



Supporting cargo bike managers to scale up the sector

Executive summary

- Cargo bikes have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while improving air quality and public spaces, however research has found that cargo bike couriers experience precarious work and health and safety risks.
- Managers want to play their part in improving conditions in the sector but face difficulties including around recruitment and retention, rising operating costs coupled with the withdrawal of government financial support, as well as widespread doubt around the potential of cargo bikes among prospective clients and other stakeholders.
- Managers, policy makers and other stakeholders can support further improvements by improving working standards and road safety, increasing collaboration and consistency across the sector, and increasing support and visibility for the sector.

Introduction

Since the publication of the report [Delivering Good Work: Labour, Employment and Wellbeing in London's Cargo Bike Sector](#), there has been a step-change in cargo bikes logistics in London. There has been a significant uptick in the number of cargo bike operators, the number of logistics operators integrating cargo bikes into their fleet, and the diversity of sectors using cargo bike logistics. Transport for London (TfL) also published London's first [Cargo Bike Action Plan](#) to promote and enable the growth of the sector in the capital.

Whilst this increase in the uptake of cargo bikes is positive, follow-up research by the University of Westminster and partners has brought to light further challenges facing managers as they work to scale up the sector. This includes difficulties around recruitment and retention, owing to the fact that riding a cargo bike is a highly skilled job, and riders experience poor working conditions; rising operating costs due to the inflation of electricity and rent costs, coupled with the withdrawal of government financial support – namely the eCargo Bike Grant Fund 2019-2022; and widespread doubt around the potential of cargo bikes among prospective clients and other stakeholders. This policy briefing note outlines the key practical recommendations for managers, policy makers and other stakeholders to take forward in order to further promote and enable the sector.

Recommendations

1. Improve working standards and road safety

The wider logistics sector, of which the cargo bike industry is a part, is often precarious and poorly paid, and lacks diversity. Poor working conditions are also exacerbated by road danger, with riders facing recurrent aggression and danger on the roads. Furthermore, reporting these incidents to the police is often met with an unsatisfactory response. Cargo bike companies, workers and trade unions should develop sector-wide working standards that take the wellbeing of riders seriously. Transport for London (TfL), the Mayor's Office, in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police, should also take further action to raise awareness of, and tackle, road aggression.

2. Increase collaboration and consistency across the sector

Managers face challenges in improving working conditions as many changes require policy interventions which extend beyond their capacity and remit, including around funding, accreditation, and regulation. Additionally, they have limited time and resources to exchange information and knowledge with other managers across the sector. Cargo bike firms, workers and unions should formalise collaboration and advocacy efforts with the creation of an industry alliance to embed sector-wide working standards and to improve external communications and engagement of the sector, which would in turn improve the sector's visibility and legitimacy. It may be the case that the cycling trade body, the Bicycle Association (BA), would be best placed to lead on the alliance, but they will need support from stakeholders such as TfL in order to drive this forward.

3. Increase support and visibility for the sector

Emerging local operators in the cargo bike sector face a lack of funding and intense competition with van logistics operators who drive down costs through exploitative employment practices. Cargo bikes also suffer from limited acceptance amongst industries whose businesses rely heavily on the movement of goods. To increase support for the sector, the Mayor of London and the Department for Transport (DfT) should increase incentives for the uptake of cargo bikes and disincentives for the use of vans, and the London Assembly should support this change. Furthermore, local authorities should work with cargo bike firms to support their uptake, for example, through helping companies securing land for their operations and incorporating cargo bikes in their own fleets. They should also prioritise cargo bike firms that are able to guarantee a high standard of working conditions, as part of efforts to support inclusive local economic development in their areas through progressive procurement practices. Lastly, cargo bike firms, research and policy institutes, third sector organisations and local and national policy makers should continue to promote cargo bikes for urban delivery by developing campaigns and supporting the widespread adoption of the [Cargo Bike Charter](#), which includes a five-point plan to improve infrastructure for cargo bikes and support individuals and businesses to move away from polluting vehicles.

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