

Bike sales fall to lowest level in 20 years

Pandemic boom has become bust despite millions spent on cycle lanes

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The Times - Sunday March 19 2023

Bike sales have dipped to their lowest level in two decades as the pandemic boom in cycling turns to bust.

The Bicycle Association's Annual Market Data Report shows that pedal bike sales fell 22 per cent to 1.88 million last year — more than a quarter below pre-Covid levels. Sales of children's bikes slumped even faster, falling by 28 per cent compared with 2019, to 700,000.

The report, called "Riding out the Storm," noted that demand for electric bikes had been more stable but "overall volumes have plateaued since 2020".

Bike sales boomed during the pandemic when exercise, including [cycling](#), became one of only three legitimate government mandated activities beyond getting food, essential work and receiving medical attention.

However, it appears that many people have lost their appetite for cycling, with one analyst estimating that only half of those who bought a bike during the pandemic are still riding it.

The figures will be a concern to the government, which has spent hundreds of millions of pounds on new cycling infrastructure, including cycle lanes and [low-traffic](#) neighbourhoods (LTNs).

Ministers have set an objective for half of all journeys in towns and cities to be walked or cycled by 2030.

While falling bike sales does not mean fewer people are currently cycling or using the new infrastructure, it suggests that efforts to make cycling a mainstream form of transport are struggling. It also raises concerns about the future expansion of cycling.

Simon Irons, of the Bicycle Association, said: "This report is not an easy read. However, as an industry we have to rise to the challenges ahead of us and do everything we can to make cycling a safe and attractive method of transport for more people in the UK. Most

worrying is the decline in kids' bike sales. This is a key area of work for the association and our industry in 2023.”

The cost of living crisis is thought to be one of the reasons bike sales have fallen, with many people putting off big spending decisions. The proliferation of electric bike hire schemes, such as Uber Lime, which allows customers to borrow bikes from anywhere they are left, is also likely to have discouraged some from making a purchase.

Rebekah Kelly, of Islington, north London, says that her family is one of the many who have dropped cycling since the [pandemic](#) ended. During lockdown she bought a new bike for her teenage daughter and repaired an old one for her son.

“Now my daughter completely rejects the bike and vows never to use it again,” she said. “My boy still likes cycling but hasn't touched it over winter. I haven't cycled as much as I used to either.”

She thinks the declining interest is because life has gone back to normal, adding: “And kids are lazy. We barely cycled at all this winter, making excuses that it's too cold or wet. My son prefers to walk to school with friends than to cycle.”

Since the pandemic, her local council has spent millions of pounds on the introduction of several LTNs. Kelly, 40, a special needs co-ordinator, says she always used to use the back roads to cycle before they were turned into LTNs. She said: “We didn't need LTNs to cycle as these roads were always quiet.”

She said potholes were a bigger impediment to cycling than cars. “I am shocked by the disrepair to some roads and I'd hope our councils will address this to support active travel rather than continue investment into cameras and plant pots. I'm hoping the summer months might ignite the passion but I'm not holding my breath.”

The cooling of the bicycle market since the pandemic has seen the share price of many bike brands collapse following huge jumps during Covid. The value of Halfords, for example, is down nearly 60 per cent from its peak in the summer of 2021, while Shimano, the bike accessories maker, and Giant, the Taiwanese manufacturer, are down 40 per cent and 50 per cent respectively.

The fall in demand means that many bike retailers are now struggling with too much inventory, after being short-stocked during the pandemic. This could yet see bike prices fall as shops discount bikes to get rid of stock.

The Bicycle Association, which represents the industry, remains upbeat despite falling sales. John Worthington, the report's author and head of insights at the group, said: “The

market faces a turbulent and challenging year ahead. Once overall supply and demand return to a better equilibrium, and the economic environment improves, longer-term prospects for the cycling market are positive.”

The Bicycle Association is calling on the government to commit to multi-year funding for Active Travel England, the agency that promoted walking and cycling. However, that seems unlikely after the Department of Transport recently announced it would cut the infrastructure budget for walking and cycling by more than £200 million.