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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cyclists, Dismount—Car Drivers, Get Out and Push? An Autoethnographic Account of Long-Distance Cycling: Joy, Speed, and Unexpected Hurdles in Dutch Traffic

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The Netherlands are known for an exemplary cycle infrastructure: cycle paths all over the place, cycle traffic lights in abundance, and "cycle highways" emerging (Skov-Petersen et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Cabral Dias and Gomes Ribeiro, 2020).[1] At the same time, the micro-managed infrastructure does not always cater to a variety of cycle styles, speeds, and distances. This does not automatically render the paradisiacal image of cycling in the Netherlands as an example for cycling elsewhere. What makes long-distance cycling so different and difficult in a country with so many cyclists? The title "cyclists dismount" symbolically illustrates the failed match of policy versus use(s): "cyclists dismount (and walk)" has no equivalent for car drivers and therewith represents a systematic priority for motorized users of public road space. This reversal is the impetus for an exploration of long-distance cycling as active mobility (AM) in order to contribute to the notion of long-distance cycling as a sustainable alternative to passive (motorized) mobility (PM).

Keywords: active mobility (AM); cycling cultures; long-distance cycling; micromanagement; passive mobility (PM)

Introduction

After studying the effects of cycling diversity for some time and over ten years of cycling the Netherlands and its neighbouring countries per velomobile, I consider myself a trained practitioner in the hurdles and gambles of long-distance cycling, both recreational and as a commuter.[2] The huge benefit for my physical health aside, the experience has often placed stress on my mental resilience. The latter taught me to think of long-distance cycling from different perspectives than those generally included by policy makers and infrastructure designers—like the sensescape of cycling (Jones, 2012; van Duppen and Spierings, 2013; Popan, 2020)—and the discrepancy between cycle policies and cycle practices as expressed in the broad concept of "cycle cultures" (Cox, 2015).

Figure 1: Cyclists dismount. Image from stockfresh images / cyclists dismount.

My cycle experience has led to a diary full of entries and events that can be traced back to the different dimensions of long-distance cycling: infrastructure and the policies behind those, cycle policies, taken for granted habits and norms that go beyond what formal policies entail (cf. Verkade and Te Brömmelstroet, 2020; Cox, 2020), and a long history of practices that all centre around cyclability, the attraction (speed, health) of long-distance cycling, and the new hurdles arising when more people commute or otherwise use the available infrastructure with different cycling modalities (Latham and Wood, 2015; also Koglin, 2020). For a reflection on what I came to term the *patchwork experience* of long-distance cycling, I use as a point of departure the stories and events encountered and noted in a diary over the years and contextualize my reflections in "active mobility" (AM) (Held, Schindler and Litman, 2015; Neun et al., 2020) as a contribution to debates over the negative impact of "passive mobility" (PM), or motorized transport (Schindler and Held, 2022). The use of cars and most forms of public transport are positioned these days as being opposed to the planet's need for a transformation of transport and mobility via active mobility (Popan, 2020; Schindler and Held, 2022). This is all the more urgent during the current COVID-19 pandemic (Freudendal-Pedersen and Kesselring, 2020) because working at home and being confined to one's country probably also means less travel altogether.

This infers the use of an autobiographical/autoethnographic approach, along with photo (voice) data and document analysis in order to problematize taken for granted, often unexpectedly normative, habits and rules hindering the expansion of AM (cf. Spinney, 2009; Lathan and Wood, 2015). In other words, and with a play on words based on John van Maanen's (2010; 2011 [1987]) notion "tales of the field", what follows will be "tales from the cycling path" or, more precisely, "tales about cycling routes", as not all cycling options guide us along paths, not even in the Netherlands, not to mention adjacent countries like Belgium and Germany, as scenes for doable holiday trips. My personal mission in all this is to answer the question, how do current cycle paths and other cycle provisions enable and disable cyclists' chances of active mobility (AM) emancipation and expansion? In the following I therefore list the systematized (and most expressive) experiences from my diaries (2010–2020) to illustrate the embodied experience of cycling long(er) distances.

After an introduction to the use of a velomobile, I give a general account of cycling mainly recreational distances, followed by a more detailed analysis of a commuting route as an example of how repetitive long(er)-distance cycling reveals details and cycling patterns one

can overlook when encountering these occasionally. Apart from diary notes, this part was enhanced by available policy documents that were scrutinized for language use (discourse) in relation to cycling, both in terms of being taken for granted as well as possible alternatives for current infrastructural (and cultural) problems. Together, the two types of longer-distance cycling may illustrate the notion of micromanagement in (mainly) Dutch cycle provisions as an inspiration for whomever would like to copy Dutch best practices.

Methodologically, it is important to state that all routes used to analyse this type of long-distance cycling were covered in a velomobile, the torpedo-like covered tricycle described by Peter Cox (2007) as the more or less "odd" vehicle in-between a car and a bicycle (2007: 126 ff.). A velomobile enables to "challenge both formally and informally existing conventions and hierarchies, … and improve conditions for all modes of mobility attuned to the search for greater sustainability" (Cox, 2007: 127). It is never nice to take oneself as "the measure of all things", but in this case, taking the "measure of a [v]elomobile experience" can prove helpful in addressing hurdles, blockades, and blatantly failed solutions for "slow traffic", as cycles and pedestrians are still termed in everyday conversation in the Netherlands, despite the rise of pedelecs and other bicycles with electric support. Where velomobiles can pass, all other cycles can comfortably pass, be they transport cycles of all sorts, bicycles and tricycles, electric bicycles, pedelecs, or even four-wheel carriages.[3] For reasons of systematic analysis, I only used material (notes, observations, pictures) from routes covered in a velomobile for almost 60,000 kilometres from 2010 to 2020.[4] As an autoethnographic account, this can only provide a cautionary and modest reflection of the embodied experience (Spinney, 2006, 2009) of long distance related to cycling.

Cycling distances

One of my first experiences by velomobile was in the summer of 2010. We never arrange routes beforehand, as we never know what will cross our path or how our energy will hold up.[5] But velomobiles do allow for longer cycling days, as the recumbent position, coupled with the aerodynamics of the cycle, do not require fierce muscle application once on the go (Bunte, 2009; Cox, 2008). Stopping, especially re-accelerating, requires more force compared to traditional bicycles, but overall gain and comfort prevail. From our home base, we would cycle to "the farm", a co-housing project where we had an apartment, only 50 kilometres, just to give the holiday a start. The next day, we meandered in the direction of the Afsluitdijk through very flat farmland, with the odd little woody patch. Some of the road was the "old road" beside which the highway had been developed. It is a little curvy but broad enough and asphalt paved. The weather was absolutely fine, which translated as a light headwind along the dyke and a swim at the halfway point. The cycle path along the dyke took us from the left side to the right side for about half of the way. The last stretch was along a former secondary road, apparently, and came to an end at a small beach. Not yet knowing how our cycle days would evolve, we turned right into Friesland after the dyke and managed to reach a small Gaasterland village where family lived. If you do not plan, you just go visit—and family always has a bed.

The next day, we covered Friesland all the way to just south of the city of Groningen with friends, a little over 120 kilometres. I had never imagined covering a distance like that in a day and with so much ease! We followed a wonderful route, partly via formal signs (*Nationale Fietsroute*) and partly from our memory of the formal road map. The advantage of flat country is that you always encounter familiar markers—a highway, a village, a gas station—as you remember them from driving a car. We did notice that junctions, especially new ones, provided space for cyclists, although this actually meant that we always had to slow down or take a longer detour—around a corner (poor vision!), across (watch out!), and around a corner

again—and thus we decelerated often. We passed Oranjewoud and followed a well-signed route (Flevoroute) crossing Friesland into Groningen. There was nice weather and no problems, until we entered Roden, about 10 km before our envisioned point of arrival, which was the worst patchwork cycle path combination ever. Cyclists were directed across the main road several times, with the sign "Cyclists prohibited" (picture) on every corner and "Cycle path" every time we crossed—an obvious example of abundant local signs meant for school commuters or cycling shoppers, not for through traffic.

It was such a nuisance to have to stop, cross, and accelerate again so many times. At a certain point, we just decided to neglect (negate) all further crossings, and we found ourselves on the main road. Just before Peize, our destination, a police car overtook us and signalled us to stop. As always, the police demonstrated curiosity about our velomobiles; this is quite different from the attitude towards "normal" bicycles, electric or otherwise, on the main road. They readily accepted our story that we ultimately did not know where to go to reach our stop for the day and courteously guided us across a junction to a somewhat hidden cycle path. I noted the following in my diary: "'cycle path signs' and 'bicycles prohibited'—that combination should be abandoned!"[6] We learned to term this type of patchwork cycle path situation *drawing board stress*, as the cycle path combination was apparently designed by someone with no cycle experience who came up with a solution with no real insight into the practical implications of the design. This does seem odd for the Netherlands, in that these (extremely) sharp turns and frequent crossings were occurring in what was obviously designed as a *cycle track*, with road signs, red road surface, and all. This may be better than what is deemed "normal" in most other countries, but for contemporary cycle tracks, it felt like a shame. That holiday we cycled a great Netherlands tour, with an average of a bit over 100 km per day.

The following year, we managed to transport our velomobiles onto a train leaving Amsterdam, the *City Nightline*. We encountered a conductor who was not quite happy due to the space our velomobiles took in the cycle compartment, but she had no other option than to accept us, seeing as the railway police had literally put us on the train. They had gathered around us inquiring which train we planned to take, as velomobiles were not allowed on Dutch trains. As soon as they had discovered we were boarding the German train, they turned out to be enthusiastically helpful. Anyway, after a comfortable night on the train, we arrived in Munich, Germany, and immediately compared the situation for cyclists with that of the Netherlands.

In Germany, cycle paths were quite abundant but often shared pedestrian spaces; thus, we drove between cars that did not always accept us and whose drivers demonstrated that by whooping and sometimes shouting out their windows. But, overall, there was even more curiosity about our cycles than in our home country. A man saw us coming at a crossroads,

Figure 2: Micromanagement via signing.

raised his arms in greeting, and shouted, "This is the solution for the future!" In general, as we found out over the following weeks, comments in Germany radiated enthusiasm and were often linked to sustainability and a desire for alternative road use—and alternative users. Sign posting and cycle provisions were not as abundant as in the Netherlands. Still, this had advantages: driving secondary roads, we were very visible, and most car drivers gave way, even when we crossed an autobahn bridge, where we found ourselves right in the middle of a line of trucks. We travelled, via an academic conference in Tutzing (Lake of Starnberg), all the way through Bavaria to the Black Forest and to Strasbourg, where we entered the Rhine Cycle Route that guided us, more or less comfortably, back to the Netherlands. And from memory, the biggest disappointment was on our last day. Quite close to home, the cycle route was blocked by a cycle gate, and our velomobiles could not pass. This was the first instance where I began advancing the idea that cycle paths are as good as their accessibility for velomobiles And this is why I chose the perspective of a velomobile.

The years after (usually spring and summer), we travelled through Belgium, the north of France, and large swathes of western Germany again. It was again hard—and since 2016 impossible—to put a velomobile on the train.[7] This meant that we mostly just did rounds, for example, leaving from home and cycling back again. The only exception was a summer in France when we took a little trailer with space for the two velomobiles. But we generally found that long-distance cycling thrives on "do it yourself", with all lightweight luggage (tent, cooking gear, clothes, and even small chairs) in the boot.

The longer the distance, the more an assessment of accessibility, convenience, and comfort, or the lack thereof, develops. We have the example of awkwardly placed road signs (right in front of a wall, so we are forced to stop and turn our heads) or road signs with no follow-up (usually the case with roadwork diversions) or absent altogether. We have tracks, apparently the "old road", gradually turning into muddy and bumpy paths, the maintenance obviously neglected since the motor highway was built. We have junctions that always mean slowing down and taking a detour; solutions for the through traffic of cyclists are always dependent on/delineated by the through traffic for cars. We have bypasses with no signs, but sometimes

Figure 3: Cycle path blocked for all but "normal" bicyles.

a friendly villager shouts directions at us. And we have the famous Rhine Cycle Route ending as a narrow sandy track just before Koblenz, where the nettles caress our faces.[8] But always, again and again, we have a hidden camping place or a beer booth in a corner and long winding paths along the river under a sunny sky.

Over time, two observations have recurrently come to mind and solidified. Firstly, cycle infrastructure mostly seems a side issue from car infrastructure in terms of planning and realization. If the infrastructure is occasionally planned as "cycle friendly", the outcome means priority for cars with provision for cyclist and pedestrians literally as a side issue (Latham and Wood, 2015; also Cox, 2020). Therefore, it might be better to replace the term *cycle friendly* with "cycle sympathetic", as that signifies the inherent power dimension of car, or passive mobility (PM), over cycling and walking, active mobility (AM) (Cox, 2019: 81 ff.). If provisions are in place and planned with some consideration, those solutions still turn out to be dependent on or, better, sidetracked based on the car (PM).

Secondly, car mobility (PM) is generally assumed to be longer distance than cycling, which implies that long-distance cycling does not stand a chance, as it always falls short in comparison with motorized distances, except perhaps in its hybrid form with electricity, the hybrid mobility (HM) form (Neun et al., 2020). Could it be that the further you cycle, the more obvious the right of way for PM becomes? It seems understandable to initially use "old roads" for cycle routes, but it seems odd that new tracks are now being designed in second order to highways and are drawn square, like on a LEGO board, which means that cars have the right of way and cyclists encounter added (sharp) curves, the latter obviously slowing down (granted, even more so for velomobiles).[9]

What does *long distance* mean then? Is it *long* compared to car traffic or *long* compared to the short cycle trips, less than 5 km, in one's village or neighbourhood? All this constitutes my initial observation, which is to regard infrastructure as entailing a bias towards motorized (PM) car traffic. This most probably also has implications for views on infrastructure, since *long distance* for cars differs from *long distance* for other non-motorized traffic, for example, hybrid (pedelecs) or active mobility (cycling and walking).

Commuting shows the details

And so it happened that from 2010, I enjoyed the velomobile for commuting, with its absolute luxury in terms of a recumbent position (no saddle or back pain), space for a cup of coffee and a water bottle, and the ability to listen to the radio (very much like the car experience) (see also Bunte, 2009; Cox, 2008). From that point on, there were no more excuses: the 24 km (one way) route to work from Heemstede/Haarlem to Amsterdam would be my trajectory for summer and winter henceforth, up until my formal retirement in 2020.[10] Apart from the independence, the speed, and the comfort—and maybe especially for holiday tours—there was another reason for deciding to turn to commuting with AM (Held, Schindler and Litman, 2015; Neun et al., 2020). For years, I drove a car to work, until both the cost (and inevitability) of paid parking and the increased commuting time due to time-consuming traffic jams in my part of the country convinced me that I had to find an alternative solution for the expensive passivity of that transport mode. For a few years, I took a folding bicycle (a Riese & Müller) in the back of my car and parked a little distance away from work where there was still some free parking space. I had some earlier experience with the route; in the summer months, I would ride a bicycle for joy and exercise, at least one or two times a week, until the autumn storms discouraged me from continuing. The Netherlands always has a set pattern of headwinds, but the joyful experience of reaching a destination via the effort of cycling, and the feel of wind and sun for an hour, is incomparably energizing. And, not unimportantly, commuting via public transport turned out to be as long as cycling in terms of time, minus the healthy feeling of exercise and enjoying the seasons. The experience of waiting for buses in windy

shelters, draughty train stations, and the necessity of at least two changes per leg of travel did not make public transport equally attractive. And through the hampering connectivity (a lot of waiting and uncertainty about ongoing travel), it would take me more than an hour to go from door to door. That, combined with an age in which a bit more exercise is no longer a luxury, meant that cycling's AM was, and is, an attractive option by all accounts.

During those 10 years, the most prominent distances I covered were those for commuting; that is what velomobiles are most convenient for. And as my home/work distance is more than 23 km (making almost 50 km per day, two or three times a week), I thus considered commuting a specific variant of long-distance cycling. One of the advantages of looking into that mode of long-distance cycling is that the "sensescape" of that route (Spinney, 2007; van Duppen and Spierings, 2013) allows for detailed, experience-based analysis over time, producing an "assemblage of technology, rider and environment" (Cox, 2019), from which a view on the state of the art of Dutch cycle hurdles and options can be derived.

The route covers city and country travel and takes us alongside an airport and through a big park (Amsterdamse Bos). In policy documents, the route is set in part to become a cycle highway, or through-cycle route, the F232 (F for *Fiets*, "bicycle"). The main part of the route is the N232, originally called Schipholweg, after the Amsterdam Schiphol Airport that it directly borders. Over time, the road has turned into a car-only road with a cycle track all along it, whereas it used to be a "provincial (N) road" where all traffic merged.[11]

The cycle path differs a lot in size (width), surface, situationality (road shared or separate), quality of maintenance, and a lot of other markers over roughly 15 km. For cyclists, it is as unattractive a track as it could be, to be honest, and far from being a comfortable cycle highway in any sense, but it is the quickest (shortest) track from home to work and vice versa, which is not quite unimportant for commuting. The odd detour is fine, but for commuting, I tend to prefer the quickest, that is, the shortest route, like many others do, as I have observed.

Before and after the N232 track, I cycle, respectively, a modern part of the city of Haarlem and, as previously stated, a woody park-like patch in Amsterdam that entails a rowing track, along which the cycle path is shared with pedestrians and slow cycles used by trainers and coaches of the rowing teams. This track is also quite inviting in terms of negating the "No cyclists" sign that suddenly appeared in 2015 (see further below for "negating"). For me, it

Figure 4: Main part of commuting route—five "patches" (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2019).

feels a lot safer on the road, not least because of the differences in speed on the designated cycle track. Police officers seem to think otherwise and once stopped me to point out the danger. They were stupefied when I explained the danger on the cycle path.

The before and after parts of my route both entail roundabouts, traffic lights, meandering trails, and, again, a wide variety of surfaces (bumps, uprooted patches, asphalt, tarmac, bricks, concrete slabs, and tiles) as well as traffic-sharing situations: roundabouts with different priority rules for city and country; free cycle paths alternating designated stretches, narrow and wider; cycle tracks alternatingly on the right or the left; and so on. Since velomobiles are allowed to share the road with cars (mopeds are also allowed) in the Netherlands, the irritation about the variety of stops tends to be quite convincing in order to avoid the designated cycle path and go on roads where possible. This is caused not least by the combination of a "shared" cycle path with a narrow space.

Over the last couple of years, multiple roadworks have occurred on the route, all apparently geared towards improvements in comfort, through traffic (implying speed), and, of course, safety (not specified but for the odd lighting plan). For cyclists, diversions during roadworks were more often than not badly indicated, and a "temporary" track can sometimes last more than two years. The question now of course is, did the new situation always prove an advantage for cyclists? As to be expected, the answer is mixed. Sometimes new cycle paths (marked with red asphalt) appeared, while at the same time, a junction connecting that stretch of the road was redesigned in favour of cars. Sometimes roadworks on the car stretch meant uprooting the cycle path and leaving the repair as a new bump for AM. At other instances, new hotels arose along the road, with no provisions whatsoever for pedestrians, who then share the cycle path where some pedelecs reach speeds of more than 40 km/hour. At least the through-route does not make one fall asleep. In terms of safety, alertness is core for all road users.

One of those disruptions of the route is a good example of how, even with new infrastructure design, motorized traffic has policy and political priority. Through and around the village of Badhoevedorp, a new curve in the highway was designed and developed around 2012 to shelter the village from through traffic. Obviously, with the cycle track as a designated through-route (or fast-cycle route), one might have expected the cycle route to represent all recent advancements in cycle mobility and infrastructure. After all, the opportunity was there. Although a nice little tunnel under the highway appeared, before and after that neat tunnel, the track revealed three (new/additional) 90-degree curves and one 140-degree back-turning curve. And this is still without the continuation of the route, which is currently under "temporary" construction and has been since November 2019, and entails another set of three 90-degree curves and steep, muddy sides. Of course, this is just an example of a small patch of the cycle route.

Nevertheless, I would like to argue that this situation is explanatory, maybe even representative, of a lot of projects elsewhere. After an accident in the summer of 2020, where I had a spinout due to a combination of rain and the muddy 90-degree curve, a long correspondence with both community and provincial policy makers and representatives of the local *Fietsersbond* (Cyclists' Union) showed me how things work. Provincial (regional) officials plan the roadwork, while local officials are responsible for the temporary detour, which obviously means that no one is responsible for the depreciated situation. But, more importantly, this situation and the plans for how the future cycle track will be illustrate the totally new/modern situation that will last for at least the next 40 years—a patchwork construction on all accounts. To be honest, everyone responded in a quite friendly and engaged manner. But the local outcome was more "Sharp turn" road signs appearing on the cycle path, with no change to be expected.[12] Indeed, this cycle track again turns out to be a good example of car dominance in design and realization.

Figure 5: Collage of detrimental situation 2019–2021.

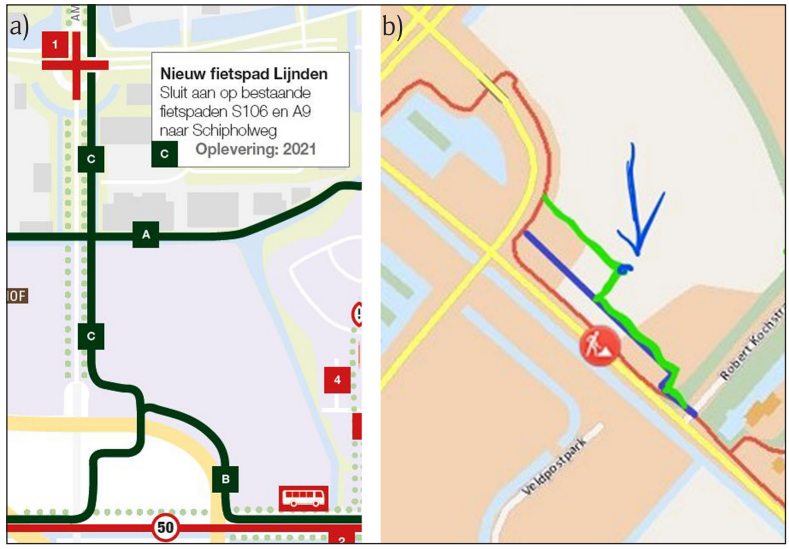

Figure 6: Design and future plan—hardly signalling improvement (Provincie Noord-Holland 2019; Gemeente Haarlemmermeer 2020).

I do not want this to turn into a tale of personal complaints (although there may be some good reasons for that). What this documented narrative illustrates is the ways in which good intentions are micromanaged (patch by patch) and ultimately turn out to provide suboptimal solutions overall. Especially for long-distance cycling, a smooth and uninterrupted track is indispensable. For that, it is important, as with all cycle provisions, not just to design and plan cycle paths but to pay attention to the connections, the beginnings and endings, where all traffic meets. And this is linked to cycling cultures. A through-route and a recreative track both represent cycling but with different cultural assumptions—and both are to be included in the through-route.

For a motor highway, who would decide to use secondary roads as in-between solutions because it is cheaper or seems easier? However, this is normal for cycle path planners: a recreative, meandering patch of walking and cycling will be part of the route, as this is

"economical" or may even be considered attractive by some due to differing cultural understandings of what cycling is for. And how would PM react to waiting times for a traffic light on a highway? For AM, this is a normal part of the route and is accepted almost without a second thought. And last but not least, that cyclists dismount around roadworks seems quite taken for granted, whereas this solution has no equivalent for cars. All good intentions aside, the point here is that this does not make "through cycling" more attractive and thus renders AM a less acceptable mode of long-distance transport.

Let me expand this point with a policy case from both my daily experience and some of the many (policy) reports. In one of the planning reports found online, I discovered a note on planning that uses the expression "red light negation" for this route.[13] Red light negation in policy terms (not in enforcement terms) means the time it takes before a cyclist just ignores a red traffic light on a cycle highway. I was flabbergasted to find this in a policy document; it implies that road design is dependent not so much on safety but on an estimate about how long it takes before people break the law or put themselves in danger. *Mutatis mutandis*, this means that traffic light systems on a cycle highway are based on a design geared towards risk avoidance, not risk prohibition. And ultimately, of course, it implies that cyclists have to be protected from themselves in order for cars to pursue their speed habits. Cyclists are people to be managed; cars are considered more or less autonomous (Verkade and Te Brömmelstroet, 2020). Granted, red light negation occurs more often with cyclists than with car drivers, and it is mainly a nuisance for the latter. But there might be a good reason to "negate" sometimes.

Therefore, if we take the notion of *red light negation* as symbolically representative, as a marker in other words, it becomes all the more obvious that cyclists, and pedestrians for that matter, are literally sidetracked road users even in the Netherlands, the world-famous cycling kingdom. Maybe red light negation is better enforced in other countries, but I can imagine the state of the art in other countries with even more patchy, unconnected cycling-enabling infrastructure. Long-distance cycling is far from a fast mode of transport already due to the spatial and political context it is bound up with.

And indeed, I started counting how often I negated traffic signs, lights, and rules. Actually, as a variant of what Latham and Wood (2015) and Popan (2020) found in British traffic, I would prefer the term *negotiate* for those situations, as that seems to be the better choice of word from a cyclists' perspective. On an average day to work, I negate/negotiate the cycle path in favour of the road (not a highway) about four to five times. And I do this more often where roadworks occur and the diversion is badly signed or even considered dangerous from a car driver's point of view. Red light negation occurs, as the CROW reports suggest, more often in the case of habitual road users, as they are used to the road and its other users. So, from the 8 to 10 traffic lights I pass, I easily negate/negotiate. And when diversions are through residential areas where narrow two-way streets hamper my speed and safety, I opt for the alternative that is considered more dangerous, the road.[14] This is rule breaking, of course, but it can also be considered a sign of negotiating in the sense of managing bad traffic infrastructure.

Maybe, as a normal cyclist, I am naïve—and that is probably true—but this example for me underscores the importance of a social (Cox, 2008), a sensory (Spinney, 2007), a power-oriented (Cox, 2019), and, in sum, a participant perspective on cycling (also Spinney, 2009; Liu et al., 2020). Where 90-degree curves occur on drawing boards and red light negation enters policy documents, the position of long-distance cyclists becomes a power play revealing a paradox. Cycle highways are supposed to enable long-distance cycling, which to the average user must mean a smooth, easy, and comfortable corridor to work. There are just a couple of problems involved in achieving this.

Firstly, AM cycle highways are never as comparably broad and ongoing as PM highways for cars, and this is a challenge for AM in terms of decelerating and accelerating using muscle power. Secondly, cycle highways, because of their connotation with motor highways, are not really designed to meet the demands of long-distance cycling. Drawing a parallel between PM and AM in using the term "highway" reveals inequality in terms of its ambition to reach "speed", as the speed for some is more important than for others. Long-distance cycling is not considered transport or mobility, not really.

Reflection

Indeed, *my* through-route is far from being a through-route in reality, even though it is assumed to be by policy makers. And international long-distance cycling is an adventure in discovery, not just in terms of the countryside. As Peter Cox (2019: 85) argues, routes are partly the sediment of histories of use and mobility practices. What came to my mind over time—especially when a "new" curve in the local highway was established with its concomitant and obviously sidetracked cycle path under and along it—is how in this day and age when AM is promoted, the dominance of PM still dictates the shape, material, and assemblage of the cycle route. Therefore, it seems important to gather together local and personal experiences in order to nuance, and perhaps change, drawing board plans. Of course, to be absolutely clear, a nice and smooth asphalt cycle path is a joy, as is the fact that one vehicle takes you from door to door (and sometimes to places that are not reachable by car, nor by public transport).[15] Even curves enable a feeling of speed, smooth velocity, and bodily freedom when they are swinging long curves. Especially at night, I came to realize that the road is mine. Women rarely drive a velomobile. In it, you are invisible, like in a car, so there are no risks from any gender angle. At night, the real joy unfolds and reveals the limits of daytime: empty roads, fewer traffic lights, and the lights of cars signalling their approach from far off. At night, the distances provide the real feeling of a long ride, uninterrupted apart from the odd bump or change in pavement, not so much as to experience the landscape in a different mode as Cook and Edensor (2017) have illustrated but as liberation from the so often raised issue of safety.

All this caused me to contemplate the pros and cons of 10 years of velomobile riding in the light of long-distance cycling, the pleasure, the speed, and what improvements are still to be made before Dutch cycle traffic is worthy of its reputation. Yes, all promises have come true on the individual level: commuting is faster in the overcrowded Randstad area of the Netherlands. And undertaking nice, long rides is a delight in terms of the sensescape concept: fresh air (mostly), exercise, freedom, and predictability of travel times. For the other senses—being bumped around by patchwork surfaces, decelerating because of red lights and car drivers' supposed priority, and the force it takes to accelerate—the result may be less attractive.[16] As I have noted, over time, commuting over this type of distance using any form of cycle is still the exception, even if our electrified brothers and sisters are more frequent now, especially in wintertime, when the cycle path was a lot emptier "in the old days". They are the new road users that manage to be faster than me in my velomobile. And their hybrid character might account for changes dawning on the horizon. After all, the speed of pedelecs can be considered as a link between fast cycling and slow car driving. Already, my track is in use between the Amsterdam Zuid-As (big offices and companies) area and the rural villages where their employees live. More than velomobiles, the pedelecs might prove to be the game changers for long-distance commuting. Yet, this again leaves a motorized hybrid transport mode in the forefront.

Increasing the variety and speeds of bicycles (and tricycles) leads to overcrowding on cycle paths. A common saying among cyclists is that "if there were so many car types with equally

different speeds on a highway (compared to cycle paths), something would have changed long ago". This is related to the increasing diversity of cycle types that frequent the paths and clog the spaces in front of traffic lights. All in all, cycle paths tend to be overcrowded, which mainly causes a problem of speed differences, risky overtaking, and a lot of irritation due to adaptation (deceleration) to the speed of others.[17]

Conclusion: long-distance power

Where does this cycle path lead? What does a sensory exploration of long-distance cycling that aims to unravel the pros and cons tell us about our venture to reach a transformation in mobilities, from PM to AM, maybe via hybrid mobility (HM)—or even FM (fusion mobility)—in which digitized forms of mobility aid are also included (Neun et al., 2020)? From international experience over the years, I have learned that cycle friendliness is just about nowhere to be found in terms of infrastructure, road signs, and habits and policies of "dealing" with cycling, not if we adapt the habits of reversed meaning, that is, comparing AM (cycling and walking) provisions with those of PM (cars). But that situation also inspires change, for instance, vis-à-vis the patchwork experiences found in the Netherlands. If other countries are about to foster cycling cultures, maybe even via the HM rise (pedelecs), they could use the current fragmented situation in the Netherlands as a caveat. It might be useful to realize that *cycle considerate* is the ultimate term for what I encountered in terms of convenience and provision for cycling long stretches. *Cycle friendly* is still a long-distance desire. *Cycle considerate* entails the notion of consideration, both in terms of policy as well as in a cultural sense; it triggers *considering* the position of AM in relation to PM.

Furthermore, I have covered a lot of distance in my reflection on cycle touring and commuting. Initially, long-distance cycling would seem to connote sports, making an effort, or maybe going on holiday. It really does not have any initial suggestion of transport or mobility, as PM has. Here again, HM might (literally) pave the way for longer distances cycled. In the wake of pedelecs, other cycles might benefit from better conditions to enable longer-distance travel as well.

Delving deeper into the small world of my commuting route in order to unravel the sensescape of a more or less representative Dutch cycling route, I noticed that the consideration for long-distance cycling is not as well developed as the Dutch cycling reputation would suggest. Especially in terms of the details, it becomes clear that the assemblage of a through-cycle route demonstrates micromanagement and a lot of plans, but the materialization of a culturally sound infrastructure for AM leaves a lot to be desired. Granted, cycle highways and fast tracks are under development in the Netherlands. But the problem lies in the details. The connections, transitions, and beginnings and endings where AM and PM meet illustrate the position of precarious entitlement (Egan and Philbin, 2021) for cyclists: cyclists are not only sidetracked but are also made vulnerable; they require more force and attention and are not taken as seriously as car users. This precariousness might be a starting point when it comes to looking at the power dimensions that emerge from a close, detailed look at long-distance cycling.

All in all, the cycle path trips in this article provide yet another illustration of how planners, policy makers, and infrastructure technicians need to take the down-to-earth, local, and personal experiences of those who follow their designs on a daily basis into account if long-distance cycling is ever going to be a genuinely active and long-distance form of mobility. Even better, it would be worth it to more explicitly invite policy professionals to take their own cycle practices into account. Similar to the examples in the works of van Duppen and Spierings (2013) and Latham and Wood (2015), the experiences and irritations listed here indicate how the sensory and temporal experiences of long-distance cycling, including commuting, require that the inequalities and power dimensions in current long-distance cycling promotion, practices, and plans be addressed. But going even further than just a plea for urban sensescapes, I would argue for a more power-infused analysis where *priority* takes on

a different meaning. What if we reverse priority, or power for that matter, for AM?[18] What if we take a closer look at how in our discourse *slow* and *fast* determine our attitudes towards AM and PM, how for AM long-distance is measured in a different time frame, if only in terms of the element of being human powered and not petroleum driven? What if we came to realize that, as the cycle path experience demonstrates, long-distance cycling has the potential to avoid traffic jams, provide an alternative for bad public transport connections, and save city space for parking? Maybe then it is not "Cyclists dismount" but "Car drivers look for an alternative".[19]

Figure 7: Velomobiles on the road.

Notes

[1] The term *cycle highway* is in development and vividly discussed among practitioners. In sum, *cycle highway* has too strong a connotation with car traffic; *fast track* alone does not cover the subject matter, nor does *through-route*. In any case, "[cycle highway] is a cycle track with little or no traffic lights, and where, upon arriving at junctions, cyclists preferably have the right of way" (cf. Thiemann-Linden and Van Boeckhout (2012)).

[2] Cycling is what most Dutch people do, and what children learn. This also means that most car drivers have cycle experience. But most rides are short (<6 km). So, I have cycled almost as long as I can remember. In the Netherlands, there are 23 million bicycles for 17 million inhabitants—see, for instance, https://www.fietsersbond.nl/ons-werk/mobiliteit/fietsen-cijfers/. This autoethnography just deals with the last 11 years, cycling a velomobile, which is designed for long/er rides.

[3] Also here, language (expressions) illustrates the standing of cycling in different countries and cultures. The use of *slow* in relation to cycling has occurred in different countries at different times. For instance, Switzerland started with the term *Langsamverkehr* ("slow traffic" or "slow travel") in 1999 as a new line of transport policy. However, the term did not meet with success. Swiss agencies translate the term for their international homepages as *human powered mobility* (HPM), which also did not catch on. In British English, the term is used for special purpose bicycles. The term *active mobility* (AM) eventually turned out to be the proper term, which is now, slowly, spreading all over the world (Schindler, Held and Würdemann, 2009)—with thanks to Martin Held for adding this important discourse-analytical issue.

[4] Other trips—for example, with a "normal" bicycle for shopping or short distances, like a majority of the Dutch seem to do—were left out of the analysis for the reason of adhering to the issue of long distance.

[5] For holidays, I use "we", as my partner, Jupp, and I travel together at that time. His velomobile is white, and mine is green (see the picture at the end of this article).

[6] The meaning of signs differs in other countries. A round blue sign with a white bicycle in the Netherlands means "cyclists go on the cycle path". The English (UK) description reads, "Route for use by pedal cycles only", which seems to specify an order derived from some regulation.

[7] This is the year when the *City Nightline* stopped, which at that point in time was the only ongoing/direct European route from Amsterdam with a separate cycle compartment. The Austrian Railways (ÖBB) rekindled international train plus bicycle travel, which has fostered a recent renaissance in European night trains. Currently, 2021, there are plans to again have trains for travel across Europe–if and how cycle compartments will be included is not clear yet. Obviously, it is far more difficult to book passage on a train with velomobiles than with "normal" bicycles, electric or otherwise.

[8] Going north.

[9] The latest news as of May 2021 on LEGO and cycling is that a 10-year-old has designed LEGO cycle paths, and given 10,000 signatures, this idea is set to materialize in LEGO world. However, with LEGO, one would still expect square curves.

[10] To be honest, the March 2020 COVID-19 outbreak was the most important rupture in commuting, marking the end of home/work commuting before my formal retirement in November 2020.

[11] As a child in the 1960s, I remember taking walks along that road on Sundays—a "normal" shared road for all traffic types—while the highway was being built alongside it.

[12] Report Haarlemmermeer, Actualisatie 2020 Verkeersstructuurplan Badhoevedorp, (local community level).

[13] Provincie Noord-Holland (2019) Doorfietsroute N232, Conceptrapport 003366.20190419. R1.01; 19 April 2019. [Goudappel Coffeng]. For an explanation of the term, see also Kennisplatform CROW, referred to as CROW 2015. The report is unfortunately only available in Dutch. Internationally, I could not find any equivalent, only a reference to the enforcement of red light negation as a crime.

[14] Oncoming cars on narrow streets with parked cars are dangerous from one's low position in a velomobile, and oncoming car drivers tend not to look low, as experience has taught me.

[15] The suggestion of smoothness is confusing. It departs from the same desire for speed as cars and therewith misses the point of an assemblage concept (Cox, 2019): speed, comfort, and joy together.

[16] Car drivers do not always "have" priority; they usually just take it.

[17] Additionally, the unwritten rule for cycling side by side in the Netherlands has evolved into the experience that cyclists now tend to consider side-by-side cycling to be a right instead of a courtesy (allowed if not hindering other traffic).

[18] A popular study by Thalia Verkade and Marco te Brömmelstroet (2020), *The Law of the Fastest* (translation IS), convincingly explains how motorized traffic has not always been "the measure of all things", but how this change has occurred only in the last hundred years. As a cyclist, and especially as a long-distance velomobilist, the examples chosen from my cycle diaries broadly illustrate this reversal of discourse. The "reverse" gaze can provide new insight into the dominance of car traffic and the value of passive mobility.

[19] The original title was "cyclists, descend", the direct translation in Dutch. Apparently, in English, cycling language/discourse is heavily influenced by equestrian culture (with thanks to Peter Cox for pointing this out).

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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