


Commentary

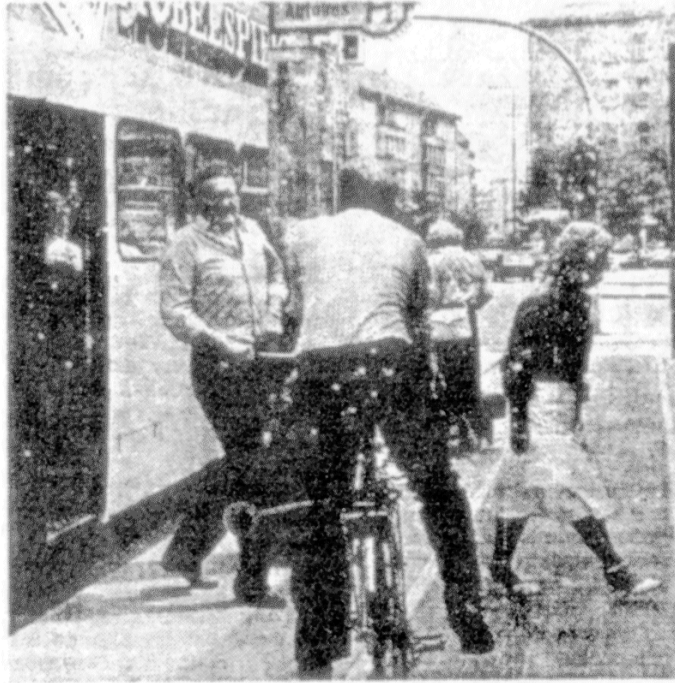
Human Guinea Pigs

About the results of the sidepath study

For years, side guards have been requested, to reduce the toll of fatal crashes involving large trucks turning right. Several bicyclists had to be killed before relief of this problem was achieved. For years also, environmentalists and bicycling advocacy organizations have campaigned for simple bike lanes on the street like those in Holland, and traffic calming, instead of expensive sidepaths. There was no response to this demand as long as it was not scientifically proven that sidepaths also can be dangerous. Why should politicians bother? They drive through the neighborhood in a Mercedes with a chauffeur; they only throw a leg over a bicycle when on vacation on Sylt, or when the press needs photos.

The elusive proof that faulty street design was being pursued was purchased only with bicyclists' blood, a political approach that serves the purpose of statistics and not of people. The 520 kilometers of sidepaths do not make Berlin more bicycle-friendly. Bicyclists can not defend themselves against sidepaths, which, in part, are senseless and life-threatening. Bicyclists are even required by law to ride on them, no matter whether they are risking their lives. The motto of sidepath builders still reads: if you  a bicycle, it's your own fault.

Michael Ringelsap



Bicycling in Berlin can be not entirely free of danger (photo: Vbl)

Bicyclists reject sidepaths

Police study documents that the number of crashes increases.

"The traffic law is not made for bicyclists." So says Stefan Lieb, of the "Grüne Radler Berlin". Senseless provisions, such as the requirement to ride as far right as possible and the prohibition against riding side by side, allow motorists to travel freely, but endanger bicyclists.

Precisely by riding side by side, bicyclists are seen sooner by motorists, and so are safer. Lieb disparages sidepaths. From his own experience, he knows that they are more dangerous than riding on a normal street. A study by the Berlin police, unpublished until now, supports this contention. According to this study, the number of crashes on streets with sidepaths increased by 25 percent, while the number of crashes on streets without sidepaths decreased by 9 percent.

The Grüne Radler therefore demand an immediate halt to construction of all sidepaths. Bicyclists' organizations should be involved in and have to approve all further "bicycle facilities." Planning up to this time has been conducted by people who "maybe sometimes ride on Sundays."

Lieb describes the "auto-free city of Berlin" as his utopia. Only buses, taxis and delivery vehicles should be allowed to zoom through Berlin's streets. Longer trips as well should, in his opinion, be made on the wire donkey. He recommends a combination of the bicycle, streetcars and subways. With this bike-and-ride system, it should be possible to reach any point in the city without any problem.

TAZ, September 3, 1987

Life-threatening sidepaths

Police study reveals: half of all bicycle crashes occur on sidepaths

"A trail of blood extends along the Berlin sidepaths, as half of all bicycle crashes occur on sidepaths," said Willy Mahler, spokesperson of the Grüne Radler. He yesterday showed journalists extracts of a study by the Chief of Police in which police statisticians had investigated bicycle crashes. According to the as yet unpublished study, half of the 2,500 bicycle crashes in 1985 occurred on sidepaths, although they have been constructed along only one-fifth of Berlin streets.

On the basis of the internal police study, the Grüne Radler demanded that construction of additional sidepaths stop immediately. "The sidepaths lead to a false sense of security which is often fatal to children and elderly people," said a spokesperson of the advocacy organization. At present, there are 520 kilometers of sidepaths in Berlin; another 15 kilometers are planned for this year. At intersections, above all, sidepaths are life-threatening to bicyclists, because motorists can not see the speeding bicyclists. Instead of sidepaths, the Grüne Radler demand bike lanes on the roadway and an area-wide imposition of a 20 km/hr speed limit. In addition, bicycling on the roadway should no longer be prohibited where there is a sidepath. "It often is safer to ride in the street than to use the sidepath," said Willy Mahler.

Helmut Heinrich, the personal spokesperson for traffic senator Wronski, also shared this opinion yesterday. He confirmed the numbers and the results of the police study, which was being evaluated at his house. "The investigation must lead to results. Sidepaths make sense, but ways of making them safer must be looked into.", said Helmut Heinrich. The police statistics, he maintained, are after all only one study among many about sidepaths, which his co-workers presently are reviewing. People are, he maintained, working at this time on a new bicycle-friendly traffic plan, which will be placed before the legislators within a few weeks.

The police warn against taking the study entirely at face value. "Only when the bare statistics are fleshed out should conclusions be drawn," said spokesperson Gläser. It must be noted that sidepaths automatically attract more bicyclists. Additionally, the study did not account for differing traffic volumes, said Gläser.

The Socialist Party [SPD] yesterday assented to the demands of the Grüne Radler, and also demanded that the construction of planned sidepaths be stopped. "Some sidepaths waste tax money," said Joachim Niklas, the traffic spokesperson of the SPD. The SPD wants to advocate that bicycle traffic travel on bicycle routes, "so that it is possible to travel ten kilometers at a stretch." According to the SPD, the bicycle routes should serve the entire area from Rudow to Frohnau and from Spandau to Kreuzberg. Along with the AL [Alternative Liste], the SPD will put forward its ideas in a debate in the Senate within a few weeks.

The AL also assents to the demands of the Grüne Radler. However, it will not entirely give up on the idea of sidepaths. It believes that sidepaths still make sense along heavily-traveled streets, but that the Senate should not build any more "pretty little sidepaths in a nice neighborhood." The AL also demands that the legislators finally change the traffic law. "Sidepaths should have a protective function for bicyclists, and not be a forced on them," said Gabriele Vonnekold. *Ringel*



 Photo caption] Sidepaths are dangerous. Photo: Paul Langro... [end of name runs off page]

Hör Zu, week 43

Deaths, injuries, millions of marks in damages

Sidepaths: From safety to crashes?

A crash, such as occurs about five times per day: a few meters before the intersection, the driver of the VW Rabbit shifts down into second gear, turns right into the cross-street -- the scream of a bicyclist is followed by a dull impact against the side of the car. A young man "who came out of nowhere" lies injured [in the street .? -- line missing at bottom of page.]

He had felt completely safe on the sidepath...

Are our sidepaths at fault in such crashes?

"Yes," believes Willy Mahler (35), of the Berlin advocacy group "Grüne Radler". "We are often not visible at all to motorists. The sidepaths are hidden behind parked cars or bushes. At intersections and [driveways...]"? a few words missing at bottom of page].

Hamburg spends 3.5 million marks yearly to build sidepaths (total length, 1800 kilometers), yet there were 2165 bicyclists injured and 6 killed. The police in Munich as well record more crashes with more sidepaths (769 kilometers): 15 dead and 2011 injured.

"Sidepaths do not unconditionally increase safety," says Horst Hahn-Klößner (37), national Executive Director of the German Bicycle Federation ADFC. "Often, it is simply...[a few words missing]"

Unpublished research by the police poses question about the Senate's plan

Numbers of crashes increase dramatically on streets with sidepaths

Executive Police Analyst Jürgen Lüder took the assignment of his superiors very literally: he diligently collected all available data on crashes involving bicyclists for a special research project. However, the result was not at all what the police chief, and especially the senator responsible for traffic matters expected: the numbers of crashes on streets with sidepaths turned out to increase dramatically.

The police recorded 774 crashes in 1981, but in 1985 there were 1658, a sad increase of 114 percent. This was distressing to the authorities, because more than 100 kilometers of new sidepaths had been installed (in 1986: 520 kilometers, construction cost per kilometer: approximately 1 million marks). The study report was shelved.

However, now, the citizens' advocacy group "Grüne Radler" has placed the unappreciated report before the public; the authorities claimed that they did not want to make it public "without commentary." Besides, it was not yet complete, according to a police spokesperson. Willy Mahler, spokesperson of the bicyclists' group which took on the task: "The Senate justifies its bicycle plan as increasing safety. The numbers however, show unambiguously that the result is opposite. That is why the report has remained unpublished until now."

Lüder's document also addresses the relative safety of streets without sidepaths. Here, according to the "Grüne Radler", the number of crashes sank from 2037 in 1981 to 1854 in 1985. The explanation for this baffling result is simple according to the bicyclists.

Mahler: "The main reason is the location of the sidepaths, where they are mostly not visible to motorists. The bicyclist is more or less hidden, and so not in the consciousness of many motorists. At intersections and driveways, motorists are often surprised by bicyclists who suddenly appear." The bicycling advocacy group therefore demands an immediate end to the construction of new sidepaths, and the elimination of the mandatory use requirement on existing ones. Future "bicycle facilities" should be built with the standards' setting participation of bicyclists' organizations.

Helmut Heinrich, personal spokesperson for the traffic senator: "We will very soon, within the next few weeks, sit down at a table with various groups and organizations, including the "Grüne Radler", in order to work through the problem and discuss new findings." Surely, the pressure for this to happen is getting attention.

In this year alone, 15 kilometers of new sidepaths are to be built, according to the plans of the Berlin authorities. alf