

Careful with the bicycle road

Karin Broer

Outside built-up areas the main rule for bicycle streets applies as well: if the concept is to be effective, there should be more bicycles than cars. This is revealed in a user survey into five 'bicycle roads' of Waterschap Zeeuwse Eilanden.

'Users wrestle with the concept. A bicycle road is and will remain a compromise.'

The bicycle road is actually a bicycle street outside built-up areas, a road for cyclists where cars are guests only. This concept has been implemented in Zeeland on several locations by Waterschap Zeeuwse Eilanden. The design was more or less identical on all sites: a bump of approximately eight centimetres high dividing the road into two narrow lanes. Cars may overtake but the bump in the middle ensures speed adaptations.

Lievens communications bureau investigated what users' opinions of the five bicycle roads are. In general users are not jubilant. They award the concept 5.7 out of ten points, therefore an unsatisfactory result. But as it turns out, there are major differences in the judgements on the five locations. The bicycle road from Middelburg to Groot Abeele as well as the one below the dunes at Dishoek prove to be effective. The Middelburg bicycle road was rated 7.1. Dishoek was not rated as too few people had participated in the survey, but overall impressions are positive. Kees Slabbekoorn of Waterschap: 'This matches what I hear in the field.'

Ratio bicycle-car

The three remaining bicycle roads were therefore rated as unsatisfactory. In all three cases the ratio between bicycles and cars proves to be wrong: there are more cars than bicycles. In the case of the bicycle road at Heinkenszand and Kamperland there are almost twice as many cars as bicycles. Exactly the opposite of the principle known from studies into the bicycle street phenomenon (see www.fietsberaad.nl).

The two Waterschap traffic experts, Kees Slabbekoorn and Annelieke Landré, feel that ratio is to blame.

[foto onderschrift]

The bicycle road from Middelburg to Groot Abeele (left) and the one below the dunes at Dishoek (right) perform well.

It is more difficult to indicate the exact part played by other design components. Landré: 'The fact that a route is long may also affect matters. In that case drivers need to be patient for quite a long period. On the other hand the bicycle road at Middelburg is also quite long, but that is a road with a considerable number of curves. That means that drivers can not overtake since their view is blocked. The design in that case more or less reinforces the relation between drivers and cyclists.'

The situation at the Krabbendijke bicycle road, rated 5.0, was quite different. To the surprise of Waterschap a bus was re-routed, with the result that there were not only large numbers of school children cycling along the bicycle road, but quite regularly buses drove there as well. Quite a number of cars turned out to prefer the bicycle road, in the wake of the buses.

Rather a bicycle path

In general users are therefore highly critical. Does this surprise the traffic experts? Not really. Slabbekoorn: 'Users have trouble embracing the concept. A bicycle road is and will remain a

compromise. Many cyclists say they would rather have a bicycle path. But we know that on roads with bicycle paths the most horrendous accidents occur as well. This study, too, demonstrates that speeds are lower on bicycle roads. That always benefits safety.' As regards objective safety all five bicycle roads are excellent. No accidents have occurred. Slabbekoorn and Landré continue to feel the concept of a bicycle road is valuable. Landré: 'The conclusion is that you have to study even better where to apply it. The ratio cyclists to drivers should be right. We will look more closely into the use. But we will continue to implement this on roads with a specific set of problems.' Those include for instance roads that may for some reason not be closed to car traffic, where there is no room for a bicycle path or where a bicycle path would be overdone. In recreational areas where traffic is only busy in summers, the measure could provide a solution as well. Landré: 'It is not a measure to be applied often. Roads with fifty cars a day do not need to be turned into bicycle roads, but in some situations it really is a good solution.'

Discussions are ongoing about whether to adapt two of the three unsatisfactory bicycle roads, or whether to construct a bike path there instead.

A bicycle road is and will remain a compromise. Just be careful where you use it.

[foto onderschriften]

Roads with fifty cars a day do not need to be turned into bicycle roads.

The bicycle road at Kamperland (top) and at Heinkenszand (bottom) are rated unsatisfactory. There are almost twice as many cars as bicycles there.