

Smart e-bikes help move Brighton towards a greener future.

The University of Brighton is leading a project that will involve trials of 'smart e-bikes' on the streets of Brighton in 2012 and 2013, as part of research into sustainable transport and mobile media.

The project aims to understand how people use e-bikes, and how smartphones can monitor this use and give useful feedback to riders. The results will help improve sustainable transport in the UK.

The e-bikes used in the study (also known as pedelecs) are electrically-assisted bicycles that enable people to cycle for work or pleasure with motorized support. The rider still has to pedal – but the rechargeable battery-assistance can make it easier to cycle, especially against the wind or uphill. Brighton & Hove City Council is a project partner, and it is hoped that the work will further add to the city's reputation for environmental awareness. The project is also linked with the work taking place in the Lewes Road area, funded by the Department for Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

This research is led by the University of Brighton's senior lecturer in Media Studies, Dr Frauke Behrendt. It developed from an idea generation event with over 20 experts, focused on encouraging more sustainable travel behaviour, habits and practices. The project is funded by a three-year grant from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), which has enabled Dr Behrendt, and colleagues Dr Sally Cairns from TRL (Transport Research Laboratory) and UCL (University College London), and David Raffo, from University of Ulster, to set up the 'smart e-bikes' project.

During the project, different groups of users will be offered the chance to try out the e-bikes for six week periods. The project team is hoping to involve both commuters and people of retirement age from local community groups. During the trials, the researchers will use digital technologies such as GPS tracking and smartphones to monitor bike use, as well as conduct surveys researching a range of issues such as ergonomics and safety. Trial participants will be able to mount their smartphones onto the handlebars to receive feedback about their speed, distance covered and various other data.

The 35 bikes involved in the trial are made by project partner and manufacturer Raleigh UK. Local company Baker St Bikes in Brighton will also be involved, providing e-bike maintenance. Local cycle trainers are also engaged with the project.

Electrically-assisted bikes are already widely used in many other countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, but are not yet as popular in the UK.

More information can be found on the research project website <http://www.smart-ebikes.com>

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