

**Dutch Designs for  
a Cycling Country**  
Daan Zandbelt &  
Mike Emmerik

## **DUTCH DESIGNS FOR A CYCLING COUNTRY**

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The growing interest in liveable, healthy and competitive cities generates an increasing attention to the use of bikes in urban areas. The Netherlands can be seen as one of the major cycling countries in the world, and the Dutch central government, local municipalities, engineers and architects are developing policies and projects that are on the forefront of stimulating and facilitating cycling in cities. Nevertheless, we see new issues arising that have not been investigated yet – especially in a spatial sense. Examples range from the appearance of bicycle traffic jams during rush hour to dangerous situations that emerge due to different speeds in bike lanes or the increasing negative impact of bicycle parking on public space. This raises the question of which spatial measures we can take to keep our cities and villages attractive for cycling in the long run. In other words: How do we prevent the bicycle from becoming a victim of its own success?

In order to explore these issues, the Dutch Board of Government Advisors (College van Rijksadviseurs) has initiated the project 'Dutch Designs for Cycling Country' (in Dutch: Ontwerpen aan Nederland Fietsland), in which design thinking is applied to a number of specific issues in the Netherlands' four largest cities. Each city was linked to an urban designer who was given the assignment to research the future of cycling through a specific thematic perspective. PosadMaxwan, for example, worked on cycling in Utrecht and the interaction between cyclists and pedestrians in the busy inner city. Artgineering investigated how infrastructural barriers in the North of Rotterdam can be overcome and how connections with the landscape and adjacent urban areas can be improved. De Urbanisten worked in Amsterdam on their vision of the bicycle neighbourhood of the future, with the new Havenstad district as a case study. Finally, MUST explored how to deal with the increasing number of bicycles in The Hague's busy inner city.

In anticipation of the forthcoming publication of the study, we are presenting four observations, illustrated with the work of one of the offices involved. The studies do not provide a perfect answer, but can be seen as a first step towards an urban future for the bicycle. The outcomes encourage people to come up with new ideas, experiments and projects that will help keep our cities attractive for cycling.

## **1. Fast & Beautiful: Create hierarchy and differentiation**

There are many different types of cyclists, who all have their own characteristics and preferences. Some people want to reach their destination as soon as possible, while others want to quietly enjoy

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the city or the landscape. At the same time, we also see a rapid increase in the diversity of types of bicycles: the standard city bike, the e-bike and the cargo or transport bike are increasingly dominating the streets. This diversity of both cyclists and bicycles illustrates that there is no such thing as the ideal cycle path.

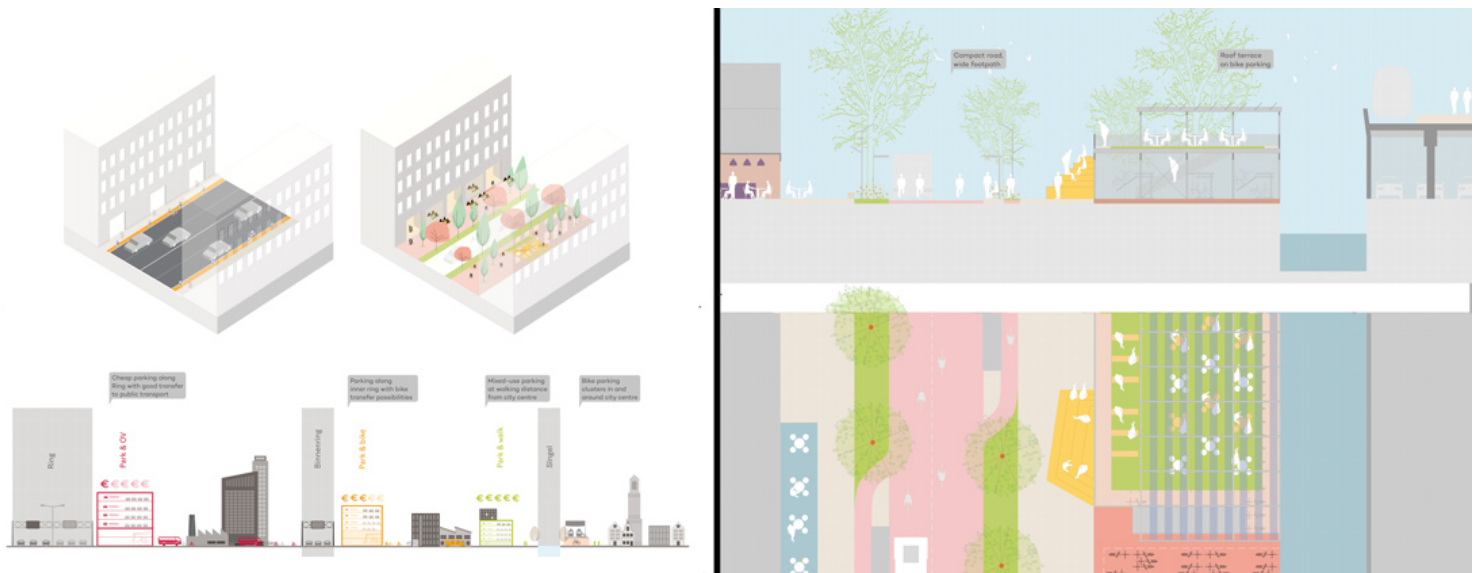
There is a need for different routes for different target groups. Therefore, it is crucial to create hierarchy in the mobility network and differentiate the mix of modalities per road. Consider urban qualities and functions when designing routes. Speed can be a decisive factor on certain roads, while interaction and spatial quality can be more important in other places. Also pay attention to mixing different types of transport. In some places it's better to design pedestrian areas where cyclists are a guest, while other locations ask for bicycle streets (with limited use of the car) or for the classic street where car traffic is dominant.



**Part of a study conducted by [Must Urbanism](#) for The Hague. In this scenario, the Prinsegracht is transformed into a lane with public transport, wide cycling paths and plenty of space for pedestrians and greenery. Cars will have to use the parallel streets that they will share with cyclists and where the speed limit is 30 km/h.**

## 2. Quality of life tops accessibility or: Make space great again

Dutch cities are getting ever more crowded. This requires clear choices about the use and design of public spaces. In the past, infrastructural interventions were dominant and generally aimed at efficiency of traffic flows. Now, quality of city life and the quality of public space need to be centerstage. Encouraging cycling is an important strategy for this, but not the only one. Also, the use of bicycles can reach its limits, especially when it comes to the spatial impact of parking. It is therefore important to look for ways to remove parked bicycles from the streets in busy areas. In case of a conflict, always choose to create more space for pedestrians and restrict bicycle use. Invest simultaneously in the development of Park+Bike and Bike+Walk concepts.



**A selection of images from the study by [PosadMaxwan](#) for Utrecht. The office argues for the creation of attractive concentrated bicycle parking around the historic city center, in order to keep the streets of the busy inner-city free of bikes and pleasant for pedestrians. As a consequence, the last part of a journey to the city center will have to be on foot.**

## 3. Create attractive and comfortable regional cycling routes

The increased popularity of the E-bike and the Speed Pedelec, makes the bicycle an attractive

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alternative to the car, especially at distances up to 15 kilometers. It is therefore worthwhile to invest in high-quality, attractive and comfortable routes between urbanized areas. When doing so, specific attention must be paid to the fringes of the city and peri-urban regions, where infrastructural barriers such as railways, motorways and waterways have to be overcome. In these cases, big gestures are sometimes required. An interesting notion is that barriers also help to create effective parallel routes. Strike a balance between beautiful and fast. Design both speed and experience coherently: How do we get from A to B quickly in the most pleasurable manner? Offer a range of routes: some focused on speed, while the others are scenic and socially safe. Create characteristic, recognizable routes that are in a logical place, with attention to variety and existing (spatial) qualities. Pay attention to ecological structures, economy, quality of life, recreation and social safety.

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**These images are part of a study by [Artgineering](#) for the northern edge of Rotterdam, where cycling paths are squeezed between the bigger infrastructures, creating illogical and unattractive routes. The office proposes a series of interventions that could improve the connectivity while simultaneously creating unique attractive experiences.**

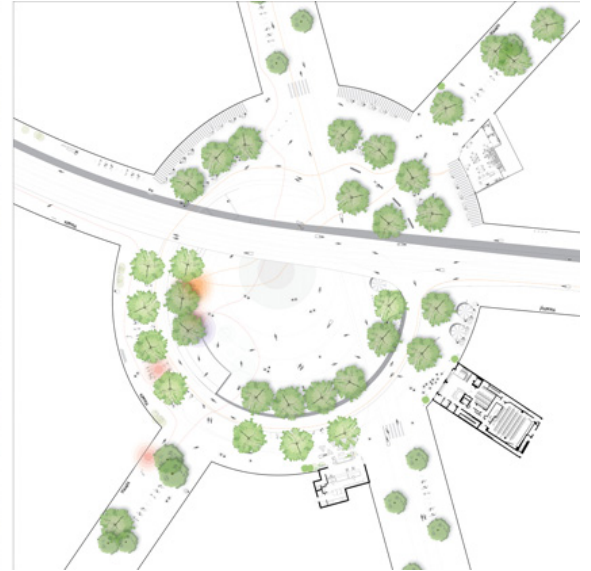
## **4. Put cyclists and pedestrians at the heart of urban (re)developments**

The construction or redevelopment of new urban areas is the perfect opportunity to encourage active forms of transportation. Yet, traffic design is still predominantly car-based. We need new urban models that are dedicated to cyclists and pedestrians. It is important to design sufficient (indoor) parking spaces for bicycles and to make neighbourhoods as car-free as possible. This creates more room for urban life and nature. Make the bicycle an attractive option for daily commutes by building houses within cycling distance of the main economic centers, schools and other facilities, and by investing in good, attractive cycling routes. Ensure a good connection to high-quality public transport for longer distances, and encourage urban distribution by bicycle as part of the urban plan.

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**A selection of images made by [De Urbanisten](#) for the Amsterdam expansion District Haven Stad, in the hypothetical scenario that the whole district would be designed for bicycle use only. It shows what needs to be done to facilitate the cyclist to the fullest and the opportunities and qualities that arise when not designing with the car as a dominant factor.**

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