

Boris bike schemes 'save lives'

'Boris bike' type scheme save lives in the long run, according to a study that has pitted the risks of accidents and pollution against the health benefits.



Are bike hire scheme good for our health? Shopper Samantha Brown last week demonstrated their dangers - but overall they appear to benefit us Photo: PHOTOSHOT



By [Stephen Adams \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/stephen-adams/\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/stephen-adams/) , Medical Correspondent

6:30AM BST 05 Aug 2011

The study, published today in the *British Medical Journal*, looked at the likely effects on 25,000 people, who are thought to have switched from car to bike commuting after such a scheme was introduced in Barcelona in March 2007.

Complex modelling estimated that the health boost they received would lead to 12.46 lives being saved every year, thanks to lower numbers of heart attacks, strokes and other problems.

By comparison, the estimated number of lives lost annually due to increase exposure to pollution and traffic accidents was tiny.

Just one more life every eight years would be lost from pollution (0.13 per year) and one every 33 years from traffic accidents (0.03pa).

The researchers, from the Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology in Barcelona, concluded that the city's bike scheme saved over 12 lives a year.

[Bicycle helmets should not be compulsory, say doctors \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/8669773/Bicycle-helmets-should-not-be-compulsory-say-doctors.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/8669773/Bicycle-helmets-should-not-be-compulsory-say-doctors.html)

The benefits from the Barclays Cycle Hire scheme could be even greater.

It has almost 129,000 members, most of whom are regular users. Statistics show members take three to four bike journeys a week on average.

However, it is likely fewer have swapped car for bike than in Barcelona.

Most probably swapped from public transport, which is healthier than going by car because it involves some walking.

Hence, although the absolute numbers of deaths avoided per year is probably greater in London, chances are that the average health impact on an individual switcher is less impressive than in the Spanish city.

A Transport for London spokesman welcomed the study.

She said: "Londoners have embraced Barclays Cycle Hire since we launched the scheme just over one year ago.

"So far our users have made over six million hires and make on average 20,000 cycle journeys every weekday. The bikes have transformed the way people make short trips around the capital."

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2011