

## Biking the Baana with Helsinki's Bicycle Coordinator

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In Helsinki's city center, more than a third of trips are made by walking and ten percent are by biking. That's a testimony to the city's great pedestrian and bike network. It's also a result of Helsinki's City Bikes program that launched in 2016 and attracted a groundswell of bike users through sheer convenience.

As a recipient of the 2019 Jennings Randolph International Fellowship, I travelled to Finland to learn firsthand about Helsinki's mobility system and bring that experience back to my community in Shoreline, WA. To get the full user experience, I took a bike ride with Oskari Kaupinmäki, Helsinki Bicycle Traffic Project Coordinator.

From the City Centre, we biked the Baana (Finnish slang for 'rail'), an approximately one-mile pedestrian and bike trail built from an old, converted railway corridor in 2012. By 2016, 350,000 people were using the Baana annually. That's more than half of Helsinki's population! It was pretty empty when Oskari and I biked it mid-morning, but during morning and evening commutes it can be overcrowded with four cyclists biking abreast (two in each direction). Creating more elbow room is a problem that Oskari is interested in solving. "But, how can you make more space within Baana's confined walls?", I asked. Some of his solutions include re-adjusting the space allocated to the walking trail and the cycle track, which currently is about a 50/50 split, to provide more negotiation room for bikes; paving over the cobble shoulder, changing vertical light poles to overhead catenary lights, and jackhammering out some of the canted rockery walls at underpasses and replacing them with space efficient vertical walls.



*Oskari Kaupinmäki, Helsinki Bicycle Traffic Project Coordinator, is helping to make cycling in the city safe, fun, and direct.*

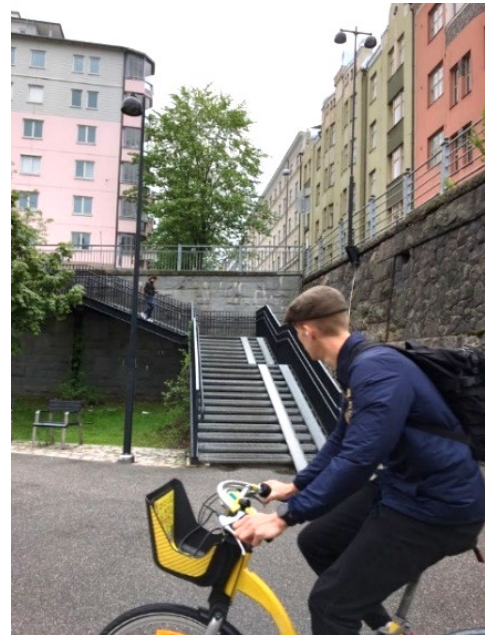




*The Baana was built from an old, converted railway corridor to connect the City Centre to the Western Harbor.*



*Brightly painted art mural on the Baana's underpasses delight people walking and biking by.*



*Staircases have runnels to assist rolling bikes and strollers up and down.*

As we cruised along the Baana, Oskari pointed out some of its bonus features...staircases with runnels to assist rolling bikes and strollers up and down, City Bike stations, painted murals on underpass walls to help brighten and brand the trail, and a digital bike counter that added two more rides to its daily total as we swooshed pass.



As we approach the end of Baana, I see the Western Harbor's big ships looming in the distance. Here, the Baana's linear nature completely dissolves into open urban plaza with some sports courts and playgrounds along its edges. The Baana's terminus offers many connections to surrounding city streets, but it takes a careful eye to follow the small paving markings with a bike logo stamped on them to stay on the right path. Oskari agrees that the end of the Baana needs better wayfinding and shares his bigger philosophy, "There are always ways to make a pedestrian and bike path better. But, when a project is done, it is best to apply those lessons learned to the next project and come back later to make tweaks to the initial project." Considering how ambitious Helsinki is about expanding its low-stress, high-comfort bike network, it is best to keep moving and keep improving.

*Wayfinding pavers at the Baana's terminus near Western Harbor.*