

Load and behold: should you opt for an electric cargo bike over a second car?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Do you cycle to work or school? Why or why not?
- What factors do you think stop people from cycling in city centres?
- How does street design influence whether people choose to cycle or drive?

2 Key words

a. Find the words in the wordpool in the article. Then match them to the definitions.

a spin	opt for	niche	scout	trepidation
advocate	zip along	fatalities	Sydneysiders	transport emissions
counter to	motivator	early adopters	forgoing	
rebates	ferry	go-to	daunted about	

- a feeling of fear or anxiety about something that may happen _____
- people who are among the first to try or use new products or technology _____
- deaths resulting from accidents or disasters _____
- to move quickly and smoothly, often with energy or purpose _____
- greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere by cars and other forms of transport

- a person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause _____
- something that encourages or drives someone to take action or behave in a certain way

- to explore or search an area to gather information _____
- partial refunds or the return of money paid, often as an incentive _____
- in opposition to or contrary to what is typical or expected _____
- deciding not to have or do something; choosing to go without _____

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12. people who live in or come from Sydney, Australia _____
13. feeling intimidated or discouraged by the difficulty or size of a task _____
14. a specialised but profitable segment of a market or area of activity _____
15. to transport people or goods over short distances _____
16. a trial of a product to test its quality or suitability _____
17. to choose or select something from different alternatives _____
18. the preferred or most reliable choice for a particular purpose _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. Many companies offer _____ to customers who agree to purchase more energy-efficient appliances.
2. The thought of presenting to 500 people left Kate feeling _____ the challenge.
3. Greg's main _____ for studying medicine was wanting to help underserved communities.
4. The company targets a(n) _____ market of well-off, eco-conscious travellers.
5. Electric vehicles usually produce zero, harmful _____.
6. We decided to take an electric car for _____ before making our final decision.
7. Our neighbours are _____ their annual holiday this year to save for a deposit on a larger house.
8. Road _____ have decreased significantly since the new safety measures were introduced.
9. Climate activists have become powerful _____ for renewable energy policies.

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10. _____ of new technology often pay premium prices for the latest innovations.
11. Many travellers these days _____ budget airlines when flying within Europe.
12. _____ are known for their love of beaches and the outdoor lifestyle.
13. Many parents often have to _____ their kids from place to place when they become teenagers.
14. Cyclists _____ the bike path during the morning commute.
15. The team needs to _____ potential locations before choosing a venue for the conference.
16. Anna approached the interview with some _____ as it was her first job application.
17. _____ expectations, the new policy actually increased productivity.
18. This café has become my _____ spot for working remotely.

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Cargo ebikes are ideal for the millions of short-distance car trips Australians take every day. Here's how to make one work for you

Clare Watson

17 October, 2025

- 1 On a trip to Vienna, we watched parents zip along the city's bike paths on electric cargo bikes, loaded up with bags, groceries and kids who happily chatted to each other in the front box or back seat.
- 2 It inspired us to buy one of our own – but when it arrived, I felt daunted about its size and how we'd go about navigating the streets of the Australian city where we live, especially during peak school times.
- 3 After my initial trepidation, I was surprised how quickly our car trips became bike rides. Like learning to drive, it took some time to learn how the bike steered, but it soon became our go-to ride for short trips. Forgoing a second car may have been the reason we bought it, but it was simply more fun to see my son grinning on the bike.
- 4 Can we make our streets safer so that more people are willing to give cargo ebikes a go? Can they make a difference in reducing transport emissions, and what should you consider if you're thinking of getting one? I spoke to a few early adopters to find out.
- 5 **A Replacing short car trips**
Driving less is a top reason people go for ebikes, whether to save money, cut emissions or exercise more. But throw kids into the mix, or hobbies, work and groceries, and things get more complicated.
- 6 E-cargo bikes, with storage or multiple seats at the front or back, are made for moving stuff and ideal for short trips between 2 and 6 kilometres, says Elliot Fishman of the Institute for Sensible Transport. In many central urban areas, ebikes "will be the fastest single way that you can get from point A to point B" over those distances, he says.
- 7 Choosing to cycle rather than drive saves 300g CO₂/km, which adds up to a substantial amount for a household if you're cycling two or three times most days – especially when you consider how often people drive short distances, Fishman says.
- 8 Sydneysiders take about 4 million car trips under 4 kilometres every day. In regional cities such as Orange, Grafton, Wollongong or Albury, the proportion of daily car trips under 6 kilometres is even higher than in capital cities, Fishman says.

- 9 With transport representing Australia's fastest-growing source of carbon emissions, e-cargo bikes have a niche but important role to play.

10 B Scout your route

If you're not sure whether a cargo ebike is right for you, Fishman suggests looking at the type of trips you take each week and figuring out how many fall into that 2 to 6 kilometre range. Then, map out routes you could safely ride.

- 11 Look for smaller side streets, scout the route on a regular bike or jump on Google Street View, he says.
- 12 Jon Lindley, a cycling advocate in Wollongong and my former neighbour, suggests building confidence by starting with short trips on a weekend when there's no time pressure and less traffic.
- 13 Check if places have somewhere you can park and lock up your bike – before you get there with a toddler in tow. You'll also need somewhere secure to store the bike at home, where you can easily wheel it in and out.

14 C Try before you buy

There are ebike rebates in some states, but they can be expensive, so you'll want to find the right one for you. Front-loaders, long-tails, box bikes – each suits a different purpose.

- 15 Bikes that carry loads at the front are good for transporting young kids, Fishman says, because the rider can more easily see and talk to their little passengers. Older children are fine riding at the back. Fishman suggests asking a bike shop if you can test-ride a bike for at least half an hour to give it a spin up and down hills or turning at slow speeds.

16 D Making streets safer

A fear of riding in traffic beside cars is "the number one reason why people don't cycle", says Fishman, who has used a cargo ebike to ferry his kids around Melbourne on carefully chosen routes since 2012.

- 17 Despite their longer-than-usual dimensions, e-cargo bikes are quite easy to move, he says.
- 18 Using barriers that prevent the passage of certain vehicles to create bike-friendly corridors is the cheapest, fastest and simplest way a city can make cycling safer, says Fishman. Placing these on routes, such as Canning Street in Melbourne's north, or through Redfern in Sydney, slows and reduces traffic, and encourages people who don't feel comfortable riding on busy roads to journey by bike.

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- 19 Directing cyclists into select streets also concentrates riders along those routes, and research suggests increasing cyclist numbers improves rider safety.
- 20 Lindley says reducing speed limits to 30 kilometres per hour is the fairest way to make streets safer for all road users.
- 21 Reducing speed limits dramatically lowers the chance and impact of crashes, especially fatalities, and counter to most drivers' expectations, it hardly impacts car travel times and improves traffic flow.
- 22 Lindley has carted his three kids around on a cargo ebike for more than 10 years but says he has never stopped feeling vulnerable on a bike.
- 23 "That was the biggest psychological barrier for me," Lindley says about riding with his kids. But his reasons for getting a cargo ebike were a strong motivator: it was cheaper, greener and, most importantly, it meant he could keep riding with his children and help them build healthy habits.
- 24 "You see the joy that the kids get out of it, the time you get to spend with them ... [and] it encourages you to use it more."

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3 Comprehension check

- a. Read the article and circle the letter of the section in the article (A, B, C or D) where you can find the following information.

Which section ...

1. ... mentions the environmental benefits of switching from cars to bicycles?

A B C D

2. ... discusses the psychological barriers riders experience?

A B C D

3. 3. ... explains the optimal distance range for cargo bike journeys?

A B C D

4. ... suggests ways to build up your cycling confidence gradually?

A B C D

5. ... describes how urban design can encourage more people to cycle?

A B C D

6. ... provides data about brief car journeys in Australian cities?

A B C D

7. ... recommends finding somewhere secure to store your bike at home?

A B C D

8. ... mentions the fastest mode of transport for certain distances in urban areas?

A B C D

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4 Key language

- a. A demonym is a word that describes a person who comes from a city, country, place or region, e.g. *Sydneysiders* (a person who comes from Sydney, Australia). Complete the endings for these demonyms.

–ites

–ers

–ians

Group 1:

1. Mancun_____ (Manchester, England)
2. Melburn_____ (Melbourne, Australia)
3. Paris_____ (Paris, France)
4. Boston_____ (Boston, USA)

Group 2:

5. London_____ (London, England)
6. New York_____ (New York, USA)
7. Berlin_____ (Berlin, Germany)
8. Auckland_____ (Auckland, New Zealand)

Group 3:

9. Muscov_____ (Moscow, Russia)
10. Tokyo_____ (Tokyo, Japan)

- b. Work in pairs to add any other demonyms you know with the same endings to each group.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What are the main advantages and disadvantages of replacing cars with cargo ebikes?
- How can city councils encourage more people to cycle instead of driving?
- Would cargo ebikes work in your town or city? Why or why not?

6 In your own words

a. You are going to prepare arguments for or against the following issue: 'Cars should be banned from city centres and councils should encourage people to use bikes, ebikes and public transport.'

Team A – you are 'for' banning cars from city centres

Team B – you are 'against' banning cars from city centres

Your teacher will divide you into two teams. Work with your team to prepare your arguments. Use the article, your own knowledge and the ideas below. Prepare notes with your ideas that you can refer to during the debate.

Team A (For) You may like to consider:

- environmental benefits
- health and safety improvements
- quality of life in city centres
- successful examples from other cities
- economic benefits (tourism, local businesses)

Team B (Against) You may like to consider:

- accessibility issues (elderly, disabled, families)
- economic impact on businesses requiring deliveries
- public transport limitations

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- individual freedom and choice
- costs and challenges of implementing the scheme

b. Hold your class debate. Then reflect as a class on whose arguments were more persuasive and why.