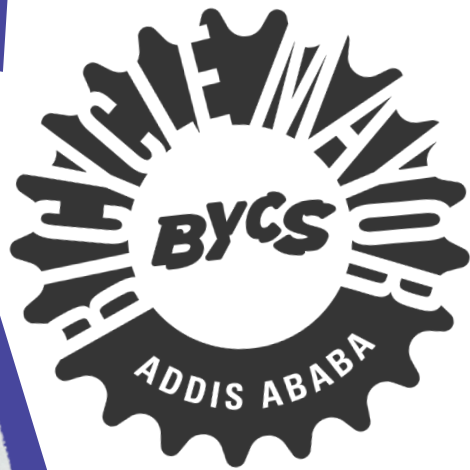
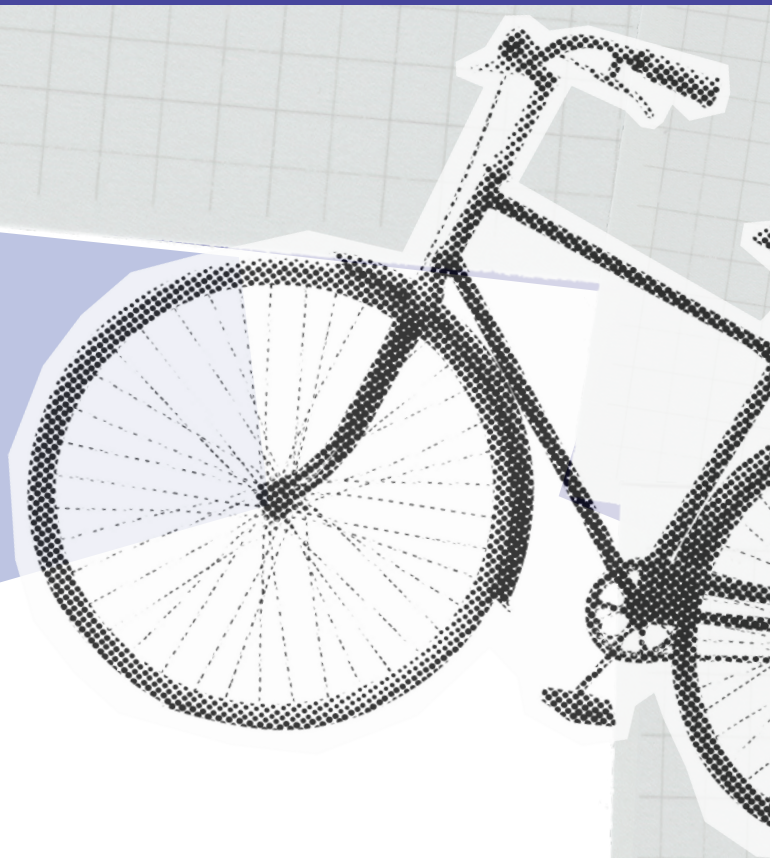


Maren Ahlers



Maren advocates for sustainable mobility, social inclusion, and gender equity. As the co-founder of Egere Menged Impact (EMi), she promotes cycling as a powerful tool for social change and empowerment, particularly for marginalized communities in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She is the Bicycle Mayor of Addis Ababa under the BYCS program and holds a Master's degree in Climate Change and Development from SOAS University of London. Furthermore, she has worked with national and international organizations in biodiversity, environmental sustainability, and communication, contributing to initiatives that promote resilience, inclusivity, and sustainable development.



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Transport systems can be considered inclusive only if...

... everyone—regardless of gender, age, or ability—can travel safely, affordably, and without barriers to reach their destination.

If I was in power of our transport systems, the first thing I would do is...

... making bicycles accessible for everyone. Addis Ababa has recently built 100 km of bicycle lanes—an enormous step for a country that has historically prioritized motorized transport. As interest in cycling grows for commuting, sports, and empowerment, access remains a major challenge. Bicycles are still rare and unaffordable for most, and there is a lack of training programs, awareness campaigns, and efforts to promote inclusive, equitable, and sustainable mobility. Yet, bicycles are the future—offering an environmentally friendly, cost-effective, and health-boosting solution to urban transport challenges.

How does the current situation for (women) cyclists in your city influence your work?

Mobility should be a right, not a privilege. It profoundly shapes my work and daily reality.

I envision a city where mobility is not just possible but truly accessible to all. For women and girls, mobility barriers severely limit independence in developing countries such as Ethiopia. Many face harassment on public transport and have fewer opportunities to access other options like bicycles. For young people, the high cost of transport restricts access to education and employment, reinforcing inequality. This leads to my commitment to promoting bicycles as a cost-effective, sustainable alternative that fosters leadership and economic empowerment. For persons living with disabilities, the city remains largely inaccessible. Many streets and public spaces lack proper infrastructure, and essential mobility tools like wheelchairs and adaptive bicycles are scarce or unaffordable.

These challenges make daily mobility a struggle for many, underscoring the urgent need for equitable, inclusive, and sustainable transport solutions. This drives my advocacy—working toward a future where everyone, regardless of gender, age, or ability, can move freely and safely in their city.



My work aligns with the Hamburg Charter Principles!



The Hamburg Charter calls on cities worldwide to embrace active mobility as a core part of sustainable urban transport. In Addis Ababa, we are bringing these principles to life through our daily work promoting cycling as a practical, green mode of transport. We advocate for bicycles not just as tools for recreation but as legitimate, everyday means of moving through the city—especially in a context where affordable, low-emission transport options are urgently needed. A key part of our mission is to ensure that cycling is safe and accessible for everyone, particularly women and youth.



We also push cycling to be recognized in urban planning decisions, ensuring it is treated as a fundamental piece of a people-centered environment. The benefits are clear: cycling reduces air pollution, improves public health, and supports a more livable city—goals especially vital for Addis Ababa's growing population.

Our approach is grounded in community engagement. Through our grassroots work, such as Critical Mass Addis Ababa and our women-led cycling programs, we give people the tools and platforms to shape the mobility future of their city. This is more than awareness-raising—it's about shifting behaviors and attitudes toward a culture where bicycles are seen as symbols of empowerment and progress.

What's the main challenge that you face in your daily work?

Addis Ababa is currently transitioning from a car-centered urban design towards a more inclusive and accessible environment for active mobility, especially cycling. While approximately 100 kilometers of bicycle lanes have been developed recently, a key challenge is the need for a broader societal shift in mindset and behavior. Motorists and pedestrians are still not used to seeing bicycles as part of the daily traffic landscape. Cyclists are often overlooked—drivers ignore bells, make sudden turns without checking for bikes, and sometimes respond aggressively when cyclists assert their right to use dedicated lanes. Moreover, cycling is not yet widely accepted as a practical, everyday means of transport. Many still associate it with economic hardship or, on the other hand, professional sportspeople rather than sustainability, climate action, or health. This perception makes it harder to build momentum for change. Our work, therefore, involves raising public awareness, advocating for policy support, and empowering

communities—especially women—to take ownership of cycling as a tool for inclusion, economic opportunity, and sustainability.

Why is it important to listen to young people?

We are the ones most affected, but we are also the ones with the most ideas to improve our situation! Our ideas may seem abstract to others, but they come from us—the youth, the majority group of the population in many developing countries, living the reality on the ground. Our ideas are fresh and innovative. We bring energy, enthusiasm, and the drive to create real change.

What would you tell other young people working in the transport field?

Push, push, push! Never be discouraged by the slow changes in this sector. Keep spreading your ideas and energy on the ground—reach as many people as possible and create a real impact. Find a team of (young) like-minded individuals who believe in your vision and support you. Our voices matter. We are the future, and we are shaping it now! And

remember, transport isn't just about roads and vehicles—it's about people, access, economy and justice. As young professionals, we have the power to rethink and reimagine mobility systems in a way that centers inclusivity, sustainability, and climate resilience. So keep pushing boundaries, question the status quo, and never underestimate the power of a bold idea!

