Münster's path to becoming a cycle-friendly city

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Introduction

This report has been written as part of the Cycling Exchange between the twin cities of York and Münster during the summer 2022. It outlines the approach Münster has followed in promoting cycling, the aim being to prompt discussion between stakeholders in both cities on how provision for his form of active travel can be improved.

Background

Münster, like York, is an ancient walled city with a cathedral as the focus of its historic core. Although it has a bigger population, about 315,000 inhabitants compared to York's 210,000, the difference in size is not dramatic. Around 60,000 students attend Münster's four universities, giving the city a youthful atmosphere. The overall population of the city is growing, however, much of this being absorbed by housing development on the outskirts of the city. It is an employment hub for the Münsterland region, which has a population of over 1.5 million. As a result, it is estimated there are 380,000 commuter trips a day in and out of the city.

The opportunities and the challenges for Münster are, thus, not dissimilar to those in York. However, action Münster has taken regarding travel, transport and the environment sets it apart. It has been voted "Germany's most bicycle-friendly city" by the ADFC (German Cyclists' Federation), the ADAC (German Automobile Association) and Germany's leading consumer safety group, "Stiftung Warentest."

To an extent, these are subjective polls, but the hard data bear them out. Cycling currently makes up 43.5% of the city's *modal split*, while travel by car is only 34.1%. If you drill down into those figures, environmentally friendly forms of transport are the most popular choices for all journeys up to 7 km.

Verkehrsmittelwahl nach Entfernungsklassen
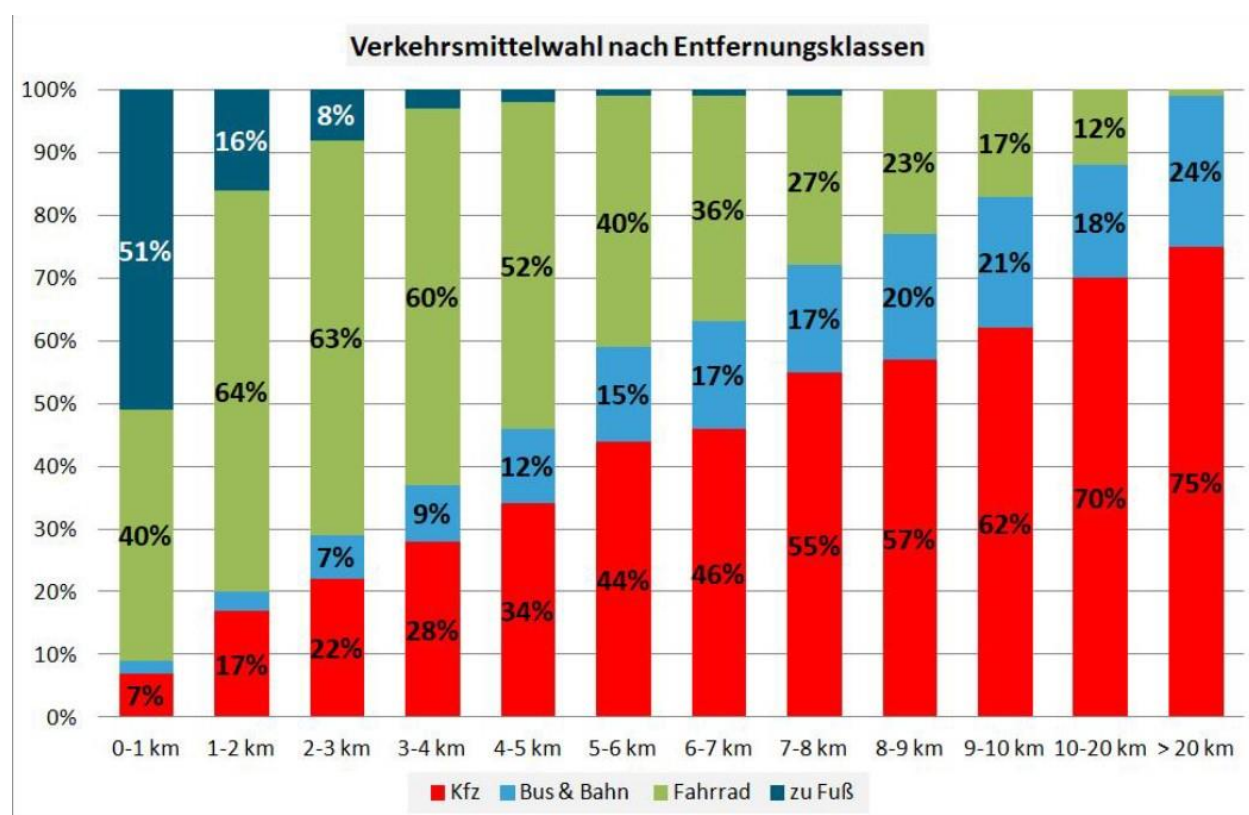
Modal choice by distance
Source: Münster City Council
Key: Car, Bus and Train, Cycle, Pedestrian.
(City of Münster 2022 c)

The city's goal is now to increase cycling's modal share to 50% in the medium term.

To give a wider context, the city has already achieved its initial climate goal of reducing CO_2 emissions by 40% by 2020. Greenhouse gas emissions from transport (despite a steady increase in motor vehicles) have been reduced by approximately 12% since 1990.
(City of Münster 2022 a)

All of these, of course, are dry statistics, but visiting Münster brings home the difference in the experience of moving about a city where active travel has been given first place. How has this been brought about?

Travel planners emphasise that their strategy has been a comprehensive one:

'From our point of view, functioning mobility can only be guaranteed if all types of transport are taken into account and coordinated as best as possible. This integrative approach has been the guiding principle of sustainable urban mobility planning for many years.'
(City of Münster 2022 a)

This report will outline how this integrative approach works by, first, looking at the cycle network separately and then seeing how this structure jigsaws with other forms of transport and services in a process of *intermodalität*.
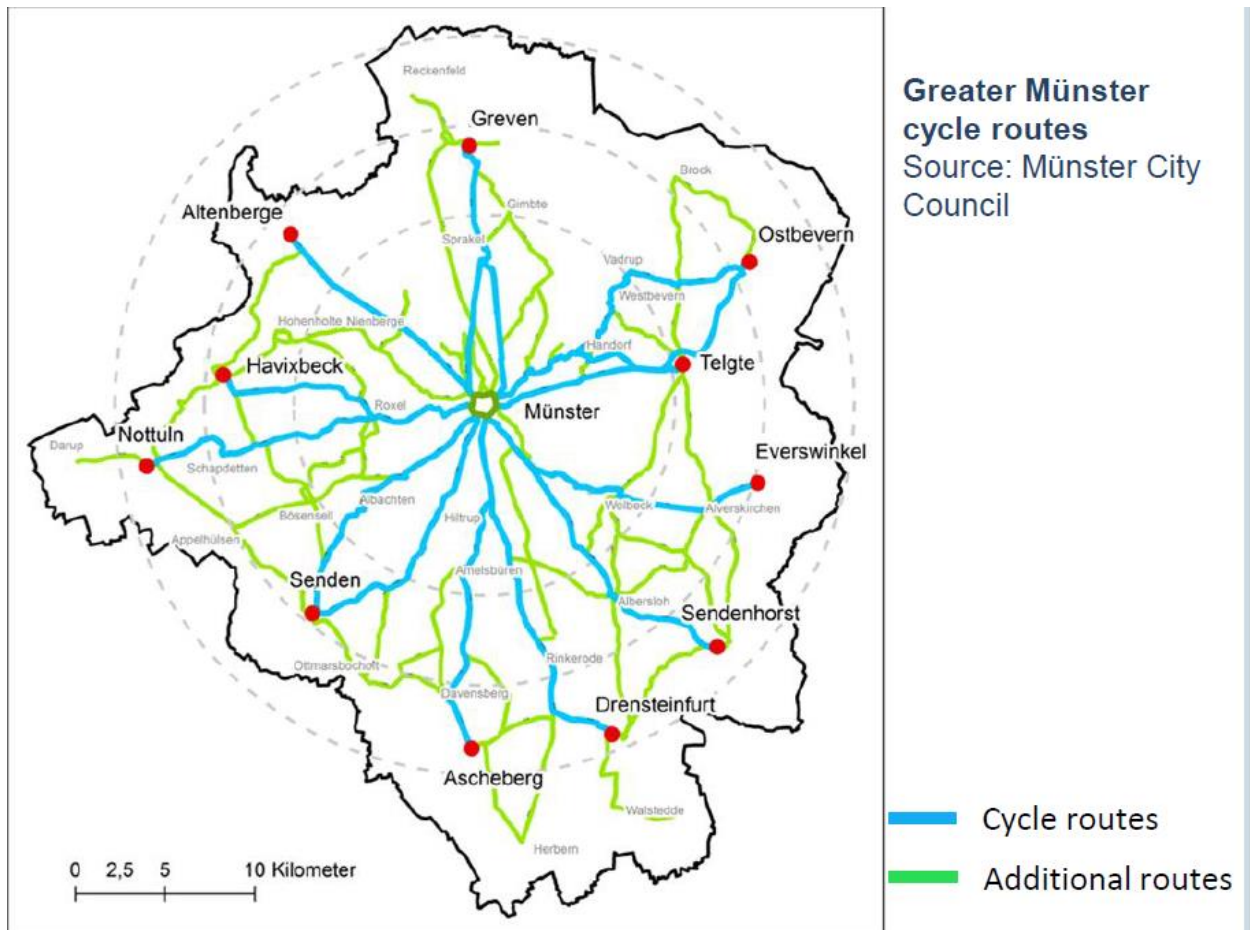

Promenade

Cycle Network

The hub of the city's cycle infrastructure is the Promenade, a 4.5 km car-free ring around the city centre, tracing the pattern of the old mediaeval walls. Spanning out from the Prom are the spokes of fourteen planned Veloroutes, which will connect the city with nearby towns. Scheduled to be completed by 2035, these are intended to offer cycle priority-routes (radvorrangrouten) for over 100,000 commuters who move to and from the city on a daily basis. Some of the Veloroutes will run along the equivalent of York's green corridors, an additional aim being to enable city dwellers to enjoy the surrounding countryside.

Greater Münster cycle routes
Source: Münster City Council

Cycle routes
Additional routes

Veloroute   (Both illustrations - City of Münster 2022 c)

The Promenade also acts as the perimeter of a city centre low emission zone, within which only motor vehicles with a green pollutant sticker are allowed. Three major streets (Salzstraße, Ludgeristraße, Stubengasse) form a pedestrianised area, where cycling is only allowed from nine in the evening to nine in the morning.

Stubengasse

The cycle network aims to be a cohesive web of major and minor routes. It includes both segregated cycle paths, as well as cycle lanes, either on the road or, more frequently, on the pavement. Cyclists are also allowed flexible use of one-way streets. All cycle infrastructure is identified by a red surface. The Appendix gives the specifications of the different tracks.

An innovation is the introduction of *cycle streets* in which bike riders have priority over other traffic (see below). Motor vehicles cannot overtake on these unless they give a berth of at least 1.5 metres; riders also have priority at junctions. Where car parking is allowed, there is a separating strip between car and rider.

Standards for Münster's cycle-priority streets
Source: Münster City Council, photo: Patrick Schulte
(City of Münster 2022c)

The overall intention is to offer a 'door-to-door' facility. As the Mobility Masterplan explains:

'The bicycle network should go far beyond the main routes. For this reason, a hierarchical network with main and basic routes is to be developed... While the main network maps connections between the residential districts, the city center, the most important workplaces and transfer points to local public transport, the basic network also runs through the individual districts and thus guarantees a fine-meshed development for bicycle traffic.'
(City of Münster 2022 b)

Intermodal travel

This interconnectivity of cycle routes is part of a broader concept of intermodality within and beyond the city. Another commentary on the Masterplan (City of Münster 2022 a) identifies three intermodal links:

    Physical
    Informational
    Tariff-related

Major *physical* interfaces occur at locations such as Radstations (bike parking garages) within the city and, further afield, at park-and-ride facilities. It is intended, though, that these will be upgraded in the future into multi-faceted mobility hubs. The current Radstations already provide a wide range of services. The bike garage at the main rail station is the oldest in Germany and remains the biggest, with nearly 3,500 secure spaces. Connected to the station by a pedestrian subway, it has fifteen staff and offers bike hire, repair and servicing, storage lockers, an accessory shop and a bike wash.
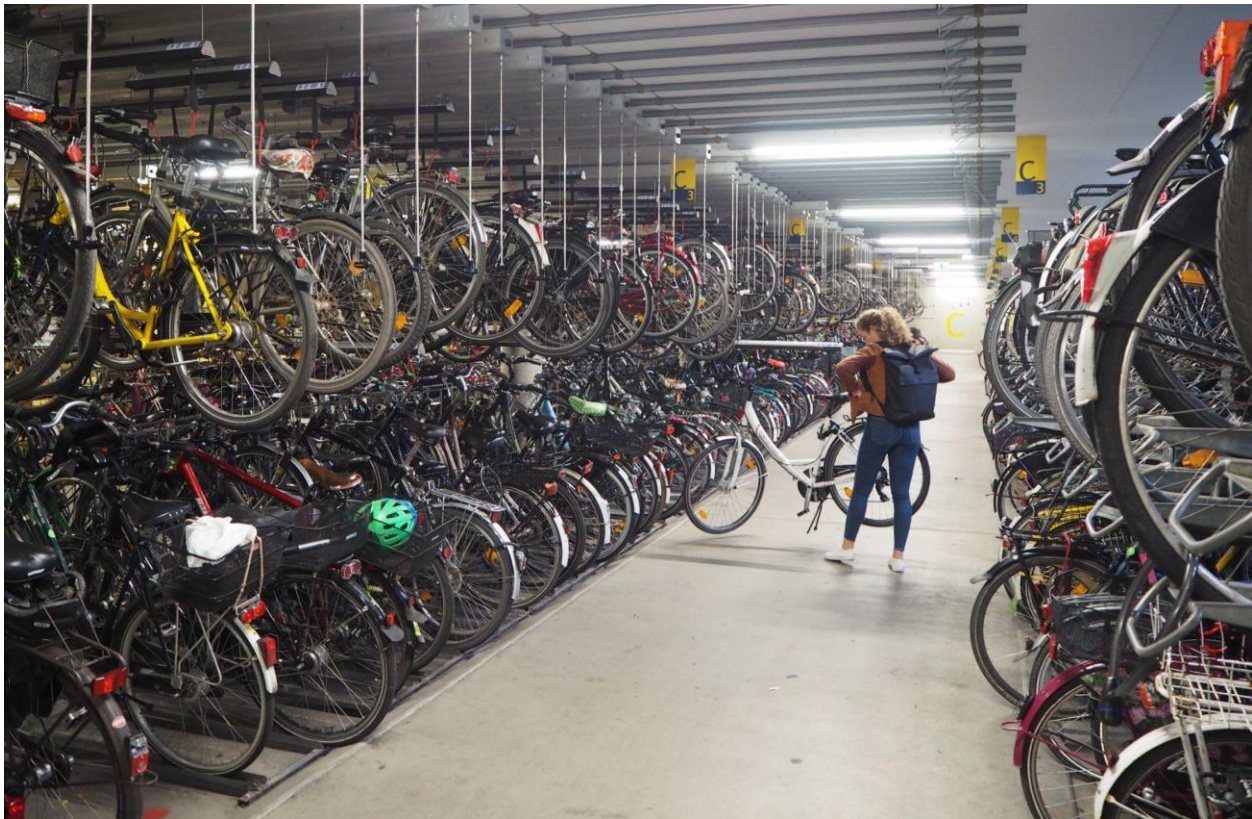
There are three more bike garages at the railway station and two more in the city centre. An increasing number of bus stops provide bike parking and, downtown, there are sixteen on-street spaces for cargo bikes.

The next step, though, will be to construct *mobility hubs*, such as the one that is replacing the multi-storey car park on Bremerplatz. This will have 3000 parking spots for bikes and 200 for cars (in order to free space on the streets); bike parking will be free for the first twenty-four hours. In addition to standard Radstation facilities, there will also be a car club pick-up point, bike sharing and a rooftop garden.

It is hoped that the park-and-ride facilities that ring the city will also eventually evolve into mobility hubs. P&R stations, most of which are also billed as *bike-and-ride*, are currently located at the seven suburban stations and on six key access roads. Although bikes can be booked on trains, they are still only allowed on buses in the evening.

Physical intermodality is complemented by the digital variety. A single *Plus Card*, for example, gives access to bus, train and taxi fares, bike and vehicle parking and the car club.

The ultimate aim is for people to be able to move easily from train to bike to bus to shared car to shoe leather. An 'active traveler' in Münster is thus provided with an inviting prospect. There is, however, inevitably, always room for improvement. Cobbled streets and older cycle paths on tiled surfaces can be 'boneshakers.' Moreover, the city is a victim of its own success and, despite massive investment in cycle parking, many city sidewalks are still cluttered with numerous badly parked bicycles. This not only hinders pedestrians, it presents an obstruction to people with disabilities.

Quelle: Zinkant (Münstersche Zeitung)

Opportunities for those with disabilities

A specific strategy for the place of disabled people within the Mobility Masterplan has not been identified. However, 'Mobil mit Behinderung' (Mobile with Disabilities) is a guide which provides comprehensive information for members of the public on services the city offers. With regard to cycling, it includes details of access for bikes, e-bikes, tandems, tricycles and 'rollfiets,' as well as opportunities to loan these vehicles. More generally, opportunities with cars and public transport are set out and adaptations to infrastructure are explained, e.g., dropped kerbs and 'fords' over historic cobbles. A link to the report is provided in the list of references (City of Münster 2016 b).

An interesting comparison can be made of the precautions against terrorism in both cities and how these affect disability access. In 2018, a mentally ill man used a vehicle as a weapon in Münster city centre, killing three pedestrians and injuring six others. To my understanding, this has not resulted in significant changes to vehicle access to the city centre. In York, by contrast, precautions against such an incident have led to strict controls on vehicle access, including that for disability blue badge holders.

Conclusion

The progress Münster has made with active travel is physically apparent to any visitor and confirmed by the data. City planners contend this is a testament to their comprehensive *intermodal* approach to travel planning. A member of the city's Fahrradbüro, however, readily admits that Münster did have certain advantages that helped it get off to a flying start. The city has always had a strong cycling culture, a partial result of its level topography and of a large student population moving between city-centre college buildings. In creating its coloured cycle infrastructure, the city has, in a sense, simply put a red tarmac carpet beneath a population already eager to get on their bikes. Those advantages, though - the culture, the demographics and the geography, also apply equally to York. The question, therefore, is why cannot York make itself the bicycle capital of Britain?

Appendix

Table 1: Widths and facilities for cycle lanes in Münster

mesh element	Width 1 direction	width 2 directions	Furnishing	remark
Cycle path in town	2.0m + 0.5/0.75m security stripes	3.0m + 0.5/0.75m security stripes	red coloring, Concrete block paving without bevel or asphalt	Both sides 1/0 dash if unlit, in 2 directions 1/2 Guideline
Cycle path in town with high load	3.0m + 0.5/0.75m security stripes	4.0m + 0.5/0.75m security stripes		
bike lanes	2.25m	-	red coloring, 1/0 broad bar, pictograms	
protective strips	1.5m	-	red coloring, 1/1 narrow line, pictograms	
Combined walking/ Bike path	2.5m	3.0m	Inner city grayer concrete block, out of town asphalt	out of town 1/0 on both sides narrow line
bike street	4.0m	4.0m	red coloring, VZ 244, 1/0 on both sides Broad line, pictograms	Right of way on the train bike street in Tempo 30 zones

(City of Münster 2016 a)

Acknowledgement

References

City of Münster   (2016 a)   Cycling concept – Münster 2025

City of Münster   (2016 b)   Mobile with disabilities: information on offers and help

City of Münster   (2022 a)   Interim report on the Mobility Masterplan 2035+, PTV

City of Münster   (2022 b)   Bicycle network planning

City of Münster   (2022 c)   Sustainable mobility in Münster

Copies of these documents can be accessed at:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RCtMrwEtdAxomPYkp3XUdgcetjKKQR1N?usp=sharing

Original versions in German and English translations are provided. The latter were generated by Google Translate and so may have some ambiguity.