

Urban



Some cargo bikes can carry a 250 kilo payload

CYCLE LOGISTICS

Counting on the cargo bike

Green entrepreneurship and improved technology are turning the bicycle into an alternative for urban goods distribution.

Most goods reach their final destination in city centres in motorized cars, vans and lorries. Even light goods are often moved by heavy vehicles and over very short distances, exacerbating pollution, noise and congestion.

A surprising element of a new approach for sustainable urban logistics could turn out to be – the bicycle. “25% of all urban freight trips could be shifted from motorized vehicles towards cycling-related solutions,” explains Dr. Randy Rzewnicki, Project Manager of the EU funded Cycle Logistics project, which is investigating the use of bicycle-related solutions in urban logistics. “These trips could be done cheaper, faster and CO₂ emission-free by bike.”

And not only for delivering pizza. Bicycle delivery companies are appearing in numbers across Europe, proving that even small to medium-size firms can deliver high volumes of goods in cities. In France, La Petite Reine, a company founded in 2001, moves over one million packages annually with 60 cargo bicycles in Paris, Bordeaux, Rouen, Lyon and also Geneva in Switzerland. And France’s national railway company, SNCF, has invested €500 000 in a company called Urban-Cab to provide a green and cost-effective solution to the last mile dilemma.

Across the channel in Great Britain, Cambridge-based company Outspoken Delivery sees approximately 70 deliveries being made a day with nine couriers. Prices for such services are generally lower and delivery faster than their motorized competitors. “Over 85% of our deliveries consist of papers, small packages and boxes,” says Rob King, co-founder of Outspoken Delivery:

“The remaining 15% covers everything from antibodies in test tube vials to pharmacy prescriptions, legal papers, laptops, flowers, and lunchtime food deliveries.” King’s firm even offers a multi-modal delivery service from Cambridge to London using a folding bicycle for collection and delivery at each end. “This is by far the quickest way into central London,” says King: “On Friday afternoon, at peak congestion, we can deliver in just 90 minutes. Not even a motorbike can get close to this.”

Innovative bicycle designs help to make delivery by bike economically viable and less of a grind for the drivers. Today’s transport bikes, for instance the “Cargocycle”, use ultra-light materials, better transmissions and also electric support engines. Some of the bikes used by “Outspoken Delivery” can carry up to 250 kg of freight, and there are even “Frigocycles” that can deliver refrigerated goods.

With such progress, bicycle logistics can potentially reshape downtown deliveries. According to research undertaken in the Netherlands by fietsdiensten.nl, a 10% shift in urban delivery from trucks to cycle couriers would create 10 000 jobs, cut motor vehicle kilometers by one million, save 85 000 litres in fuel and cut 21 000 tons of CO₂ emissions per year. Little wonder policy-makers are also starting to see potential value in cycle logistics. In Belgium, Flemish Mobility Minister Hilde Crevits called for more bike couriers this year: “There is real growth potential for bicycle couriers... they offer all sorts of advantages because they are a simple, quick and environmentally friendly way of getting around.” JF

www.lapetitereine.fr
www.outspokendelivery.co.uk
www.urban-cab.com