by connecting cities. However, fragmented development and local protests complicate their construction, as is the case in South Limburg. Infrastructure projects such as the F2, which cross municipal borders, involve different local authorities and bureaucracies, potentially causing delays and leave routes incomplete. Also, local resistance resembling “not in my backyard” (NIMBY) attitudes toward bike paths can affect infrastructure plans and their development.

Conflicting priorities: Political visions in bicycle planning

Local bicycle strategies are important for improving cycling, but are, to some extent, subordinated to broader political visions. Some visions, such as those focused on tourism and recreation, may complicate efforts to reduce cars in cities, as seen in Maastricht. Economic and branding considerations often seem decisive, such as maintaining inner-city car accessibility and parking, which local businesses support, or prioritising recreational over everyday cycling in less urbanised areas.

Inflexible reimbursement procedures: A barrier to multi-modal commuting

Alternatives to the car provided by employers are important for sustainable commuting, but their long-term impact may be limited by inadequate travel policies. A research experiment in Maastricht found that employers’ inflexible reimbursement procedures, covering only one transport mode, limit employees’ use of different modes of transport, as they may not want to give up car commuting completely. More flexible procedures could encourage mixed and more sustainable mobility patterns.



Lessons for governance and planning

Past bicycle initiatives in Maastricht have primarily focused on campaigns, e-bike trials, and infrastructure enhancements to encourage behavioural change. Such efforts have proven effective, but seem to require innovative redesign for further substantial impact.



A promising approach for public agencies to encourage more sustainable mobility is a multi-step programme covering the entire customer journey and building on public-private partnerships: co-creating initiatives with employers or third-sector organisations, focusing on awareness, travel policies, bicycle access (or other alternatives to car use), and digital monitoring. For the success of such programmes, supportive policies and infrastructure (e.g., parking norms) are essential. Considering different (conflicting) interests may mitigate barriers for sustainable endeavours, for example engaging with shop owners about a shift from grey, car-accessible city centres to green and still multimodally accessible centres.

Rethinking cycling initiatives beyond employees' commuting could enhance inclusivity, which could be empowered by subsidising initiatives, such as bicycle-equipment support and bicycle schools.



Contact SPECIFIC

✉ info@15mcityspecific.org

🌐 www.15mcityspecific.org

in [@specific-15-minute-cities-for-cycling](https://www.linkedin.com/company/specific-15-minute-cities-for-cycling)

📷 [@15mcityspecific](https://www.instagram.com/15mcityspecific)

🦋 [@15MCitySPECIFIC](https://twitter.com/15MCitySPECIFIC)

This project has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Innovate UK, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), the National Centre for Research and Development (NCBR), the Dutch Research Council (NWO), and the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) under the Driving Urban Transitions Partnership, which has been co-funded by the European Union.

