

Bicycling in Bedford-Stuyvesant:

A Report on Cycling and Driving Behaviors



A Neighborhood Report by the Brooklyn District Public Health Office, the Injury Epidemiology Unit and the Built Environment Program



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Key Findings

1. There are many cyclists in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Most cycle as a means of transportation.

- More than 2,400 cyclists rode through the intersections studied during 40 hours of observation, an average of more than one cyclist each minute.
- Almost 2 in 3 surveyed (n=324) were commuting to work, school or elsewhere, and 1 in 3 was riding for exercise or leisure.

2. Most cyclists are adult men, live in or near Bedford-Stuyvesant, and report being healthy.

- Almost all (96%) observed were adults and most (80%) were male.
- 7 in 10 surveyed lived in North and Central Brooklyn.
- 7 in 10 surveyed reported excellent or very good overall health.
- 4 in 10 surveyed were overweight or obese.

3. Most cyclists ride in bike lanes, and almost all prefer to ride on streets with bike lanes.

- 9 in 10 observed rode primarily within bike lanes and painted buffers.
- Almost all (95%) surveyed preferred to ride on streets with bike lanes.
- When asked what factors would encourage them to use bikes more, 37% cited having fewer vehicles driving and stopping in bike lanes, and 34% cited having more bike lanes.

4. Motorists drive and park in bike lanes, creating unsafe cycling conditions. Cyclists, too, engage in unsafe behaviors; most do not wear helmets and some bike against the flow of traffic.

- 3 in 4 surveyed cyclists reported feeling unsafe riding on New York City streets, and more than 1 in 4 reported a crash with a motor vehicle in the past three years.
- 1 in 10 vehicles drove in the bike lane or buffer, and on average, a parked or idling vehicle blocked the bike lane for six minutes per hour (10%).
- 7 in 10 cyclists were not wearing helmets, and almost 1 in 5 biked against the flow of traffic.

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Editorial

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This Report

Regular physical activity, such as brisk walking and bicycling, is an important part of a healthy lifestyle and can help prevent obesity and chronic diseases. Three in ten (30%) adults in North and Central Brooklyn report not participating in any physical activity over the last 30 days, according to 2008 data from the New York City Health Department. Adult rates of obesity and diabetes are higher in North and Central Brooklyn than in the city overall; 31% of adults in those areas are obese, compared with 23% of New York City adults, and 15% report having diabetes, compared with 10% of adults citywide.¹

Cycling provides an opportunity to integrate physical activity into daily routines. People bicycle for many reasons: exercise, leisure, commuting to school or work, or running errands. New Yorkers who walk or bike to routine destinations report better overall health and lower levels of mental distress.²

New York City's bicycle lane network has grown dramatically in recent years—since 2006, more than 200 miles of bike lanes have been added, nearly doubling the citywide network. Data collected by the Department of Transportation reveal that from 2000 to 2009, commuting by bicycle to lower Manhattan has increased by 221%,³ yet little is known about cycling in other parts of the city.

Through its Brooklyn District Public Health Office, the Health Department conducted research in Bedford-Stuyvesant during the summer of 2009 to better characterize cyclists, their attitudes and behaviors and the behavior of motorists. This report describes the study findings and provides recommendations and resources to promote bicycling and improve safety for all who use New York City roadways.

Study Methods

The research included both an observational study and a survey of cyclists. The observational study sites covered four Bedford-Stuyvesant city blocks, each with a bicycle lane. Sites were chosen according to injury rates, street characteristics, traffic flow and type of bicycle lane. Two sites have a bike lane and a painted buffer (DeKalb Avenue/Throop Avenue and Bedford Avenue/Fulton Avenue) and two sites have a bike lane without a painted buffer (Tompkins Avenue/Putnam Avenue and Franklin Avenue/Myrtle Avenue). At each site, two video cameras recorded traffic flow (one placed 30 feet ahead of the intersection following the flow of traffic and the other at the beginning of the next intersection, against the flow of traffic) during commuting times on two weekday mornings (7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.), two afternoons (4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.), and on one Saturday (10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.) for a total of 10 hours per site. Tapes were reviewed by research assistants who coded and entered the observed data.

In addition, cyclists were surveyed at the four Bedford-Stuyvesant study sites or adjacent blocks (marked by signs and traffic cones). All cyclists passing through the area were asked to participate in the survey. Water bottles and bike maps were offered as incentives. Of the 777 cyclists approached, 324 (42%) participated.

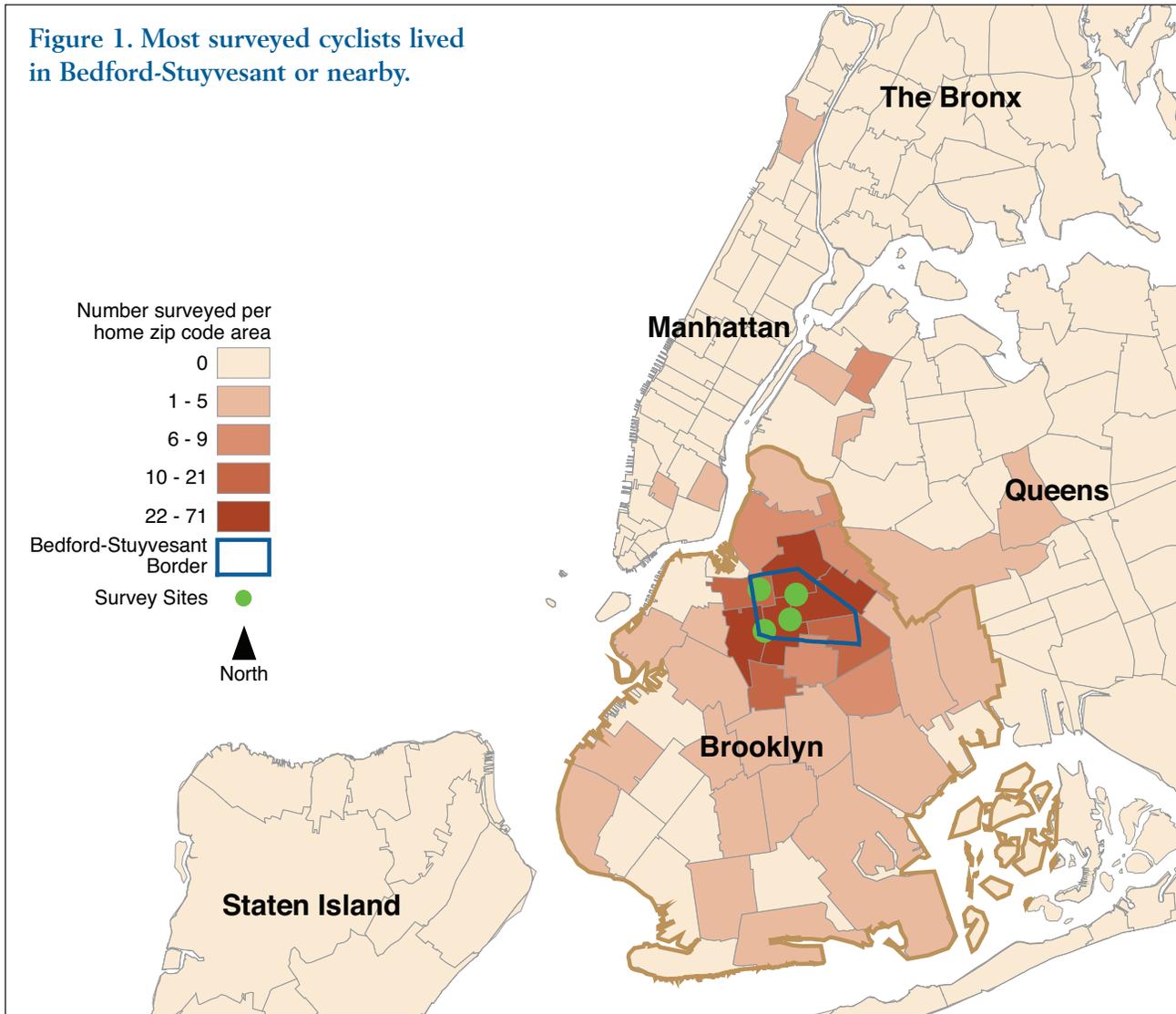
The study methods have several limitations. Since drivers and cyclists were observed during certain times and at specific sites only, their behaviors may not apply to other time periods or sites. Also, since cyclists were surveyed only on streets with bike lanes and the participation rate was low, responses may not be representative of all people who bike in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Despite such limitations, these data help illuminate cycling-related issues in New York City.

1. There are many cyclists in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Most cycle as a means of transportation.

During the 40 recorded hours (10 hours per intersection), more than 2,400 cyclists rode through the four study areas. On average, more than one cyclist was observed per minute at each intersection; the busiest was Bedford/Fulton Avenues (**Table 1**). More cyclists were observed during the afternoon commute than during the morning or on the weekend. Of those surveyed, 65% reported they cycled to get to work, school or elsewhere, 21% for exercise and 14% for leisure. In addition, 65% reported cycling for 30 minutes or more five or more days in the past week.

Table 1. Cycling is common in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

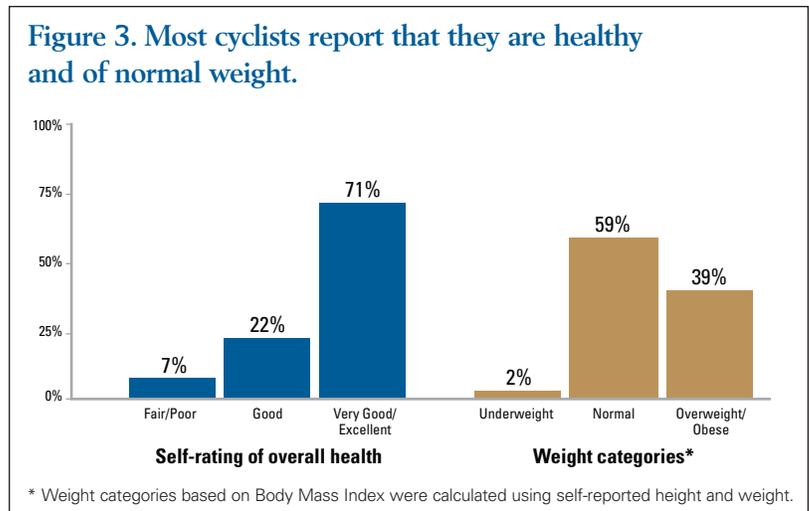
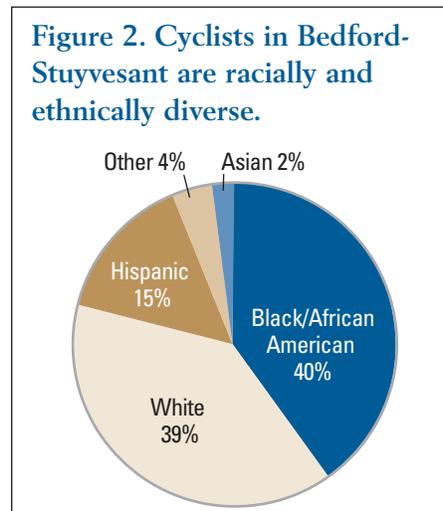
Cyclist Data	Intersection				
	Tompkins/ Putnam	Franklin/ Myrtle	DeKalb/ Throop	Bedford/ Fulton	Total
Number of cyclists observed	427	675	560	799	2,461
Average number of cyclists (per hour)	43	68	56	80	62



2. Most cyclists are adult men, live in or near Bedford-Stuyvesant, and report being healthy.

Almost all (96%) the cyclists observed on the roads in Bedford-Stuyvesant were adults; 80% were male. Of those surveyed, 69% lived in North and Central Brooklyn neighborhoods (**Figure 1**), and 52% were older than 35.

Of the cyclists surveyed, 40% reported being black or African-American, 39% white, 15% Hispanic and 2% Asian (**Figure 2**). When asked about their health, 71% said their overall health was very good or excellent; 39% were either overweight or obese (**Figure 3**). By contrast, only 40% of North and Central Brooklyn adults report very good or excellent health and 63% are overweight or obese.¹



3. Most cyclists ride in bike lanes, and almost all prefer to ride on streets with bike lanes.

Most (89%) of the observed cyclists rode primarily in the bike or buffer lane. When asked about road preference, 95% preferred roads with bike lanes and 60% preferred streets with bike lanes that include painted buffers (**Figure 4**).

When presented with a list and asked what changes would further encourage bike use, 37% of cyclists chose “fewer vehicles driving or stopping in bike lanes,” and 34% chose “more bike lanes on streets” (**Table 2**).

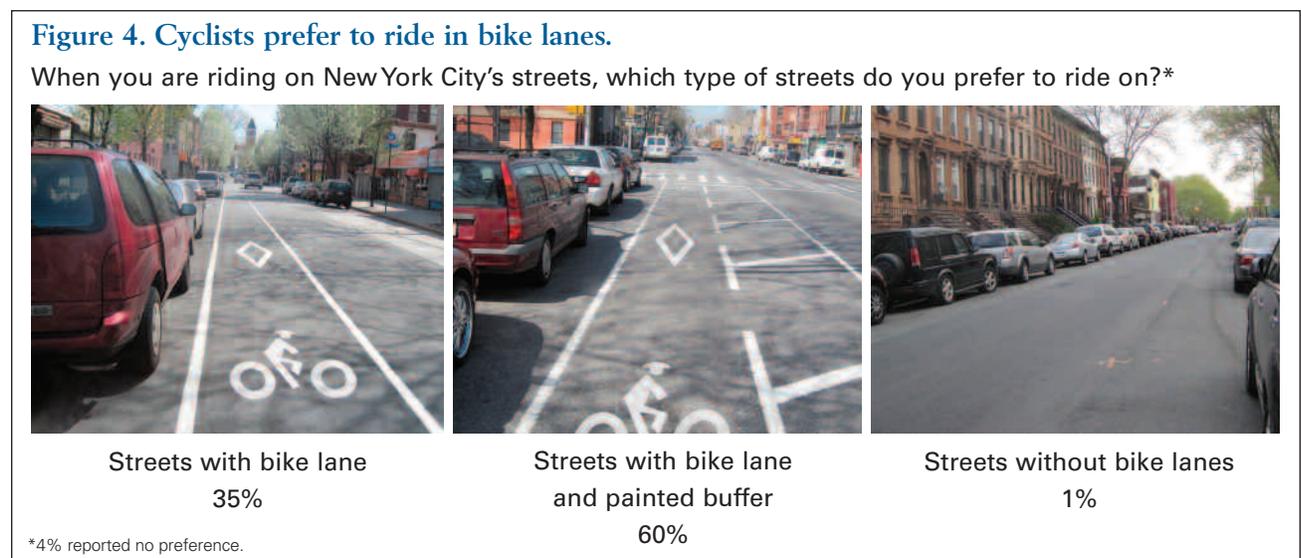


Table 2. Cyclists report that fewer vehicles in bike lanes and more bike lanes would encourage more cycling.

Type of change that would most encourage you to bike more in NYC	Percentage
Fewer vehicles driving or stopping in bike lanes	37%
More bike lanes on streets	34%
Road surface improvements	13%
Fewer speeding vehicles	6%
More parking for bicycles	6%
Other	3%

4. Motorists drive and park in bike lanes, creating unsafe cycling conditions. Cyclists, too, engage in unsafe behaviors; most do not wear helmets and some bike against the flow of traffic.

Most (74%) cyclists reported feeling unsafe while riding on city streets, and 27% reported having had a crash with a motor vehicle within the last three years.

Motorists were observed driving and parking in bike lanes. Both at intersections and along city blocks, 10% of vehicles drove in the bike lane or buffer. Even after vehicles that were traveling in the lanes to park or to avoid an obstacle are excluded, more than one vehicle was observed traveling in the bike or buffer lane every two minutes. The bike lane was also blocked by a parked or idling vehicle for an average of six minutes per hour (10%).

Cyclists were also observed engaging in unsafe behaviors; 18% biked against the flow of traffic (on average, one cyclist every 10 minutes) and 71% cyclists failed to wear helmets (**Table 3**).



Table 3. Most cyclists in Bedford-Stuyvesant do not wear helmets.

Cyclist Characteristics	Percentage Not Wearing Helmets
Race/Ethnicity	
Hispanic	97%
Black/African-American	92%
White	45%
Gender	
Male	78%
Female	42%
Total	71%

Recommendations

All New York City residents:

- Make physical activity part of your daily routine. Adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on five or more days per week to improve and maintain their health. More physical activity is even better, particularly for weight control. Children and adolescents should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day.
- If you are not currently physically active, increase your activity level gradually. Find a buddy or partner to walk or bike with you.
- Take advantage of opportunities to include physical activity in your everyday routine:
 - Walk or bike to work, school or during errands.
 - Get off the bus or subway one or two stops early, and walk or bike the rest of the way.

Motorists:

- Drive safely—follow the rules of the road and observe speed limits. It is illegal to drive faster than 30 miles per hour in New York City unless a higher speed limit is posted.
- Driving or stopping in bike lanes is also illegal, except to park or avoid an obstacle.
- Eliminate distractions (never talk or text on a cell phone while driving) and always be on the lookout for cyclists and pedestrians.

Cyclists:

- Bike safely—follow the rules of the road (see Resources).
- Always ride with the direction of traffic. Cyclists older than age 12 years are required to stay off sidewalks.
- You must have a bell (or horn), reflectors and (if traveling after dusk) front and rear lights.
- Helmets are required by law for cyclists younger than 14 and are strongly recommended for all cyclists.
- Always yield to pedestrians.
- Ride in bike lanes when available.

Community groups and elected officials:

- Advocate for safe neighborhoods that promote physical activity. See recommended strategies in the New York City Active Design Guidelines (see Resources).
- Support efforts for safer streets including roadway modifications. Changes such as interconnected bikeways and enhanced pedestrian pathways that provide separation from motor vehicles encourage cycling and walking.

Employers and building managers:

- Encourage employees to bike to work by providing secure indoor bicycle parking according to the Bicycle Access to Office Buildings Law (visit nyc.gov/bikes).
- Implement building designs found in the New York City Active Design Guidelines (see Resources) and provide additional support for physical activity, such as showers at worksites, stair access and posting signs to encourage stairway use, and providing other information on opportunities to be physically active.

References

1. New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Community Health Survey. Available at: nyc.gov/health/epiquery Accessed April 5, 2010.
2. New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Slopen M, Olson C, Kerker B. Physical Activity in New York City: New Yorkers Can Easily Integrate Exercise into Their Daily Routine. Vital Signs. 2009; 8:1-4.
3. New York City Department of Transportation. 2009 Commuter Cycling Indicator. Available at: nyc.gov/html/dot/html/bicyclists/bikemain.shtml. Accessed April 5, 2010.

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Brooklyn District Public Health Office

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

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Resources

NYC Cycling Map and Information

The free New York City bike map provides information on all bike paths, lanes and routes. The NYC Cycling Map is available at bike shops or by calling 311. Additional city cycling information is available by visiting:

nyc.gov/bikes

Ride the City

Ride the City is a website that helps cyclists find a safe route to their destination.

ridethecity.com/

Biking Rules

Biking Rules is a new “street code” for city cyclists developed by the advocacy group Transportation Alternatives.

Tel. (212) 629-8080

bikingrules.org/

transalt.org/

Bike New York

Bike New York organizes rides, offers free classes to the public, and develops customized bicycle safety and education programs for children and adults.

Tel. (212) 932-2453

bikenewyork.org/

Recycle-a-Bicycle

Recycle-a-Bicycle is a youth training and environmental education initiative that has taken root in New York City public schools and after-school programs. This initiative promotes everyday bicycle use and encourages participants to learn bicycle mechanics.

Tel. (718) 858-2972

recycleabicycle.org/

Active Design Guidelines

The Active Design Guidelines, developed through a partnership involving City agencies, private-sector architects and academics, provide strategies for creating healthier buildings, streets, and urban spaces.

nyc.gov/adg

Neighborhood Reports

To help reduce health disparities and improve the health of all New Yorkers, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) established three District Public Health Offices in 2003. These offices target public health efforts and resources to New York City neighborhoods with the highest rates of illness and premature death — the South Bronx, East and Central Harlem, and North and Central Brooklyn.

This neighborhood report was prepared by the Brooklyn District Public Health Office. We hope this report fosters dialogue and collaboration among our many partners, including other city agencies, community-based organizations, hospitals and clinics, businesses, elected officials, and, most important, the New Yorkers who live and work in Brooklyn.

For more information on the District Public Health Offices: nyc.gov/health/dpho