



Road transport

Cargo bikes deliver faster and cleaner than vans, study finds

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Thu 5 Aug 2021 06.00 BST

Electric cargo bikes deliver about 60% faster than vans in city centres, according to a study. It found that bikes had a higher average speed and dropped off 10 parcels an hour, compared with six for vans.

The bikes also cut carbon emissions by 90% compared with diesel vans, and by a third compared with electric vans, the report said. Air pollution, which is still at illegal levels in many urban areas, was also significantly reduced.

Home deliveries have soared in recent years, spurred by online shopping and the coronavirus pandemic. Vans can travel along clear stretches of road at higher speeds than cargo bikes but are slowed by congestion and the search for parking. Cargo bikes bypass traffic jams, take shortcuts through streets closed to through traffic and ride to the customer's door.

Carbon emissions from transport have [barely fallen in the past decade](#) and pose a significant challenge for the UK in meeting its targets to combat the climate crisis. The government recently announced [a 30% rise in funding to make cycling and walking easier](#). The report's authors said the government should consider cutting the VAT rate on cargo bike deliveries and allow more powerful e-bikes to be used.

“Recent estimates from Europe suggest that up to [51% of all freight journeys in cities](#) could be replaced by cargo bike,” said Ersilia Verlinghieri at the Active Travel Academy at the University of Westminster and lead author of the report. “So it’s remarkable to see that, if even just a portion of this shift were to happen in London, it would be accompanied by not only dramatic reduction of CO2 emissions, but also contribute to a considerable reduction of risks from air pollution and road traffic collisions, whilst ensuring an efficient, fast and reliable urban freight system.”

Hirra Khan Adeogun at the climate charity Possible, which commissioned the report with funding from the KR Foundation, said: “We’ve seen home deliveries skyrocket during the Covid lockdowns and that trend is likely to continue. We urgently need to put on the brakes and reevaluate how goods move through our cities. Cargo bikes are one solution that we need to get behind.”

The [study used GPS data from the cargo bike company Pedal Me](#), which operates within a nine-mile radius of central London. The researchers compared deliveries on 100 randomly chosen days across the seasons with the routes that vans would have taken to get the parcels to customers. They found the cargo bikes saved nearly four tonnes of CO2 across the period, even when accounting for the food the riders consumed.

“These benefits are not just specific to London, with the 100,000 cargo bikes introduced in Europe between 2018 and 2020 estimated to be saving, each month, the same amount of CO2 needed to fly about 24,000 people from London to New York and back,” the report said. Other research has shown that [cargo bikes are more cost-effective](#) than vans when delivery distances and parcel sizes are small.

Electric vans are becoming more common, but still make up a very small number of the 4m vans on the road, [96% of which were diesel in 2019](#). Vans and HGVs were also involved in [one in three fatal collisions](#) in London between 2015 to 2017.

Steve Gooding, the director of the RAC Foundation, said: “When we last [looked into van use](#) we found that while delivery vehicles made up only a small part of the van fleet they covered a disproportionately high number of miles.

“While businesses are driven by economics, they are increasingly being held to account for their environmental and safety performance too. Cargo bikes will tick -

and carry - a number of boxes for companies looking to thread their wares through our crowded city streets, and so help us all breathe more easily.”

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