



Houten: Best bicycle city of the Netherlands 2018!

A city designed for cycling

Houten is a relatively new city of 46,000 residents that started growing in the 1970s—empowered by the revival of the Dutch cycling culture. The city was designed according to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists and is embedded in a car free green landscape. Due to its unique traffic system, Houten is well known as ‘cycling paradise’, and has therefore been elected twice as the Netherlands’ best bicycle city.



Initial situation

- Houten was founded in the 1970s—an era of:
 - growing concerns about liveability, quality of life, environmental issues and general sustainability concerns,
 - an increasing number of fatalities caused by car traffic, especially involving children,
 - and growing aversion and resistance to large scale and car dominated urban and traffic planning as in the 1950s and 1960s.
- The situation in Houten was special due to two reasons: There was high local political awareness to build a bold strong out-of-the-box vision as well as courage to deviate from the great mediocrity—with a high level of self-assurance—in cooperation with engineers, urban landscape and traffic designers.

Objectives

- Main objective: building and designing a people friendly, pleasant, livable and healthy new city.
- The city design was about human beings in the first place, mobility was secondary to that.
- The starting aim was to design Houten as a village-like city. This was a reaction to the mainstream car dominated urban and traffic planning at that time.
- Another basic condition was traffic safety.
- Daily urban activities should be close to people’s homes—in cycling or even walking distance. Therefore, priority was given to slow traffic in disadvantage of motorized traffic.
- Flowing cycle traffic without delays or interruption was and still is of high importance (e.g. there are no traffic lights in Houten).

Implementation

- Implementation followed the design philosophy of the urban planners Wissing and Derks: start with the main structure for a green landscape including playgrounds and infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Traffic system by Goudappel and Coffeng: separation of modalities—building the city around a network of main bicycle routes while car traffic is led outside to a surrounding ring road.
- All vital urban functions like schools are located directly at the cycle network.
- Ensuring bicycle traffic flow through tunnels or bridges at intersections with other traffic.
- High level of quality in engineering bicycle paths: smooth surface (asphalt) and recognizable by red color.
- All main bicycle routes are equipped with street lighting.
- A large number of bicycle parking facilities has been built.

Achievements

- A city with a high standard of living including a sustainable traffic system has been developed.
- Successful development of a car-free public space with safe conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, fresh air and a relaxed atmosphere.
- Bicycle utilisation rate:
 - >40% of total trips shorter than 7.5 kilometers
 - 99% of children going to school
 - Long-distance commuting: 10% by bicycle and another 10% by bicycle and train
- Number of cyclist traffic fatalities caused by cars: zero (since 1970s)
- All ages benefit from cycling and its contribution to a healthy style of living—children, adults and elderly people.
- A bicycle railway station transferium and a free and guarded bicycle parking facility ensure an optimal combination of cycling and public transport for commuters.
- Houten is being visited from policy makers, urban planners, designers, students etc. to see how sustainable mobility can be put into practice.