

Sophisticated Physical Improvements in Odense

Henrik Lumholdt
City of Odense, Parks and Roads Administration,
Nørregade 36-38, Odense DK 5000 C, Denmark
Email: hlu@odense.dk

Odense – Denmark's National Cycle City

Odense is the third largest town in Denmark with 185,000 inhabitants.

Odense has a long tradition of planning for cyclists. Already back in 1976, the first plan for a coherent bicycle path network was adapted, and subsequently, many paths with either traffic or recreational purposes have been established.

The traffic paths offer good and safe cycling connections between residential and industrial areas, schools, shopping areas, etc., whereas the recreational paths give access to nature and recreational sites.

Today, the bicycle path network in Odense consists of more than 350 km. of bicycle paths. Every year, 3 million DKK (approx. 402.000 Euro) are allocated to expansion of the path network.

Over the last 10 years, the cycle traffic has increased by about 50%, however the curve has flattened out the last couple of years.

At the same time, the number of bicycle accidents has been reduced drastically. In 1988, 98 personal injuries occurred with cyclists involved, and in 1994 the number was down to 76 injuries – a fall of 22% on the municipal roads. On a national level, the fall in injuries had only decreased by 1%.

In January 1999, the Danish Ministry of Traffic nominated Odense as Denmark's National Cycle City. In this connection, over the coming years, Odense will carry out a number of experiments with a view to increasing the share that cycling has of the total traffic. Furthermore, we will improve the safety and security of cyclists.

The homepage – www.cyclecity.dk – has been established, giving updated and detailed information on the development and results of the project.

A common element in all the tests and new ideas that have been implemented is that the status of the bicycle as a means of transport must be heightened. This means that all aspects related to cycling should have a high priority – both on a functional and aesthetic level. People should be proud of cycling. High quality equals status, which again means more cyclists.

Many train stations and other traffic junctions present cyclists with awful conditions. Parking facilities are not readily accessible and are often of such poor standards that only low quality bikes will be parked there. You almost expect your bike to be pushed over, moved or maybe even stolen.

During the last year, Odense has made considerable improvements concerning the accessibility and comfort of cyclists as well as parking facilities for bicycles.

New Cycling Paths in the Town Centre

In 1986, the first traffic plan was prepared for the centre of Odense. The plan contained 2 new cycling routes through the town centre, one on the north-south axis and one east-west. These new routes established quick and safe passages across the pedestrian areas.

In Spring 2000, a new traffic plan replaced the old one. To keep pace with the increase in cycling traffic the new plan introduced an extra north-south bicycle path, and – as something new – a bicycle path around the pedestrian areas. Cyclists will now have quick and easy access to any destination in the town centre.

In the historical part of the town centre, close to the town hall and cathedral, the bicycle paths will be granite paving with beautiful bicycle path symbols also in granite.

Indication of Cycling Routes

In order to make the new routes in the town centre visible for cyclists, a special marking in the form of small brass caps has been designed.

The caps are placed along the bicycle paths, approx. 1 m. from the pavement and at intervals of approx. 2 m. If there is a major change of direction in the route, this will be signalled by a larger cap.

An elaborate design concept lies behind the choice of cycling route marking. There has also been a consumer test to ensure that cyclists understand the marking.

In Autumn 1999, a prototype was produced and set out several places in the centre of the town as a full-scale test, in order to ensure the correct installation and to assess its durability in a winter season.

The test showed good results and approx. 3,000 indication caps are currently being produced in order to visualise the 6 km. long cycling network throughout the centre of the town.

The Municipality of Odense hopes that the Danish Ministry of Traffic will choose this symbol as the standard symbol of cycling paths in the country.

Bicycle Parking

During the last year, two large new bicycle parking lots of a high aesthetic and functional standard have been constructed.

One parking lot offers 400 parking possibilities in close proximity to the pedestrian area. The need for bicycle parking here arose when an educational institution was established nearby. These parking facilities were constructed on a former car park for 12 vehicles. Most of the bicycle lots are roofed. A special lighting with up-lights gives the area a beautiful light setting. A small fountain, nice bollards to sit on in granite together with plants have given this small square a new splendid oasis to the town.

When the bicycle parking lot was opened, a request was made through the local newspaper to find a name for the new square. It is not every day that a bicycle parking lot gets its own name, and in this manner wins the acclaim of the citizens.

The other bicycle parking lot is under construction in what used to be the main train station. A new and bigger commuter centre was built close by – containing bus terminals, the town library, shops, restaurants, cinemas, etc. The need for a large bicycle parking lot arose quickly at this commuting junction.

In Spring this year, the Municipality of Odense carried out an extensive renovation of the former train station. At the same time, a beautiful square has been established in front of the building.

Behind the building, parking facilities for 400 bicycles are available. The parking lot gives direct access to train platforms, regional and city busses as well as bicycle paths in the town centre. A special lock system for each parking lot has been developed to ensure that the bikes cannot be removed from the bicycle stand.

In the basement of the building, 200 parking facilities with extra security will be established. These facilities are for subscribers only and will feature video surveillance, music, luggage lockers, a ticket machine and a tap for thirsty cyclists. Furthermore, there will be a show case, where the town's bicycle shops can promote their products. From the basement, there will be direct access to train platforms and the forecourt.

Inside the building itself there will be an exclusive bicycle shop. Besides sale of bicycles and repair services, the shop will also arrange special events, lectures, exhibitions and so on – all related to cycling.

Close to the old train station, a new office building is under construction. This building will also hold parking facilities for another 500 – 1,000 bikes of the same high quality.

It is no secret that these initiatives have required many negotiations both with municipal and private partners. Promoting, enhancing and making cycling visible on this level has been met with much scepticism.

Traffic Improvements for Cyclists

In many crossroads with traffic lights it seems comical that cyclists have to wait for the green light before they are allowed to turn right. Therefore, Odense has made special short-cuts, allowing cyclists to turn right regardless of the traffic light.

Any cyclist will know the feeling of frustration when the traffic light changes to red just before one reaches the crossing. Linked traffic light systems only apply to cars. Now Odense will launch world news: Linked traffic light systems for cyclists. Special “running” lights have been developed to show the appropriate speed in order to make the green light at the next traffic light. The running lights consist of a row of small bollards with green lights, that indicate the area in which the cyclists should be in order to get the linked traffic light system.

In residential areas where many traffic paths cross the streets lined with houses, the give-way right is reversed so that priority is given to cyclists on the bicycle paths. The paths cross the road on a raised plateau and the maximum speed on the road is set to 30 km/h. Thus, cars must give way to crossing cyclists.

In one-way streets in the town centre, cyclists are allowed to drive in both directions. This practice has been integrated into the new traffic plan for the town centre.

Operative Standards Are Improved

Cyclists should insist on the same high standards on the paths as car drivers have on the roads. In Odense all the main paths are upgraded to top priority level in connection with clearing snow. The municipal road inspectors are obliged to drive through the bicycle path network on bicycle at least once a year.

When major improvements have been carried out on the paths, campaign posters are put up to keep the cyclists informed.

In 1999, Odense launched a contest “Find the worst path in town”. In this humorous and self-critical way, the Parks and Roads Administration received great input as regards priorities for next year’s maintenance of the path network. At the same time, the Parks and Roads Administration had the opportunity to attract attention to the municipal efforts to raise the quality standards of the paths, and to gain insight into which demands citizens could make regarding the paths.

More than 150 proposals came in. The winner of the contest was rewarded with a cycling holiday in Provence, France, and it goes without saying that the worst path was immediately upgraded with new asphalt.