

*Fairbank,  
Maslin,  
Maullin,  
Metz &  
Associates*

FM3

*Public Opinion Research  
& Strategy*

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz and Greg Lewis  
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

RE: Seattle Voter Attitudes on Bicycling and the So-Called “War on Cars”

DATE: January 17, 2013

---

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a telephone survey of voters in Seattle to explore their attitudes towards bicycling and their support for policies that would improve bicycle infrastructure across the city.<sup>1</sup> **The survey results show that Seattle voters have broadly positive feelings about people who ride bicycles in Seattle and support policies like greenways and protected bike lanes to increase opportunities to bike safely in Seattle.** The survey findings also provide strong evidence that few voters perceive there to be a “war on cars,” and that negative sentiments toward biking tend to be concentrated among a small minority of voters. The survey results also show that voters would welcome more opportunities to ride bicycles — though many voters already ride on a regular basis, and a majority of all voters say they would like to ride even more than they do now.

Among the key specific findings from the survey are the following:

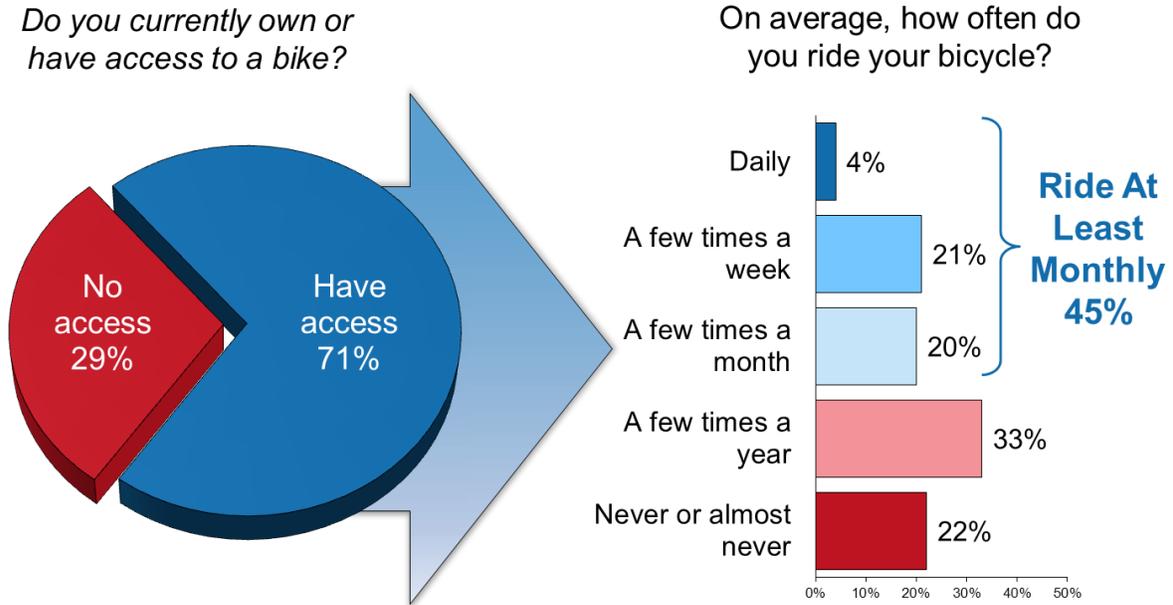
- **More than three-quarters of Seattle voters view people who ride bicycles favorably.** Voters overwhelmingly report positive feelings towards the City’s bicyclists: 78 percent of voters say they have a favorable opinion of people who ride bicycles in Seattle, including 38 percent who say they have a “very” favorable opinion of them. Just 19 percent of voters say their opinions of this group are unfavorable.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Methodology:** From December 9-12, 2012, FM3 completed a telephone survey of 400 registered voters in Seattle, Washington. Interviews were conducted on both landline and wireless phones. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/-4.9%. Margins of sampling error will be higher for subgroups within the sample. Some results do not total to 100% because of rounding.

- **Most Seattle voters have access to a bike; many of them ride frequently and a majority of them would like to ride more often.** As shown in **Figure 1** below, 71 percent of Seattle voters say they currently own or have access to a bike. Of this population, 45 percent say they ride their bicycle at least a few times a month, including one quarter (25%) who say they ride at least a few times a week.

**Figure 1: Bicycle Access and Riding Frequency**



While many voters say they do not ride very often, a majority of all voters (60%) say they would like to ride more often than they do now (**Figure 2**). A substantial majority of Seattle voters are already biking or show a real interest in doing so more than they do now.

**Figure 2: Desire Among Seattle Voters to Bike More Often**

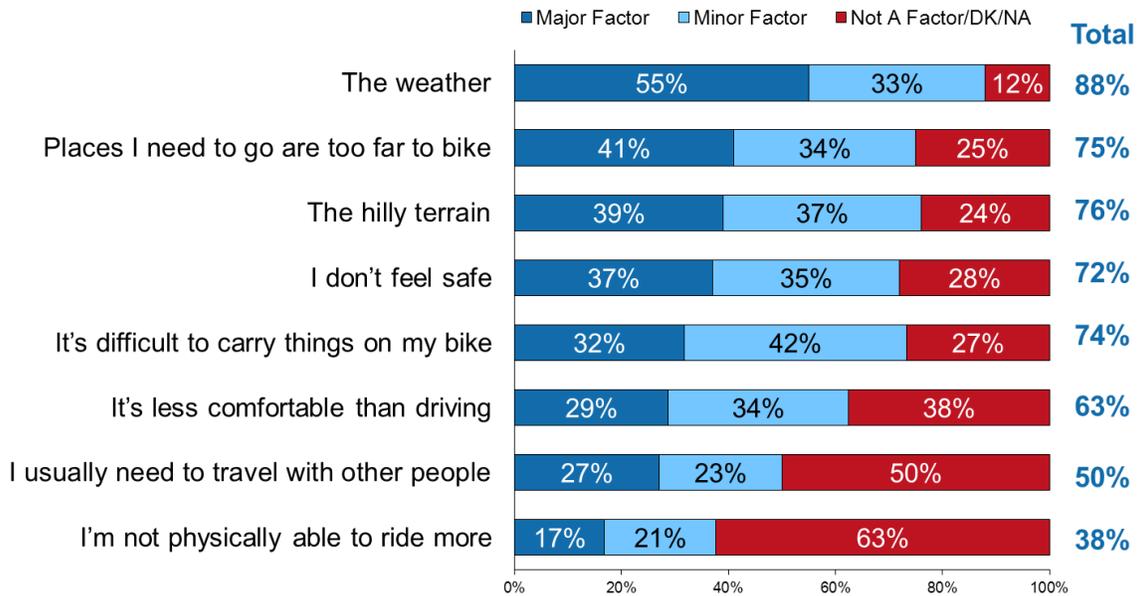
*Would you like to ride a bicycle more frequently than you do now?*

Response	%
<b>Total Yes</b>	<b>60%</b>
Yes, much more	28%
Yes, a little more	32%
<b>No</b>	<b>40%</b>

- Weather, terrain, distance and safety are the primary obstacles for Seattle voters who are not already frequent bicyclists.** As shown in **Figure 3** below, substantial portions of voters who do not currently ride their bike daily identify several key obstacles to riding more often. Weather is the primary obstacle among this group of voters, with 55 percent of them identifying this as a “major” factor for why they don’t ride more often. Another significant obstacle is the feeling of safety—37% of voters say this is a major factor preventing them from riding more. Other obstacles include destinations that are too far to reach by bike, the city’s hilly terrain, and the challenge of transporting things on a bicycle.

**Figure 3: Obstacles to Biking More Often**  
(Among Seattle Voters Who do not Ride Daily)

*I am going to read you a list of reasons why people may not be able to ride bicycles more often. Tell me whether that is a major factor, a minor factor, or not a factor for why you don't ride your bicycle more often.*



- Making streets safer for all transportation users is a top priority for Seattle voters.** The survey results make clear that Seattle voters widely agree that safer streets and better bicycle infrastructure are desirable goals for the City. This includes two-thirds of voters (66%) who agree that making Seattle streets safer for everybody—including cars, transit, bikes and pedestrians—should be a top transportation priority. Majorities of voters also agree that the City needs more protected bicycle routes, and that the City should be a great place for bicycling.

Figure 4: Opinions about Bicycling

Statement	Agree	Neutral/DK	Disagree
Making our streets safer for everybody, whether they drive, ride transit, bike, or walk should be our top transportation priority	66%	22%	11%
We need protected bike routes that connect our neighborhoods	56%	24%	20%
Being a great place for bicycling should be a part of Seattle’s character as a city	56%	25%	20%
Seattle’s streets should be safe enough for bike riders of all ages and skill levels to ride on	56%	21%	22%
We need protected bike routes that connect our city	53%	20%	25%
Seattle is waging a “war on cars” that that is making traffic worse	31%	17%	51%
Seattle is being taken over by social engineers, who are trying to force us out of our cars	26%	19%	55%

- **There is little support for the notion of a “war on cars” – fewer than one-third of voters perceive there to be one, far smaller than the proportion who call for improved bicycle infrastructure.** As shown above in **Figure 4**, half of voters (51%) disagree with the idea that there is a “war on cars” in the City, while fewer than one-third (31 percent) agree with this sentiment. The notion that the City is “being taken over by social engineers, who are trying to force us out of our cars” is just as clearly rejected by voters; just 26 percent agree with this statement. These findings provide strong evidence that the “bikelash” occasionally touted in the media is sentiment shared by only a small minority of voters, and dismissed out of hand by the majority.
- **Policies that would improve conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians are widely popular among Seattle voters.** **Figure 5** presents a list of transportation policy proposals that majorities of Seattle voters say they would support. Each of the policies would increase bicycle safety and all are very popular among voters. Repairing roads and sidewalks is supported by nearly all voters, and creating more bicycle-friendly neighborhood greenways is a policy that finds 86 percent support among Seattle voters. Building more protected bicycle lanes is supported by 73 percent of voters.

**Figure 5: Support for Transportation Policies in Seattle**

Policy	Support	Oppose
Repairing and improving existing roads	97%	1%
Making it easier to walk by building and repairing sidewalks	94%	5%
Repairing and improving existing roads before we build more	94%	5%
Creating more neighborhood greenways, which are low-speed, low-traffic streets that are safer for families	86%	13%
Making bicycling safer by changing streets so that bicyclists are physically protected from car traffic with curbs, parked cars, or other barriers	73%	25%
Increasing opportunities to bike safely, <u>even if it means removing some on-street parking</u>	63%	38%
Increasing opportunities to bike safely, <u>even if it means taking away a lane from cars on some roads where there are multiple lanes</u>	58%	40%

- Significantly, voters back improved bicycle infrastructure even if it results in the displacement of some traffic lanes and on-street parking.** As shown in **Figure 6** on the following page, by a two-to-one margin, voters in Seattle would prefer increasing transportation choices (including transit, biking and walking) rather than using transportation funding solely to make it easier for people to drive. Three in five voters back policies to expand transportation choices even when it is explicitly noted that doing so may entail replacing lanes or removing on-street parking to make space for protected bikeways. Similarly, as previously illustrated in **Figure 5**, majorities of Seattle voters support increasing opportunities to bike safely even if this means removing some on-street parking (63% support) or taking away a lane from cars on some roads (58%).

**Figure 6: Attitudes Toward Transportation Investments in Seattle**

Statement	% Choosing
Many Seattle residents would like to drive less, but do not see any alternative. We should invest our transportation dollars to give local residents more transportation choices – including public transportation, biking, and walking -- <u>even if it means replacing some lanes on our roads and removing some on-street parking for protected bikeways</u>	59%
Most Seattle residents rely on their cars to get around. We should recognize this reality and invest our transportation dollars to make it easier for people to drive in Seattle.	30%
Both/Neither/Don't Know/NA	12%

In short, the survey results provide absolutely no evidence of widespread anti-cycling sentiment in Seattle. In fact, the data show quite the opposite: many Seattleites are already riding bicycles; many more are interested in riding more frequently; and the vast majority views those who ride bicycles very favorably. At the same time, the notion of a “war on cars” doesn’t resonate at all. Instead, there is strong support for policies that would make bicycling safer across the City (a major obstacle preventing many from riding more often), even it means giving up some on-street parking and driving lanes to make room for these improvements.