

Active Travel and Social Justice Report

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Cycling and Walking (APPGCW)

“This overwhelming level of engagement underscores the urgency of the issue and the depth of inequality in active travel”

Foreword from our Chair

As Chair of the APPGCW, I am proud to introduce this vital report on social justice in active travel. The findings make clear what many of us have long suspected that despite the well-documented benefits of walking, wheeling, and cycling, far too many people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, face systemic barriers that prevent them from accessing these essential modes of transport.

The response to this inquiry has been unprecedented, with more submissions than any previous APPGCW report. This overwhelming level of engagement underscores the urgency of the issue and the depth of inequality in active travel. Disabled people, women, children, people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, and those on low incomes are all disproportionately affected. Whether due to road danger, inaccessible infrastructure, unaffordable cycles and mobility aids, or cultural and societal barriers, the reality is that millions are being excluded from an activity that should be open to all.

Ensuring that active travel is safe, accessible, and equitable is not just a policy aspiration; it is a matter of fundamental social justice. This report

sets out clear and actionable recommendations that can make a real difference. It calls for stable, long-term investment, safer streets, inclusive infrastructure, and policies that remove financial and physical barriers to active travel.

This is a challenge we must meet head-on. The cost of inaction is simply too high, both for individuals who are denied the benefits of active travel and for society as a whole, which stands to gain healthier, more connected, and more inclusive communities.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who submitted evidence to this inquiry. Your contributions have been invaluable in shaping this report and ensuring that the voices of those most affected are heard loud and clear.

The time for action is now. We must ensure that active travel is an option for everyone, not just for those who already find it easy to walk, wheel, or cycle.





Leigh Day



Caroline Julian, External Affairs
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Foreword from our sponsors

As co-sponsors, British Cycling and Leigh Day Solicitors are pleased to support this timely report from the All Party Parliamentary Group for Cycling & Walking.

It is testament to the importance of this topic that this inquiry received the highest volume of responses that the APPGCW has ever seen. The evidence submitted highlighted that significant barriers still exist that prevent many people from accessing the health, economic and social benefits that cycling walking and wheeling deliver. And critically, those facing these barriers the most are disadvantaged and minority groups, including Disabled people, children, those from low socio-economic backgrounds and those who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Road safety remains chief amongst those barriers, as this report outlines, and it's a concern that British Cycling and Leigh Day have been at the forefront of addressing on behalf of members and vulnerable road users for many years.

Independent research commissioned by British Cycling tells us that road safety is still cited as the biggest reason that holds people back from getting on a bike, and that this is particularly the feeling

amongst disabled people and women. As we strive to radically grow and diversify those who cycle and benefit from cycling across Great Britain, this is hugely worrying.

Recent changes to the Highway Code recognised the importance of protecting the most vulnerable and set out a hierarchy of road users with walkers, wheelers, riders, people with disability and children identified as those being most at risk, alongside new rules placing significantly increased responsibility on drivers to take particular care of these groups. However, hearts, minds and behaviours still need to change radically, as does the infrastructure and investment which enables everyone – no matter their background, abilities or identity – to thrive.

This isn't just important, therefore, it's urgent. Doing nothing is not an option. It's a matter of social justice that needs to be addressed now.

Our thanks to the authors, Tom Cohen and Ersilia Verlinghieri, all those who gave written and oral evidence to the inquiry, the report's Advisory Board and the members of the APPGCW itself.



Executive Summary



There is a pressing need for major growth in volumes of walking, wheeling and cycling in the UK, to respond to a range of profound challenges including public health and climate change. UK governments have set ambitious targets for active travel in recognition of its massive potential contribution but we are not on track to meet any of them, because the experience of travelling actively remains generally poor.

This inquiry was motivated by wide disparities in opportunities to travel actively: gender, age, disability, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and residential setting (e.g. living in a rural or urban area) can all play a part in determining how comfortable a person feels about travelling actively, or whether it is even possible. The advantages of active travel are being enjoyed by some and not others. The health benefits in particular are not generally being felt by the people who, because of health inequalities, have most to gain from active travel. The All Party Parliamentary Group for Cycling and Walking therefore called this inquiry into active travel and social justice. Nine expert witnesses gave evidence at a Parliamentary hearing, nearly 100 individuals and organisations submitted evidence, and an Advisory Board of expert stakeholders supported the drafting of this report and its recommendations.

Three principal barriers were identified:

- Uneven provision of appropriate environments for walking, wheeling and cycling
- Uneven distribution of and access to cycles and mobility aids
- Unsupportive environments/culture

And three categories of ‘facilitator’ (ways of addressing a lack of social justice in active travel):

- Improvements to walking, wheeling and cycling environments
- Widespread provision of affordable and accessible mobility aids and cycles (including parking options)
- Community interventions for active travel journeys

The evidence given to the inquiry provided many examples of excellent work being done to widen participation in active travel.

The inquiry concluded that, in order for actions addressing social injustice in active travel to have their full impact, three more fundamental changes are needed:

- Reducing road danger
- Predictable, sustained funding at a level consistent with targets for walking, wheeling and cycling
- All active-travel infrastructure to be of a high standard

The inquiry makes the following nine recommendations:

1. Reduce financial barriers to cycling

Make cycling affordable by reforming the Cycle to Work scheme into “Cycle for Health” to support low-income individuals, subsidising e-cycles, recognising adapted cycles as mobility aids under Motability, expanding low-cost cycle hire schemes, and capping cycle hangar fees.

2. Tackle pavement parking

Pavement parking disproportionately harms Disabled people. We urge the government to respond to their overdue pavement parking consultation, make unnecessary obstruction a civil offence, empowering local authorities to enforce penalties and ensure accessible streets.

3. Data collection to enable sound monitoring and evaluation

A national strategy is needed to collect and share data on transport use and inequalities, ensuring policies effectively address barriers to active travel.

4. Ensure UK-wide access to free cycle training, and widen its reach

Cycle training must be universally accessible, covering adults as well as children, with stable funding, diverse instructors, and links to long-term cycling opportunities.

5. Make Inclusive Mobility a minimum standard for designing infrastructure

Inclusive design should be a legal requirement, not just guidance. The Department for Transport must mandate adherence to Inclusive Mobility standards to ensure infrastructure works for everyone.

6. Effective and meaningful involvement of interest groups in policy development

Local transport authorities must engage diverse community voices from the start of planning, with clear commitments to incorporating feedback and reporting on its impact.

7. Enable the most effective community-based organisations to maximise their impact

Grassroots groups play a crucial role in inclusive transport but struggle financially. Authorities must provide long-term funding based on performance rather than short-term grants.

8. Build social justice into performance management in local transport

Authorities must track and address transport-related inequalities, and Active Travel England and equivalent bodies should assess authorities’ performance on social justice, with support for underperforming councils.

9. Remove access control barriers from public cycleways, footpaths, parks, and other amenities; strengthen action against anti-social use of motorcycles

Access control barriers often block Disabled people and those with non-standard cycles while failing to stop antisocial motorcycle use. New guidance should focus on inclusive design, removal of historic barriers, and tougher enforcement against illegal riding.



Introduction

About the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Cycling and Walking (APPGCW)

Since the 1970s, the APPGCW has worked on a cross-party basis to promote all forms of cycling and walking, working with representatives of organisations in the private, public, and third sectors that share their vision.

The group works to communicate the benefits of active travel within Parliament and conducts inquiries on pressing matters relating to cycling and walking.

The imperative to grow active travel

The case for major growth in walking, wheeling and cycling in the UK is clear. As Chris Boardman, Commissioner of Active Travel England, put it: “pick a crisis: [active travel] can help you with all of them ¹.”

One of the UK government’s five missions is centred on **health**. Of particular relevance to this inquiry are the elements of public health

(“prevention will always be better, and cheaper, than a cure”²) and reducing health inequalities (to which we return below).

The UK has a severe problem with **physical inactivity**. In 2021, 30% of adult males and 41% of adult women in England were not meeting the recommended level of moderate or vigorous activity³. In Scotland, 35% of adults were taking insufficient exercise in 2022⁴. In Wales, 11.4% of children aged 4-5 were obese and a further 13.4% were overweight in 2022/23; in England, 22.1% of year 6 children (age 10-11) were obese and 13.8% overweight in 2023/24⁵. The costs resulting from these problems are already huge and are growing. The beauty of active travel is that it can be part of people’s everyday life, meaning that they meet recommended levels of physical activity without having to “make time” for exercise or pay for a gym membership. As for the benefits, “exercise can reduce your risk of major illnesses, such as coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and cancer, and lower your risk of early death by up to 30%” ⁶.

Introduction



Air quality in many of the UK’s urban areas is dangerously poor. In 2018, the Royal College of Physicians estimated that 40,000 annual deaths in the UK could be attributed to exposure to outdoor air pollution⁷. As measures such as road pricing and clean air zones help to move people out of cars and away from the most polluting vehicles, active travel is there to provide alternative ways of getting about. Walking, wheeling and cycling should be the natural first choice for shorter journeys⁸, and we must remember that practically any journey by public transport also involves some active travel.

The UK’s commitment to **Net Zero** is part of the government’s environment mission. In transport, this means a major emphasis on electrifying the fleet and decarbonising the grid. But that will not be enough. It also requires an unprecedented shift away from private, motorised transport. Public transport plays an exceptionally important role in this, as does active travel. Meanwhile, active modes remain the ultimate form of low-carbon travel⁹.

The UK government is also committed to kick-starting **economic growth**, with strong emphasis on making sure that growth is evenly distributed. The contribution of active travel to building prosperous local economies has been under appreciated for too long, despite an increasingly strong body of evidence. Active-travel interventions consistently deliver high benefit-cost ratios (13:1 on average¹⁰) and they are associated with significant increases in retail activity on high streets¹¹.

So, if there is a miracle cure for all of these challenges, it is active travel. And the UK has a series of active-travel targets reflecting this as our governments have increasingly recognised its importance:

- **40% of all journeys less than 1 mile to be cycled by 2040 (Northern Ireland)**¹²
- **45% of journeys to be made by public transport, walking and cycling by 2040 (Wales)**¹³
- **Half of all journeys in towns and cities being cycled or walked by 2030 (England)**¹⁴

Despite this, the UK’s recent record on active travel is poor. In Scotland, “the number of journeys made by walking and cycling were at similar levels to 2019 and prior years”¹⁵. In England, despite a slight upturn during the pandemic, the average number of cycle trips fell by 14% between 2002 and 2023; the average number of walking trips in 2023 was very similar to that in 2002¹⁶.

The reasons for this are well understood: the overwhelming reason given for not cycling is perceived danger. Recent research by British Cycling found the principal barrier to cycling was a lack of confidence on busy roads (52% of respondents), and this was more pronounced amongst females (65%)^{11a}. Many people would be happy to walk and wheel more if they felt safe doing so and if the experience were more pleasant all-round. The sad fact is that those travelling actively are enduring higher risk and inconvenience than those using private motorised modes. Moreover, they suffer disproportionately the harms generated by motor traffic whilst imposing very little harm on anyone else. **This is unjust.**

Social justice in active travel

Despite the downsides, huge numbers of people in the UK are enjoying the benefits of active travel, feeling healthier, getting to their destinations refreshed and energised, having positive interactions with loved ones and members of their communities, and saving money in the process.

Active travel really should be for everyone. But it isn’t. As we show in this report, the benefits of active travel are experienced very unevenly. That was the catalyst for this inquiry: beyond the general issues of justice that attend active travel identified above, **there is a very significant lack of social justice within active travel**. Many groups, such as children, Disabled people, women and people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, face greater barriers to active travel, and are therefore under-represented among those who walk, wheel and cycle in the UK.



We should all feel a moral obligation to respond to this: it is not acceptable that so many people feel excluded from something so positive. We must also recognise the potential practical benefits of doing so: if all groups did as much active travel as those who face the fewest barriers, that would represent a massive shift in the right direction. And, returning to the government's commitment to tackling health inequalities, it would bring the additional benefit of improving the well-being of people whose health is amongst the worst in the UK. For example, we know that people living in deprived areas have a substantially lower life expectancy; yet the people who cycle most are amongst the UK's more affluent. As we'll explain, LGBTIQ+ people face discrimination and abuse that can make walking, wheeling and cycling unappealing; this same group has a 52% incidence of depression (compared with 16% in the general population¹⁷). And there are many other examples.

Our research revealed that gender, age, disability, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and residential setting (e.g. living in a rural or urban area) can all play a part in determining how comfortable a person feels about travelling actively, or whether it is even possible. Very often, characteristics will present combined challenges (called intersectionality): Disabled people are likelier to experience poverty than non-disabled people, for example, which can make it more difficult for them to afford adapted cycles which are typically much more expensive than standard cycles.

The good news is that there are practical steps we can take that will address these problems, and there already is excellent work being carried out to do just that.

There is a great deal to do but there is a great deal to gain.

This inquiry
The APPGCW commissioned this inquiry in autumn 2024. We held a hearing at the Houses of Parliament on 9th December at which nine experts gave evidence (see Appendix 1), and we issued a call for written evidence. This elicited nearly 100 submissions from organisations and individuals across the UK. These can be viewed at <https://appgcw.org/resources/inquiries/>

An Advisory Board was convened (see Appendix 2) to provide expert opinion on the content of this report and its recommendations. The findings were also discussed informally with a range of expert stakeholders.

This report has been written by Dr Tom Cohen and Dr Ersilia Verlinghieri, both of the Active Travel Academy at the University of Westminster.

Structure of this report
The next section, called Laying the foundations, makes the case for fundamental changes in active travel that will underpin work to address social injustice within active travel. The following section, Barriers, provides a detailed survey of the occurrence of social injustice within active travel and the reasons for it. Facilitators explains what can be done to tackle social injustice and provides examples of the best work taking place. The final section is the inquiry's Recommendations for increasing social justice within active travel.

Laying the foundations

We have explained above that conditions for active travel in the UK are far from acceptable. This means that action on social justice within active travel can have only a limited effect if the basic conditions for active travel do not greatly improve.

This section sets out three fundamental requirements for active travel. They are the platform on which this inquiry's recommendations rest.

1. Reducing road danger

This was the theme of our last inquiry, Road Justice¹⁸, whose call to action was based on the unacceptably high level of danger faced by those travelling actively compared with those using other modes. We need the roads to become safer for all those walking, wheeling and cycling. The Road Justice inquiry made ten recommendations (see Appendix 3), all of which remain valid today. We restate our call for their implementation, drawing particular attention to the need to increase knowledge and understanding of the recent changes to the Highway Code. Referring to current events, we call for active travel to feature prominently in the Road Safety Review taking place in England.

2. Predictable, sustained funding at a level consistent with targets for walking, wheeling and cycling

We are not on track to meet any of the home nations' targets for active travel. A major reason

for this is that the level of funding for active travel does not match the ambition and is often inconsistent. Funds have tended to be allocated inconsistently and with short timeframes which do not match the magnitude and timescale of transformations needed to make active travel feasible for all. Recent work by IPPR recommends annual spending per head needs to reach £50 by 2029-30¹⁹. This does not have to be new money; it is a matter of revisiting the way funds are invested across transport in the UK. It is also critical that investment into efforts that tackle inactivity amongst disadvantaged group, including via DCMS and Sport England, remains strong. The share allocated to active travel has consistently been out of proportion with the benefits it generates. This has to change for active travel to achieve its potential.

3. All active-travel infrastructure to be of a high standard

A great deal of active-travel infrastructure in the UK does not live up to the standard of working for everyone. Some falls short in terms of physical accessibility; much, whilst accessible "on paper", is flawed in other ways²⁰.

The active-travel network in the UK must be truly welcoming to all, reflecting all protected characteristics. It must in particular meet the requirements of physical accessibility, including in its connections to the public-transport network²¹.



The Barriers



There are several barriers to the adoption of active travel, some of which affect minoritised groups more than others. This is a matter of social justice and fairness.

Barriers are evidenced by the unequal representation of those groups among those walking, wheeling and cycling. The Sustrans Walking and Cycling Index shows that, amongst those who walk at least once a week, only 10% identify as female compared to 21% who identify as male; 10% are disabled compared to 17% who are not; 11% are from lower socio-economic groups compared to 19% from higher; 13% are from minoritised ethnic groups compared to 16% of white people²². Department for Transport data show that in 2020 disabled people²³ took 28% fewer walking or wheeling trips compared to non-disabled people, and that men made

more than double the amount of cycle trips and cycled on average more than double the distance of women²⁴. The Active Lives Children's Survey shows how children and young people of Black, Asian and Other ethnicities in the UK are the least likely to be active²⁵. Even when looking at walking, wheeling and cycling in green and blue spaces, older people, people living in low-income areas, people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, and disabled people are underrepresented in such spaces in England, missing out an important opportunity for active travel and related health benefits²⁶.

Barriers affect different groups differently meaning they need to be addressed in a targeted way. However, removing barriers that make active travel inequitable can only benefit everyone that travels actively, and increase participation overall.

Barrier 1: Uneven provision of appropriate environments for walking, wheeling and cycling

Established and pervasive car-centric transport systems mean that resources (space and funding) for other modes of transport are scarce and unevenly distributed. This means that compromises are constantly being made in the quality of provision for walking, wheeling and cycling, with huge disparities, for example, between some neighbourhoods and others, or between urban and rural areas. This in turn fuels inequalities in participation in active travel.

A key mechanism by which poor walking, wheeling and cycling environments exclude some groups is in relation to road safety. Inadequate or non-existent infrastructure, combined with speed, aggressive driving and limited enforcement, lead to high rates of collisions and near misses, which in turn create a stressful and unsafe cycling environment. This has been shown to be a major deterrent to uptake²⁷.

These effects are disproportionately felt by minoritised groups. For example, research by Agilys and Living Streets found that **people from minoritised ethnic groups** walking in deprived areas are more than three times more likely to be killed or seriously injured on Britain's roads than white people walking in non-deprived areas²⁸. Recent research by Transport for London highlights that while fear of road danger remains the main barrier to cycling for all demographic groups, women, children and older Londoners are more likely not to cycle because of this fear. These are also the groups most likely to express a preference for infrastructure that separates cyclists from motor vehicles²⁹.

Poor provision excludes children and young people

Lack of adequate infrastructure is the main barrier to **children and young people** walking, wheeling and cycling. A survey of over 2,000 parents by Brake found that 69% would like their children to walk or wheel to school more often, but many say they can't

because the roads are too busy (39%) and the traffic moves too fast (24%).



The risks faced by children and young people vary considerably with other characteristics. For example, children travelling actively in the most deprived areas of England are three times more likely to be injured on the road than in the least deprived areas.

Non-compliant infrastructure and lack of inclusive design mean also that most footways and many cycle lanes are unsuitable for users of mobility aids and adapted cycles, leaving **Disabled people** unable to travel actively even where infrastructure exists³⁰. Poor pavement provision and maintenance (including absence of dropped kerbs and tactile options, poor surfacing, narrow and cluttered pavements, and inadequate road crossing facilities) are consistently reported as a key barrier to Disabled people journeys, especially in rural areas³¹. Similarly, access control barriers on cycle routes, such as A-frames or chicanes, mean many off-road and protected routes are practically inaccessible to people using adapted cycles and other mobility aids, as well as parents using prams/buggies etc³². Finally, unavailability of adequate resting places and toilets in public spaces reduces Disabled and older people's opportunities to travel actively³³.

Barrier 2: Uneven distribution of and access to cycles and mobility aids

The high costs associated with purchasing, renting or storing cycles and mobility aids means many who are willing to walk, wheel or cycle aren't currently doing so. Sustrans' Walking and Cycling Index 2019 revealed that 19% of residents from low-income households were stopped from cycling by the cost of purchasing a cycle ³⁴. This situation becomes even more problematic when low income intersects with other areas of marginalisation.

Cost of mobility aids and adapted cycles is a key barrier for disabled people

Disabled people are at higher risk of poverty compared to non-disabled people and face a significant pay and employment gap. As such, the cost of acquiring mobility aids, including adapted cycles, becomes prohibitive, especially where purchasing or repairing adapted cycles is much more expensive than standard ones. Sustrans' Disabled Citizens' Inquiry found that 16% of disabled people cannot access adequate mobility aids to walk or wheel (the figure rises to 27% for non-white disabled people). Research by UCL has shown that cost is the main barrier to accessing mobility aids such as walking sticks and wheelchairs, particularly for disabled women. Existing schemes, such as the Cycle to Work scheme, are of limited help because many people do not qualify or require cycles whose cost exceeds the scheme's maximum. In addition, there are currently extremely limited options for sharing or hiring accessible cycles and other micromobility devices, and a systematic lack of provision of accessible cycle storage for disabled people. 22% of respondents to Transport for All's research cited cycle storage difficulties as a barrier to cycling, particularly for larger adapted cycles.



High cost is also compounded by the inability of certain groups to access the Cycle to Work scheme. This is because the scheme is not available for **low-income earners** (including those paid less than the National Minimum Wage), unemployed, self-employed, retirees and most employees of SMEs, many of whom, as discussed, have already limited access to a cycle ³⁵. Similarly, cycle hires and rentals, which are often an important entry point for new cyclists, are often too expensive or distant for those who would benefit from using them ³⁶.

Finally, lack of safe and accessible parking for those who cycle or wheel is another key barrier, especially for **less affluent groups** who are less likely to have sufficient indoor or outdoor space to store their cycle/mobility aid securely at home, as they are more likely to live in high-density housing, or less likely to work for an employer who provides secure bike parking ³⁷. Sustrans' report on Residential Cycle Parking shows how 32% of surveyed people on low income or unemployed and 39% of Disabled people reported not having a convenient or secure cycle parking option at home, which corresponds to 3.7 million people in the UK ³⁸. Such residents also face barriers in accessing cycle hangars where provided, due to long waiting lists and high scheme costs.



Barrier 3: Unsupportive environments/culture

Providing adequate infrastructure and equipment tailored to the needs of specific groups is a key step to facilitating active travel uptake by diverse groups. However, this is not enough. Cultural factors, including how active travel is perceived by the public, and portrayed by the media and others, are key barriers to adoption for many. Moreover, available data are often not disaggregated enough by gender and other sociodemographic characteristics to enable a robust analysis of the intersectional factors influencing groups' experiences of active travel barriers, including those related to stigma, harassment and fear ³⁹.

Evidence so far reveals that, firstly, fear for one's safety is not only linked to perceived road danger, but also related to experiences of harassment and aggression on roads and in public space. Experience and fear of gender-based and racial hostility and violence are reported as a key barrier especially to walking, wheeling and cycling particularly **for women and LGBTQIA people** ⁴¹, and **Black people**⁴².

Fear and experience of gender-based aggression and violence is a key barrier for girls, women and LGBTQIA people

Fear of aggression means that many active travel routes (for example through parks or poorly lit residential areas) are felt as off-limits for many **women and girls**, especially during the winter months, meaning women and girls are excluded from benefitting of those spaces.

Aggression and abuse whilst cycling are also a key deterrent. London Cycling Campaign's survey reports a shocking picture with 93% of **women who cycled** surveyed saying that drivers had

deliberately used vehicles to intimidate them and 77% reported this happening at least once a month. **LGBTQIA and female delivery riders** report aggression by people driving cars or vans as a recurring event during their working day, and often a reason why they quit their jobs.



Secondly, norms and expectations of travel choices create exclusion for those who do not feature in current representations of who is walking, wheeling and cycling. For example, research by Transport for All showed how “a pervasive and damaging misconception that Disabled people do not or cannot cycle” prevents many **Disabled people** from cycling ⁴³. Similarly, messaging around activities and sports appropriate for **girls** means parents regard physical activity as less important for them than for boys⁴⁴. Because of gender stereotypes, **women** also enjoy significantly less leisure and physical activity time per day than men. These effects are also enhanced by the lack of role models for people from diverse backgrounds travelling actively, meaning such practices are still considered as an exception to the norm ⁴⁵.



The ‘facilitators’



There are many ways of addressing a lack of social justice in active travel. Some are targeted specifically at removing barriers faced by defined groups, by providing cycling experience days to Disabled people, for example. Others promote and/or enable active travel more generally and, in so doing, help to widen participation. A third type may increase social justice in active travel incidentally – speed limit reductions, for example, are generally proposed on grounds of road safety but can have the effect of making active travel more appealing to groups previously unlikely to participate, such as women and girls

and Disabled people. These all have their part to play in tackling the barriers described in the previous section. Overall, we note a somewhat disproportionate focus on cycling, with a smaller overall number of initiatives and organisations identified across the UK working directly on walking and wheeling. The prevalence of cycling amongst the examples reported below reflects a general concern that walking and wheeling, whilst crucial, are often forgotten dimensions of urban mobility.

Facilitator 1: Improvements to walking, wheeling and cycling environments

As mentioned in Laying the foundations, the reduction of motor traffic volumes and promotion of high-quality infrastructure (wide, unobstructed, accessible pavements or separated and safe cycle lanes and adequate cycle parking) must be a policy priority to facilitate widespread adoption of active travel by diverse groups.

Key initiatives working in this direction include the creation of high quality and connected cycle routes in London and other cities, advances in ensuring the quality of pavements including bans on advertising on pavements (Edinburgh) and bans on on-street parking to ensure that pavements can be fully used by those for whom they were designed (London, various Scottish cities and various locations overseas), and the provision of accessible and affordable cycle storage. Furthermore, wider transport policies can work towards ensuring that everyone, and particularly the more vulnerable amongst active travellers, can enjoy a safer and more accessible environment. These include: the introduction of 20mph limits, road-space reallocation programmes, road pricing, and reduction of traffic in residential areas creating safer and quieter environments for those who walk, wheel and cycle.

Turning to specific groups facing exclusion, for example children, the most effective policies include:

- The introduction of principles of play sufficiency (in Wales and increasingly in Scotland) at local and national level⁴⁶.
- The introduction of School Street programmes by many UK local authorities⁴⁷.
- The Play Street programme providing safe spaces for children to engage in active travel⁴⁸.

One example of action widening participation and access to safe active travel routes and to nature is a campaign, supported by law firm Leigh Day, to remove over 1,400 barriers on public pathways in Greater Manchester that restrict access for Disabled people and those using non-standard cycles or mobility aids, violating the Equality Act 2010 and human-rights laws. Removal is due to being in 2025 but campaigners are pressing Mayor Andy Burnham for quicker action.⁴⁹ Similar work is taking place on the Flintshire Coastal path⁵⁰.

Facilitator 1: Improvements to walking, wheeling and cycling environments

Other examples include:

- The implementation of Safer Parks guidance setting out key directives and examples to address the inequality of access to parks for women and girls in the UK and internationally ⁵¹.
- The promotion of coherent networks of safe, green walking routes (such as London Loop and Salford Trail) using green route plans such as the Leisure Walking Plan in London, linking neighbourhoods of 'green' and economic deprivation with green spaces and public transport ⁵².

Availability of adequately disaggregated data and robust spatial analysis is key in identifying adequate location and ensuring highest impact of such interventions. Achieving social justice in active travel means first of all identifying and prioritising those geographies which, due to a combination of poor provision and limited funding, have more limited access to quality walking, wheeling and cycling environments, face overall higher levels of socio-economic deprivation and have less access to community initiatives which support active travel uptake ⁵³.

London's connected and high-quality network of separated cycleways

London's progress in delivering high-quality cycle infrastructure offers important learning points for local authorities aiming at more just active travel interventions.

1. The adoption of New Cycleway Quality Criteria means protection from motor traffic and accessibility are at the core of cycling infrastructure design.
2. The use of Strategic Cycling Analysis means new routes are prioritised not only to cater for existing cycling demand but also for potential demand (i.e. trips not yet cycled but which could be cycled) and not just commuting trips, ensuring different groups can benefit from improvements.
3. The 2023 Access Control Guidance Note provides a process for the removal, replacement and/or installation of access controls, and sets out design requirements to ensure that existing and planned access controls allow for all legitimate use, and that users of adapted cycles in particular are not excluded.



Facilitator 2: Widespread provision of affordable and accessible mobility aids and cycles (including parking options)



Cost and availability of personal or hired/shared cycles and mobility aids are a central barrier to social justice in active travel. Various initiatives are designed to provide access to affordable cycles at the local level, with some attempts to provide national coverage for those not covered by the Cycle to Work scheme⁵⁴. These range from new concessions on cycle hire for lower income groups (promoted by Transport for London)⁵⁵, the creation of 'bike libraries' where members of communities can borrow bikes at no or very low cost⁵⁶, the donation or selling of affordable refurbished cycles to members of specific groups (which is often combined with creating job opportunities for those involved as mechanics)⁵⁷, to pilot schemes of non-standard cycle loans run by Wheels for Wellbeing⁵⁸. These initiatives are highly effective, with research on impacts of Welcome Wheels schemes for refugees and asylum seekers, for example, showing how cycle provision schemes designed to meet specific groups' needs offer greatest potential for reducing barriers to participation in active travel⁵⁹.

The provision of e-bike subsidies at national, regional and local level, a policy already popular in many European countries, also showed promising results. For example, an evaluation

of subsidy schemes in France (with a cap of €250) revealed the significant role these play in encouraging e-bike adoption, especially among women (58% of beneficiaries) and seniors (27% of beneficiaries are over 60 years old)⁶⁰.

Providing free bikes for people from disadvantaged communities

A partnership between The Active Wellbeing Society and local authorities has promoted a new 'National Free Bikes Network' to enable people from disadvantaged and under-represented communities in the UK to access free standard cycles and widen their access to travel. As part of this effort, over 8,000 free bikes have been delivered in Birmingham, 3,000 in Essex and 1,000 in Ealing, west London. The scheme is centred on building capacity and challenging the stigma of cycling. In addition to the bikes, it provides participants with free cycle training, free bike maintenance and free guided rides. Early evaluation of a pilot scheme showed increasing levels of physical activity and cycling participation among scheme participants.

Facilitator 3: Community interventions for active travel journeys

Community-based interventions are an effective way of facilitating the participation of minoritised groups in active travel⁶¹. By developing skills and social networks, they enable those who are traditionally excluded or underrepresented in active travel to have the confidence, support and knowledge they need to walk, wheel and cycle for their journeys⁶². This is done through programmes tailored to the specific needs of groups, including direct individual or group training in cycling or bike repair, community walking,⁶³ cycling and wheeling events and buddy schemes⁶⁴.

Organisations such as Black Girls Hiking, Joy Riders, Cycle Sisters, Wheels for Wellbeing, Wheels for All and Welcome Wheels often combine these formats to engage effectively with groups such as **women from minoritised ethnic groups or Disabled people**. These organisations are also highly influential in advocating for fairer decision-making processes when considering active travel policy. However, a gap exists especially in terms of organisations focused particularly on walking and wheeling, which we acknowledge should be urgently filled in.

Tailored training and confidence sessions aimed at groups who are traditionally excluded from cycling are also provided by several organisations, including Bikeability, British Cycling, Modeshift (STARS education programme) and TfL.

The West Midlands City Academy Project, supported by Sport England and British Cycling, provides young people - especially from underrepresented backgrounds - with access to cycling through community hubs, skill development, and talent identification as a legacy of the 2022 Commonwealth Games. In its first year, the project established five hubs, engaged over

18,000 participants, with 75% from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and saw multiple riders progress to BMX academies and competitive cycling, while also training local volunteers to sustain the initiative

Many of the existing community-based schemes are facilitated as part of dedicated grants such as: LCC Community Cycle Grant Programme, TfL Community Cycling Grants, LCC/Lime 'Share the joy' grants, or GM Moving, highlighting the importance of support and funding for the existence and continuity.

Supporting children's independent mobility

Training sessions are particularly important to support children's independent mobility. For example, training can have a highly positive effect on cycling confidence, both for young people and for parents when their children cycle. An evaluation study of Bikeability programmes found positive, statistically significant, impacts of participating in at least Level 2 training on cycling rates since the start of term, whether pupils have cycled on the road in the past week, whether parents allow their children to ride on roads and pupils' knowledge of how to ride on roads safely.

Tailored training by skilled trainers can also directly help children with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) who are underrepresented amongst children cycling.



Recommendations



We received a large number of recommendations in the submissions provided in response to our call for evidence. These complemented the very useful suggestions made by the expert witnesses at our hearing in December.

We have prioritised recommendations that have the greatest potential to improve social justice in active travel, based on the findings presented earlier in the report. We have also favoured recommendations which are specific, making it simpler to track whether they are implemented. We have also taken advice from various expert stakeholders, notably the Advisory Board who have assisted the inquiry process.

All the recommendations are feasible but there is a range of ambition, including both measures that would be relatively straightforward to implement and others that would require significant change.

1. Reduce financial barriers to cycling

A decent cycle costs money; an e-cycle costs more, and adapted cycles cost more still. For the large proportions of the population who cannot

store cycles inside their homes, the cost of secure storage can be prohibitive, which puts cycling out of reach for those on the lowest incomes (including refugees). Yet this is the group that could often benefit most from it. The correlation between disability and low income combined with the high cost of adapted cycles puts Disabled people in an especially difficult position. The following measures would make a major difference:

a) The Cycle to Work scheme should be revised (and renamed Cycle for Health) so that it is geared to help those who most need financial assistance with the cost of cycle purchase. This would extend the scheme's tax benefits to those on low incomes, self-employed people and pensioners.

b) Subsidy for purchasing e-cycles should be offered to those on low incomes, especially if living in rural areas, where distances can make using an unpowered cycle impractical.

c) Adapted cycles should be recognised as mobility aids and included in the Motability Scheme, which would mean VAT no longer applied to their purchase.

d) Transport authorities should allocate sufficient resource to subsidised cycle hire, loan and trial schemes to help people experience cycling at low or no cost before making the financial commitment.

e) The cost of renting a hangar space should not exceed a sixth of the cheapest parking permit in the same area.

2. Tackle pavement parking

Pavement parking is bad for all those who walk and/or wheel, but its impacts fall disproportionately on Disabled people and parents/carers with small children. We note the consultation conducted in England in 2020 and urge the current Government to take action on this issue. Specifically, we endorse the option of making the enforcement of the crime of unnecessary obstruction a civil matter, which will enable local authorities with civil parking enforcement powers to issue penalty charge notices to those breaking the law. This could be implemented quickly and give local authorities discretion on enforcement, based on the specifics of their area or the severity of the obstruction. We urge the governments of all the home nations to make equivalent offences a civil matter so pavement parking that causes unnecessary obstruction is brought quickly under control.

3. Data collection to enable sound monitoring and evaluation

To make sound decisions about social justice and active travel, we first need an accurate picture: who is travelling and how? Are the negative effects of transport falling disproportionately on certain groups? This applies to transport in general but particularly to active travel, where the quality of data is generally poor. We also need a better understanding of which interventions have the most positive impacts on groups facing exclusion. Policymakers for now depend on a

patchwork of data to support their decisions, and it is not normally possible to understand what is happening at the level of an individual local authority; this is partly because useful information is not routinely shared. We therefore recommend the development and implementation of a national strategy for improving monitoring and evaluation of transport interventions in general and active travel in particular.

4. Ensure UK-wide access to free cycle training, and widen its reach

Cycle training is a central plank of growing cycling. Whilst we welcome its wide availability in schools, we recognise provision is patchy and that it must be available to adults too. The current funding model does not work for either the instructor workforce or training providers. Cycle training needs to be free of charge, flexible, offered in a culturally inclusive way, and linked to long-term cycling opportunities, such as led rides, social cycling groups, and access to bikes. Funding for cycle training needs to be long-term and stable. Moreover, concerted effort is required to ensure the population of trainers represents the diversity of those who could benefit from cycling, i.e. everyone.

5. Make Inclusive Mobility a minimum standard for designing infrastructure

Transport authorities are encouraged to follow guidance but they are not obliged to, so much of what is built excludes Disabled people. This will change if authorities are asked to adhere to standards rather than to consider following guidance. Inclusive Mobility is generally regarded as a good set of principles when designing to cater for people with a range of impairments. It should be made a design standard and its profile within the Department for Transport increased.

Recommendations



6. Effective and meaningful involvement of interest groups in policy development

Certain local transport authorities do a good job of including diverse voices in their planning, for example inviting representatives of relevant community organisations to attend regular roundtable meetings at which plans are discussed from an early stage to ensure that diverse needs are taken into account. This should be standard practice across all transport authorities, and to avoid the risk that such initiatives might be seen as simply “window dressing”, authorities should set out in advance the process for incorporating the views expressed into decision making, and report regularly on the impact such processes have had on plans and policies. Authorities need to be provided with the funds to support this.

7. Enable the most effective community-based organisations to maximise their impact

We have shown that there is some excellent work being done by grass-roots organisations to challenge exclusion and widen participation. Very often, these organisations are best placed to do this work. But we have also described how many

of them struggle financially. Governments at all levels need to respond by placing this service – it is a service – on a sound financial footing. Instead of handing out small grants annually based on a “beauty parade”, local transport authorities need to provide these organisations with the security and confidence to flourish, by making longer-term commitments based on a fair assessment of past performance. It would be very helpful if this action were clearly connected with authorities’ plans for addressing social justice (Recommendation 8). Meanwhile, the authorities themselves need the means to make these commitments by being provided with sufficient secure and long-term funding to finance them (see Laying the foundations, above).

8. Build social justice into performance management in local transport

As we have shown, issues of social justice permeate transport in general and active travel in particular. On the basis that what gets measured gets managed, local transport authorities should monitor and report on their performance with respect to social justice. This includes monitoring to understand the current situation as well as assessment of new policies/schemes:

will they actively correct injustice, for example by increasing uptake of active travel by people historically excluded from it? This requires each transport authority to have suitable structures in place, and we suggest it would help to have a named officer leading on social justice, responsible for monitoring and reporting. As with Recommendation 7, this has a resource implication so national governments must provide additional funds to authorities to finance this additional activity.

Funders need to reinforce this change by providing local transport authorities with an incentive to improve. Active Travel England’s capability ratings have motivated those scoring poorly to tackle weak performance; those ratings should be expanded to include considerations of social justice and authorities assessed as weak should be provided with targeted assistance to improve their grade. This also requires Active Travel England and equivalent bodies to strengthen their teams with inclusive design specialists who can take proper account of the needs of people with a range of impairments and lived experiences.

9. Remove access control barriers from public cycleways, footpaths, parks, and other amenities; strengthen action against anti-social use of motorcycles

Access control barriers are typically installed to prevent antisocial use of motorcycles but are not generally effective. Instead, they can make routes impassable for people with mobility impairments and others using non-standard cycles. We recommend guidance is issued on best practice in removing access control barriers, based on the latest research. We at the same time endorse the updated Crime and Policing Bill’s pursuit of the “Safer Streets mission”. This will remove the requirement for the police to issue a warning before seizing off-road bikes being used anti-socially.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Witnesses giving evidence at hearing, 9th December 2024, Palace of Westminster

Organisation	Individual
Age UK	Emma Hutchins, Physical Activity and Health Influencing Manager, Richmond Group of Charities
Black Riders Association	Temi Lateef, Founder
Cycle Sisters	Sabeha Miah, Area Co-ordinator
Cycle Sprog	Karen Gee, Founder
Living Streets	Tanya Braun, Director of Policy and Communications
Saheli Hub	Naseem Akhtar, CEO
The Bike Project	Lizzie Kenyon, Chief Executive
Transport For All	Megan Barnett, Policy and Public Affairs Officer
Wheels for Wellbeing	Ben Foley, Campaigns and Policy Lead

Appendix 2 - Members of the Advisory Board

Organisation	Individual
Brake	Luca Straker, Campaigns Manager
Cycle Sisters	Sarah Javaid, CEO & Founder
LDN Riders	Damion Cotterell, Head of Operations and Development
Paths for All	Ian McCall, Policy & Partnerships Manager
Poverty Alliance	Ralph Hartley, Policy Officer
Transport for All	Emma Vogelmann, Head of Policy, Public Affairs, and Campaigns

Appendix 3 – Recommendations from the APPGCW’s previous inquiry, Road Justice

See <https://appgcw.org/resources/inquiries/road-justice-report-2023/>

- Escalating penalties for repeated offences
- Compulsory re-testing
- Increased maximum sentence for dangerous driving and fuller use of Police bail powers
- Exceptional hardship to be truly exceptional
- Removal of tolerances in speed enforcement
- Consistently thorough investigation of serious collisions
- Standardising third-party reporting systems
- A UK Commissioner for Road-Danger Reduction
- Treating crash victims as victims of crime
- Widen understanding of the Highway Code

Appendix 4 - Footnote Links

1. [*Cycling Weekly \(2022\) Chris Boardman becomes the first commissioner of Active Travel England | Cycling Weekly*](#)

2. [*Labour \(2024\) Build an NHS fit for the future – The Labour Party*](#)

3. [*NHS \(2023\) Adult physical activity - NHS England Digital*](#)

4. [*Scottish Government \(2023\) 9 Physical Activity - The Scottish Health Survey 2022 – volume 1: main report - gov.scot*](#)

5. [*House of Commons Library \(2025\) Obesity statistics*](#)

6. [*NHS \(2024\) Benefits of exercise - NHS*](#)

7. [*Royal College of Physicians \(2018\) Every breath we take: the lifelong impact of air pollution | RCP*](#)

8. [*Department for Transport \(2023\) The second cycling and walking investment strategy \(CWIS2\) - GOV.UK*](#)

9. [*See, for example, Brand et al \(2021\) The climate change mitigation effects of daily active travel in cities*](#)

10. [*Transport for London \(2018\) Walking and cycling: the economic benefits.*](#)

11. [*Living Streets \(2024\) The Pedestrian Pound.*](#)

11a. [*Unpublished research carried out by British Cycling.*](#)

12. [*Department for Regional Development \(2015\) A Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland.*](#)

13. [*Welsh Government \(2021\) Llwybr Newydd - The Wales Transport Strategy 2021, p48*](#)

14. [*Department for Transport \(2020\) Gear Change . p12*](#)

15. [*Transport Scotland \(nd\)Personal Travel | Transport Scotland*](#)

16. [*Department for Transport \(2024\) NTS 2023: Active travel*](#)

17 [*The King's Fund \(2024\) Health inequalities in a nutshell | The King's Fund*](#)

18 [*APPGCW \(2023\) Road Justice Report 2023*](#)

19 [*IPPR \(2024\) STRIDE AND RIDE*](#)

20. [*London Cycling Campaign's recent Women's Freedom After Dark report concluded that nearly a quarter of the total length of TfL's Cycleway network is 'socially unsafe' after dark - London Cycling Campaign \(2025\) 24% of Cycle Network Unsafe After Dark*](#)

21 [*National Centre for Accessible Transport \(2024\) Understanding the Roles and Responsibilities of Accessible Transport Staff in Local Government*](#)

22 [*Sustrans \(2023\) Walking and Cycling Index 2023 | Sustrans*](#)

23 [*Gov.uk \(2020\) Transport: Disability and Accessibility Statistics, England 2020*](#)

24 [*Gov.uk \(2020\) Walking and cycling statistics, England: 2020 - GOV.UK*](#)

25 [*Sport England \(2023\) Active Lives Children and Young People Survey 2022-23.*](#)

26 [*Ramblers \(2022\) Who has a Public Right of Way?*](#)

27 [*Aldred \(2016\) Cycling near misses: Their frequency, impact, and prevention.*](#)

28 [*Agilys \(2021\) Walking and inequality*](#)

29 [*Transport for London \(2021\) Cycling potential in London's diverse communities*](#)

30 [*Sustrans \(2003\). The Disabled Citizens' Inquiry; Transport for All \(2023\) Are we there yet? Barriers to transport for disabled people in 2023*](#)

31. [*Transport for All \(2023\) Are we there yet? Barriers to transport for disabled people in 2023; Bridge G \(2025\) Equitable mobility: enhancing walkability and rollability for inclusive and healthy communities.*](#)

32 [*Wheels for Wellbeing \(2023\) Inclusive Cycle Infrastructure Guide: Inaccessible barriers*](#)

33. [*Sustrans \(2023\) Disabled Citizens Inquiry*](#)

34. [*Sustrans The cycling opportunity*](#)

35. [*Sustrans \(2023\) Walking and Cycling Index 2023 | Sustrans*](#)

36 [*Dalton, Burke and Jones \(2022\) Free-to-use cycle provision schemes have potential to encourage cycling and reduce inequalities*](#)

37 [*Sustrans \(2024\) Residential cycle parking*](#)

38 [*Sustrans \(2024\) Residential cycle parking*](#)

39 [*APPG for UN Women \(2021\) Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces ; Lam \(2022\) Towards an*](#)

[*Intersectional Perspective in Cycling | Active Travel Studies*](#)

40 [*Lam \(2022\) Towards an Intersectional Perspective in Cycling | Active Travel Studies*](#)

41 [*Vera-Gray and Kelly \(2020\) Contested gendered space: public sexual harassment and women's safety work; APPG UN Women. 2021. Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces.*](#)

42 [*Osei and Aldred \(2023\) "You always think about what other people be thinking": Black men and barriers to cycling in London ; Lam \(2022\) Towards an Intersectional Perspective in Cycling | Active Travel Studies*](#)

43 [*Transport for All \(2023\) Are we there yet? Barriers to transport for disabled people in 2023*](#)

44 [*Women in Sport \(2023\) Sport, Stereotypes and Stolen Dreams: Why girls still feel they don't belong in sport*](#)

45 [*Lam \(2022\) Towards an Intersectional Perspective in Cycling | Active Travel Studies ; Osei and Aldred \(2023\) "You always think about what other people be thinking": Black men and barriers to cycling in London*](#)

46 [*https://www.playengland.org.uk/manifesto*](https://www.playengland.org.uk/manifesto)

47 [*Thomas \(2022\) MAKING SCHOOL STREETS HEALTHIER: Learning from temporary and emergency closures*](#)

48 [*Playing Out. What are play streets?*](#)

49 [*Leigh Day \(2024\) Leigh Day award for campaign to scrap barriers in Manchester*](#)

50 [*TCC Flintshire Coastal Path - remove the barriers!*](#)

51 [*Safer Parks Consortium \(2023\) Safer Parks: Improving access for women and girls*](#)

52 [*Transport for London \(2022\) London Leisure Walking Plan 2022*](#)

53 [*Lam \(2022\) Towards an Intersectional Perspective in Cycling | Active Travel Studies*](#)

54 [*Halfords has launched an initiative for employees ineligible for the formal scheme, offering bikes at a 20% discount and spreading the cost through net deduction arrangements*](#)

55 [*Transport for London \(2024\) Equity in Motion*](#)

56 [*Greater Manchester Sports Partnership \(2024\) Leigh Bike Library enjoying huge success in first 18 months*](#)

57 [*HELP BIKES FOR REFUGEES*](#)

58 [*Wheels for Wellbeing \(2024\) Wheels4Me*](#)

59 [*Dalton, Burke and Jones \(2022\) Free-to-use cycle provision schemes have potential to encourage cycling and reduce inequalities*](#)

60 [*ADEME \(2016\) Etude d'évaluation sur les services vélos*](#)

61 [*Dalton, Burke and Jones \(2022\) Free-to-use cycle provision schemes have potential to encourage cycling and reduce inequalities*](#)

62 [*Nixon and Schwanen \(2018\) Emergent and integrated justice | 9 |Lessons from community initiatives to improve infrastructures for walking and cycling . ; Valentini and Butler \(2023\) Bike Kitchens and the sociomateriality of practice change: exploring cycling-repair relations.*](#)

63 [*For example the Ramblers' Wellbeing Walks Initiative*](#)

64 [*For example, LCC Cycle Buddies programme and the Bike Buddy programme in Greater Manchester*](#)

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Active Travel and Social Justice Report

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