ECF
EUROPEAN CYCLISTS' FEDERATION

Manifesto: Achieving energy independence and affordable transport for all

10 measures to leverage cycling

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Achieving energy independence and affordable transport for all: 10 measures to leverage cycling

The US-Israel war on Iran has aggravated the fossil fuel energy crisis, only four years after it was triggered due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Gas prices are up again, raising household costs everywhere. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has called it the largest energy shock in history. As it will take years to rebuild the destroyed energy infrastructure, the energy crisis will not go away anytime soon, even if hostilities end today.

This new shock has made it painfully clear once again: The European transport sector is still way too dependent on imported oil, despite growing electrification. The only way out of this dependence is to bring fossil fuel consumption down. Against this backdrop, giving hugely expensive fuel tax breaks to car drivers, or air passengers, may temporarily relieve short-term financial pain, but it will not address the root cause of the problem and potentially even make it worse in the medium and long term. On the other hand, investments in sustainable forms of transport, like active mobility or public transport, will address both affordability issues and energy dependence.

Among all the modes of transportation, the bicycle is by far the most energy-efficient: One kilometre travelled by conventional or electric bicycle uses 27 times and 19 times less energy than one kilometre driven by an (electric) car, respectively.[1] The small amount of energy that is used is either purely muscular or a mix of muscular and electric energy - fuel consumption is zero. Thus, every car or van trip that gets substituted by a (cargo) bicycle, reduces individual fuel consumption and makes sure that more fuel is available for industry, agriculture, public transport, emergencies etc.

The potential is huge: 26 % of urban car trips in the EU are within a 5 km range, more than half within 10 km. Collectively in Europe, there are around 100 million urban car trips every single day within that kilometre range.[2] Tens of millions of these trips could be walked, cycled or done by public transport instead. Every bit counts.

What is the impact of shifting from cars to cycling?

Shifting just a part of daily mobility from the car to cycling saves money: Depending on the size of the car, replacing 10 km on 200 workdays a year saves up to €400 - 500 in fuel and maintenance costs annually. Savings are much higher if one or several cars can be replaced completely in a household.

Below we recommend **10 measures** that governments could take in the short-run as well as in the mid-to long run. All levels of government – local, regional, national, European – have to take their responsibility.

[1] Frédéric Héran and Arnaud Sivert: L'amélioration de l'efficacité énergétique des véhicules individuels, 2022
[2] European Commission: New Mobility Patterns in European Cities, 2022.

5 recommended short-term measures

1. "COVID bike-lanes" were taken up in many countries in 2020 and 2021, kick-starting an unprecedented cycle revolution.[3] Enter the "**Resilience bike-lanes**" in 2026. We call upon road authorities to temporarily re-activate the successful COVID strategy of converting road space to cycle lanes and tracks.

2. Adjust **speed limits**. The introduction of 30 km/h speed limits in cities can save over 40% of lives, alongside significant positive effects on the environment, energy consumption and public health, including reduced fuel consumption and increased walking and cycling. Reducing vehicle speeds from 50 km/h to 30 km/h can lead to a 7 % decrease in fuel consumption.[4] Consider 80 km/h on rural roads, and 120 km/h on motorways.

3. Offer **financial support**, also in combination with incentives for scrapping polluting vehicles:
   - bicycle/eBike purchase incentives (for example such as the targeted purchase incentives for households in need and for professionals working in delivery or home care by Nantes Métropole in France)
   - cycle repair vouchers
   - support for social leasing schemes (for example such as the Véligo scheme in the Île de France region in France)
   - bike sharing subscriptions, also in combination with incentives for scrapping polluting vehicles.

   Even small financial incentives can have big impact when it comes to customer purchasing decisions, especially for electric and cargo cycles with higher initial investment costs. Support can also be targeted specifically towards population groups at risk of transport poverty.

4. Implement regular **car-free Sundays**. This could happen in a whole neighbourhood, a district or a city. Many authorities have a wealth of experience with implementing such events. The European Mobility Week delivers the perfect template.

5. Everyone deserves a summer holiday, but in 2026 it should be as low-carbon as possible. Public authorities and tourism agencies should set up **promotional campaigns** to advertise their region as a cycling **tourism destination**. Why not try out EuroVelo, the European long-distance cycle route network, this summer? Rail, bus and ferry operators should expand their bicycle space capacity to make arrival and departure as smooth as possible.

Bringing energy consumption down and reducing Europe's energy dependency from autocratic systems makes sense not only in times of crisis, but also in the long run.

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[3] Ralph Buehler, John Pucher, Marcel Moran, Emmanuel de Lanversin & Rachel Aldred: Cycling in New York, London, Paris, and Berlin before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Sustainable Transport* (2026), posted online April 6, 2026 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/15568318.2026.2649315?needAccess=true

[4] George Yannis, Eva Michelaraki: Effectiveness of 30 km/h speed limit – A literature review, 2025. https://road-safety-charter.ec.europa.eu/system/files/good_practice/supporting_files/sustainability-ImplementationResults-ReviewPaper-Yannis_0.pdf

5 recommended mid-to long-term measures

6. Introduce **bike-leasing in corporate fleet policies** through targeted tax incentives. Existing schemes in Germany and Belgium are hugely popular and speaking to the middle-class, contrary to car leasing which is mostly reserved for higher income groups. These schemes can also be combined with tax-free km-allowances for cycling to and from work, as is the case in Belgium.

7. Public budgets are tight and will continue to be tight everywhere, so Europe should prioritise the kind of investments that deliver high socio-economic impact and European fuel sovereignty. Set aside at least **10% of transport budgets** for **active mobility**. Think in terms of multi-annual, rolling budgets to secure long-term planning and financing.

8. Build **state-of-the-art continuous cycling networks**. At every level: local, regional, national, European. These networks are not planned and built overnight, hence the need for multi-annual budgets. Continuous networks always have a higher impact than isolated, stand-alone projects.[5] **Bicycle parking is also important**, especially in new housing projects, public transport hubs and energy-efficient renovation projects. Bicycle parking and e-mobility charging requirements as stipulated in the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive have to be transposed on time into national law and be rapidly implemented.

9. Set up ambitious **bike-to-school** schemes. Every primary school child in Europe should have the right to learn how to ride safely a bicycle to and from school. It is an investment into a life-long active lifestyle, addressing the many challenges that come with ageing societies.

10. Invest in **human capacity**. At national transport ministries, hundreds of people typically work in road or rail departments, whereas there are often only one or two colleagues working on active mobility. If any at all. Without the experts to plan, implement and monitor policies, nothing of the above will work.

The European dimension

The fossil fuel energy crisis can only be solved if the European Commission coordinates and pushes for measures that truly reduce fossil fuel energy consumption, and are targeted to help the most vulnerable households. This has to be reflected in ongoing negotiations between the EU and Member States on the National Social Climate Plans as well as on the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2028-2034. To hear and fully take into account the voice of local and regional governments as well as civil society will be more important than ever.

The signatories to this manifesto stand ready to help advise with these measures to leverage cycling and create the conditions for European energy independence.

[5] Nicholas N. Ferenchak and Wesley E. Marshall: Beyond Low-Stress Bicycle Lanes: Assessing the Role of Bicycle Network Density in Ridership, 2026. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/03611981261430738

List of co-signatories: