



BICYCLE RESEARCH REPORT No. 15

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WERNER BRÖG AND ERHARD ERL: INFLUENCING TRAFFIC BEHAVIOUR BY PUBLIC AWARENESS

Widespread support for discrimination against motor traffic

The Key Facts

A large majority of the public wants to see priority given to encouraging cycling. On the other hand, the so-called "opinion-formers" - the media - consulted in various towns disagree with this. They believe that the public mostly share their own view; that if the interests of cyclists and car-drivers should conflict, cycling should only be encouraged where there will be no drawbacks for the car-driver.

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The Munich research institute Socialdata interviewed people in 17 towns in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands; most of them wanted the bicycle to take priority. In Delft, Holland and Berlin, Germany, more than 90% said that if there were a conflict of interests in town planning they would favour the bicycle, even if this might lead to disadvantages for car-drivers (see Fig 1). For the towns of Troisdorf, Gladbeck and Lunen - all members of the promotional campaign in North-Rhine-Westphalia for cycle-friendly towns - this view was held by 77% of the public, but by only 33% of the local media. In addition 69% of the public thought that local public transport should take priority over cars.

The survey shows that the media have widespread misconceptions of what the public really thinks (see Figs 2 and 3). 5 out of 6 people regard the bicycle as an environment-friendly alternative for urban transport which is worth supporting. The media does not believe that the public holds this positive view (5). I had made similar incorrect estimates about the steps to be taken on "More car parking in town centres" (opposed by 55% of the public, see Fig 6) and "Savings on cycleway construction, to be reallocated to road building" (75% against, see Fig 7).

On one point, however, they were in agreement; 8 out of 10 people, and almost as many of the media, think it is dangerous to cycle in their own town (Fig 8). Both the public and the media underestimate the volume of non-motorized traffic, whereas private motoring and local public transport were considerably overestimated (Fig 9).

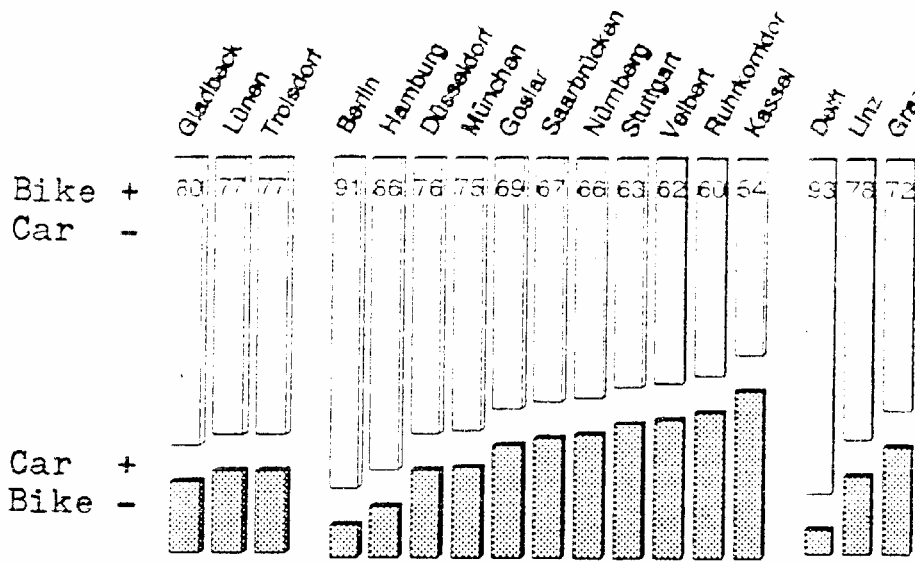


Subjective factors such as the local "municipal climate" are at least equally as important for cycle use as the cycling infrastructure or "system-determined factors". This means that changes in behaviour can be brought about by measures which affect opinions and subjective perceptions just as much as by spending on better facilities. Public relations work should therefore be an integral part of traffic planning and policy. The authors point out that the positive features of the bicycle have all been accepted; it is environment-friendly, relieve congestion in town centres and is suitable for town traffic. They recommend using these arguments as well as drawing attention to the negative consequences of private motoring and the misinformation put about by the media.

Title of Paper "Influencing Behaviour by Public Awareness, as illustrated by the Encouragement of Cycling", by Werner Brög and Erhard Erl, Paper read to the seminar on "Environmental Pollution-caused by Traffic" held by UTECH 91 in Berlin

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Fig. 1: Conflicts in Traffic Planning



- * In the event of a conflict of planning interests the majority of Germans would opt for a solution which favoured the bicycle.
- * Any disadvantages for the motor car would not dissuade them from this "preference."
- * This also applies to the towns outside Germany

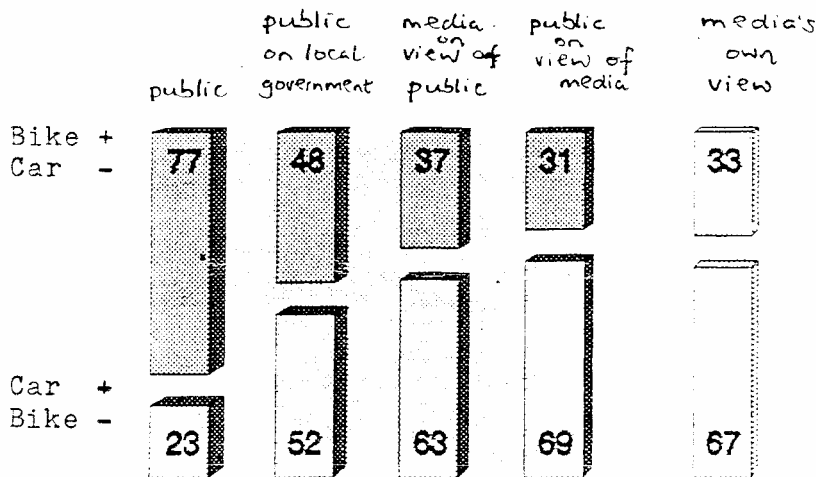


Fig 2

In one of the three towns mentioned, 3 out of 4 people (72%) thought that if there were a planning conflict in their town between bicycle and car, the bicycle should have priority, even if this led to disadvantages for the car-drivers. In the media of this town the proportion of pro-cyclists is smaller (33%). The media attribute their own view to the people of the town. On the other hand the people are, on the whole, pleased with the attitude of their representatives in local government.

However, because the media are more articulate and their voice is heard more often, their influence on general attitudes is overestimated, so that the public assume that the local climate of opinion is more car-friendly than is in fact the case.

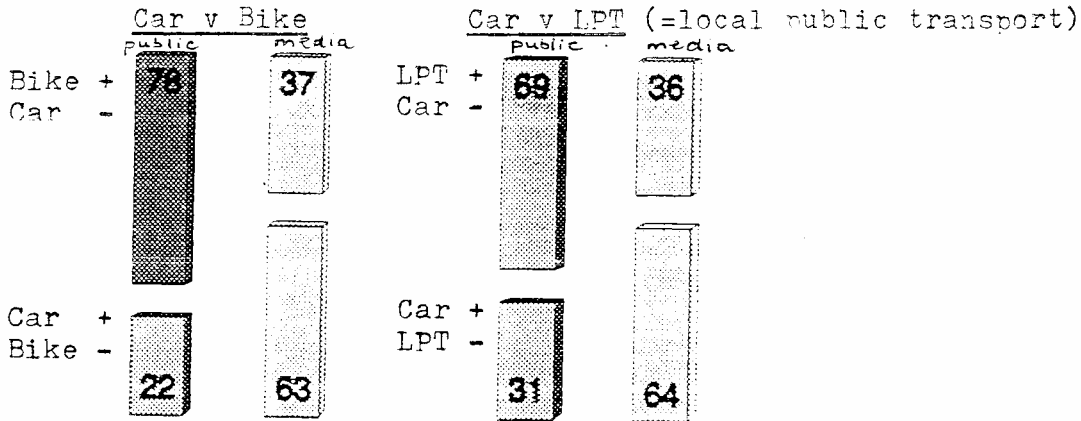
Car/Cycle Conflicts in Traffic Planning



Thus the results of public surveys on mobility often contradict the expectations of many people in the media. The latter then like to explain away the discrepancy between their expectations and the findings of the survey as methodological weaknesses. They claim that the public did not give their real opinion at all - they only said what they thought was expected of them.

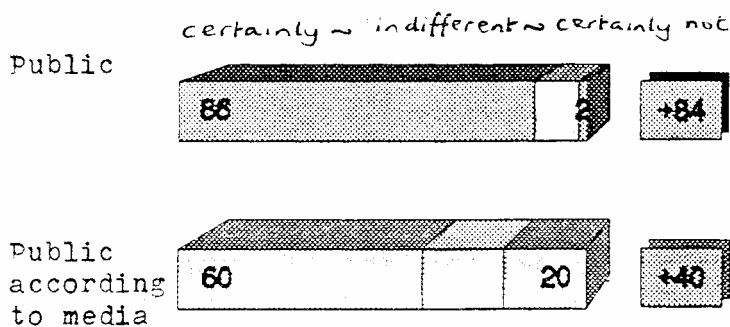


Fig 3: Conflicts in Traffic Planning



- * In the event of a planning conflict between bicycle and car 78% would welcome a solution favouring the bicycle, even at the expense of the car.
- * The media, however, had a different assessment of public opinion; they believe that the car would be preferred.
- * The same trend would apply to any conflict between public and private transport.

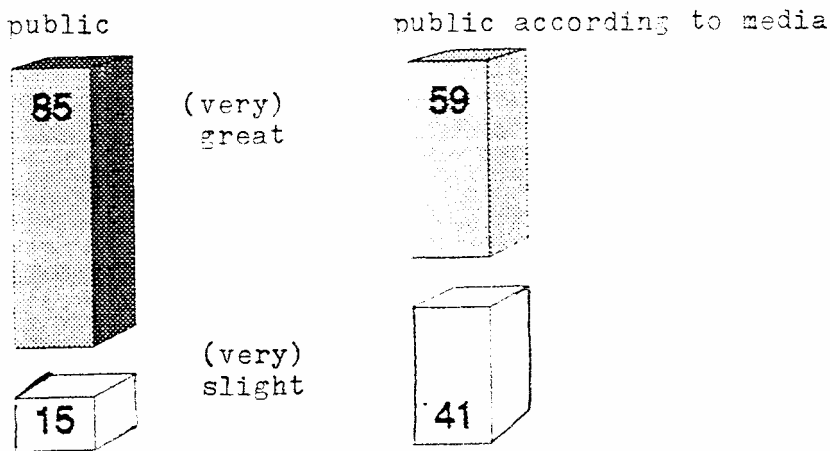
Fig 4: Plans for the Future: extensions to the cycle infrastructure



- * Six out of seven people called for more money to be spent on extending the cycleway network. Only one in fifty rejected this, giving an approval index of +84 (86-2).
- * This positive approach by the public to the encouragement of cycling is significantly underestimated by the media.

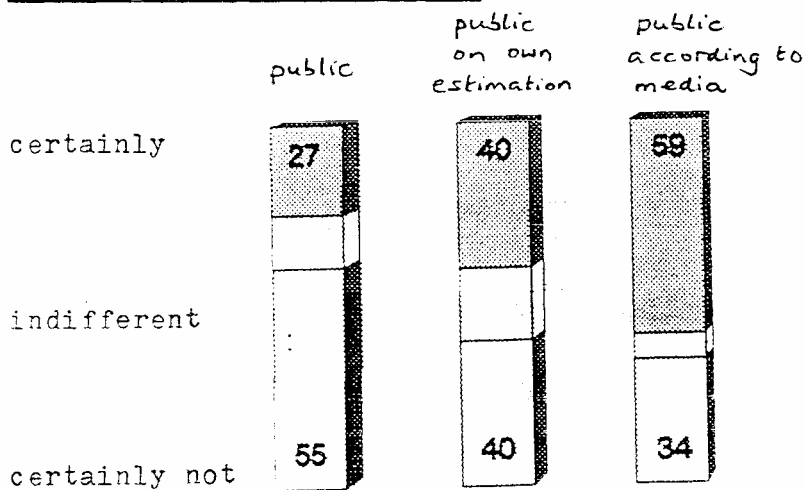


Fig 5: Local Significance of Cycling



- * Five out of six people regard the bicycle as an environment-friendly, alternative for urban transport which is worth supporting.
- * Again, despite this very positive assessment of the bicycle as an everyday means of transport, the media refuses to attribute it to the public.

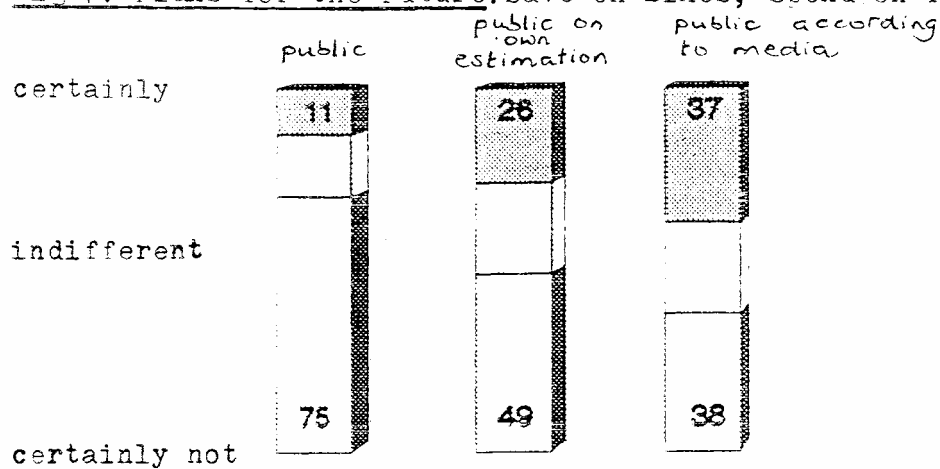
Fig 6: Plans for the Future - car parking in town centres



- * These contrary views also apply to the provision of more car parking spaces in the city centre.
- * True public opinion and the media's estimation of it are diametrically opposed to each other. The public's own estimation of its opinion lies midway between the two.



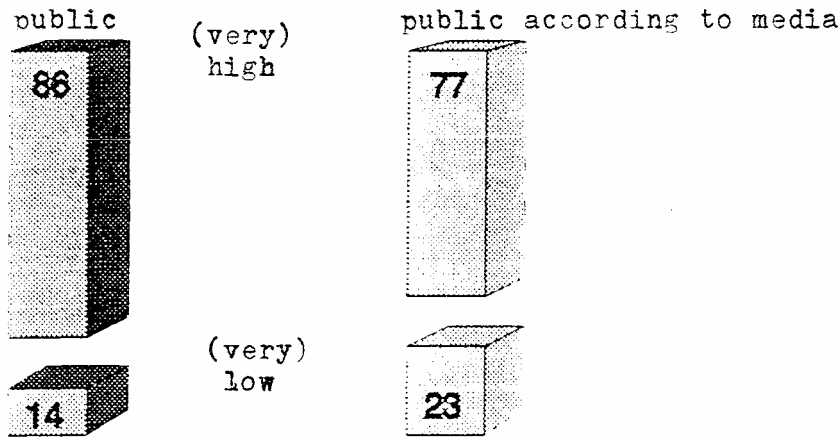
Fig 7: Plans for the Future: Save on Bikes, spend on roads.



The comparison of true public opinion and the public's own estimation of it with that of the media shows a clear trend: The media assume public opinion to be considerably more car-friendly than it really is; the public's own estimation lies between the two.

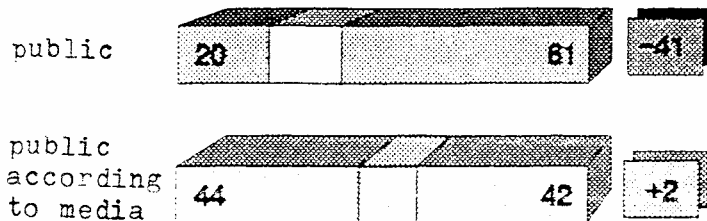


Fig 8: Cycling: the Risk of Accidents



- * Eight out of ten people think that it is dangerous to ride a bicycle in their town.
- * The media's assessment of public opinion is relatively similar. According to the media, 77% of people thought the risk of a cycle accident was either "high" or "very high".

Plans for the Future: Encouraging the Use of Private Motor Transport
certainly ~ indifferent ~ certainly not

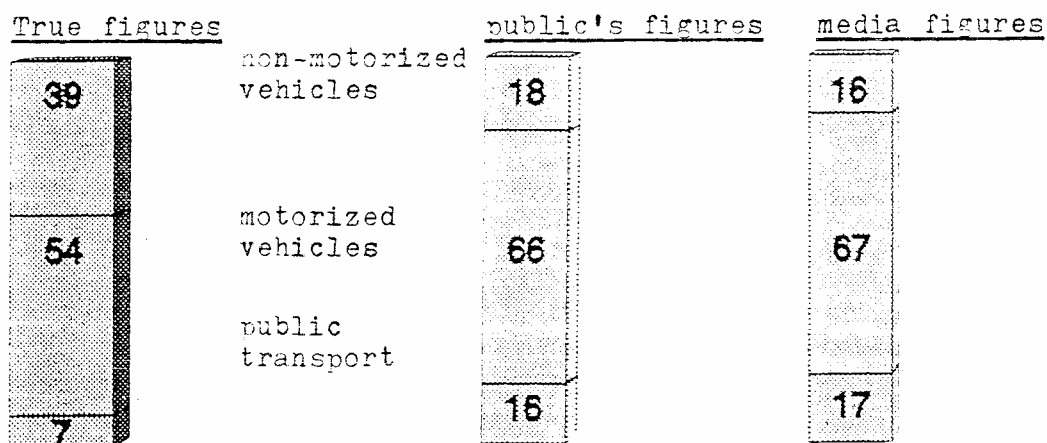


- * A majority of people rejected the idea of encouraging private motor transport (cars and motorized two-wheelers) even if this did not reduce spending on other transport modes. (Approval index -41, based on 20-61).
- * The media, on the other hand, assume the public would approve of the idea, though only by a narrow majority.



Fig 9: Everyday mobility: everyone has something to say, but few know the facts.

Choice of Transport Mode



- * The real choice of transport mode in the three sample towns comprises 24% footways, 15% cycleway network (=39% non-motorized vehicles); 54% motorized private transport (includes motorized two-wheelers and cars with driver and passengers) and 7% public transport.
- * The estimates of the public and the media for choice of transport mode are very similar; non-motorized transport is significantly underestimated, whereas motorized private and public transport are significantly over-estimated.