

Enabling everyone to walk, wheel or cycle





Foreword



Imagine living in a place where everything you need is within a 20 minute walk.



Caroline Bloomfield
Sustrans Northern Ireland Director

Streets prioritise people with wide pavements, seating and cycle parking. Cycling and walking are safe and easy. Public transport is easily accessible.

There is green space in your neighbourhood. Children play outside as it feels safer, and they walk and cycle to school again. A series of footpaths and protected cycleways ensures people can get around safely. There are some longer journeys you need to make by car but these are rare. And because you move every day, you are healthier. You see your neighbours and have a social connection to the place in which you live. It is a community.

Sustrans' vision became even more relevant when Covid-19 hit. We have come to value our green space and local neighbourhood more than ever. There has been a huge surge in walking and cycling which have been recognised not just for their mental and physical health benefits, but as important modes of transport.

Walking and cycling can be for everyone, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity or background. But we will need to see investment if they are really to be for everyone.

Northern Ireland still lags behind the rest of the UK and Ireland in terms of investment. We have seen a number of pop-up cycle lanes and some pedestrianised areas in our cities but these have been few and far between.

Covid recovery has placed greater importance on a number of key issues: our local environment; connection with outdoors and nature; mental and physical health; air pollution.

At present we face a **climate change crisis** in which emissions from cars are a major source, we have **air pollution** which damages our health and the health of unborn children, and we have levels of **physical inactivity that cost our NHS billions** every year.

Walking and cycling can be a key part of the solution – and they don't cost a lot. Sustrans wants a future where people are healthier and happier, where the climate crisis is under control and air pollution is a thing of the past.

It's all achievable. **We just need the right leadership.** We need these policy asks to be front and centre of your party's manifesto to enable walking and cycling for everyone, every day.

Healthier places and happier lives for everyone



Summary

Ask 1: Make Northern Ireland the equal of Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, by dedicating at least **10% of total Transport budget** to walking, wheeling and cycling.

Note: 'wheeling' relates to people using wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

Ask 2: Make walking and cycling a realistic and safe alternative to the car. Create a capital fund for development and improvement of **urban and rural greenways/ National Cycle Network** across Northern Ireland to ensure it is accessible for everyone and fulfil the Department for Infrastructure's Strategic Plan for Greenways [published in 2016].

Ask 3: Transform travel in the Belfast area by fully funding a Project Team with a timetable to deliver the **Belfast Cycling Network**, similar to the Glider project. Develop plans for cycling networks across all urban areas of Northern Ireland, including Derry~Londonderry.

Ask 4: Ensure every child who can and wants to is able to safely walk and cycle to school.

Ask 5: Create a programme for **School Streets** embedded within neighbourhoods that provide safe, car-free zones around Primary Schools.

Ask 6: Help local authorities transform towns and cities to put people first by making **20-Minute Neighbourhoods** a central principle in local planning, transport, health and economic policy. Ensure all new developments and town regeneration schemes prioritise the most vulnerable road users and reduce car dependency to create more vibrant places for people.

Ask 7: Legislate for an **Active Travel Act**, similar to Wales, to ensure active travel is embedded in the statutory planning process, that urban and rural greenway development is a statutory duty of local authorities and fund the Act (as outlined in Ask 2).

Ask 8: **Implement 20mph speed limits** as the default in all built-up areas to improve road safety and encourage active travel in neighbourhoods.

Ask 9: Ensure there are adequate powers and enforcement to **tackle inconsiderate and irresponsible pavement and cycle lane parking** so that people are enabled to walk, wheel and cycle safely.

Ask 10: Implement a **Climate Change Act** like the rest of the UK regions and ensure we are on track to reach Net Zero emissions by 2050 if not sooner.

Ask 11: Legislate for a **Clean Air Act** to mitigate against the harmful pollutants we are all breathing – transport being the second largest source of air pollution in Northern Ireland.





Increase investment in safe, healthy, sustainable travel



During the Covid pandemic, walking and cycling came to play a key role in people's lives, either as their form of daily exercise or safe mode of transport. There is strong public support for investing in active travel and creating more space for cycling infrastructure.

However, Northern Ireland lags well behind the rest of the UK and Republic of Ireland (RoI) with the lowest per capita spend on walking and cycling. For many years less than £2 per head was spent. This has risen in the current financial year to £7 but remains at just 2% of the transport budget. By comparison Scotland is spending £21 per head and Wales £23. The new coalition government in the RoI is even more ambitious with a commitment to spending £66 per head or 20% of its transport budget on walking and cycling over the next five years.

Long-term funding is essential. For too long, active travel has been given the crumbs of the transport budget but without any real long-term investment. We want to see at least 10% of the budget dedicated to walking and cycling by 2024/25. This needs to happen if we are to change travel habits and improve our health, the environment and make our towns and cities more liveable.

We call on the next Northern Ireland Assembly to lock in the changes we have seen in people's walking and cycling behaviour by further investing in active travel, ensuring better integration of the National Cycle Network (NCN) to improve connectivity between towns and rural areas. This requires a dedicated revenue funding stream to support people and groups to walk and cycle more.

The economic case for investment in cycling is strong. We get £5.50 for every £1 we invest and the benefits include: a healthier population; stronger, safer local communities; better access to jobs and education; lower levels of pollution and a reduced impact on the environment. All things we should value more especially after this pandemic.

- Ask 1:** Make Northern Ireland the equal of Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, by dedicating at least **10% of total Transport budget** to walking, wheeling and cycling.
- This would include a **revenue funding** stream for behaviour change work to support programmes across communities, workplaces and schools.
 - Establish strategically-placed **Active Travel Hubs** to enable people to overcome barriers to walking, wheeling and cycling.

Note: 'wheeling' relates to people using wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

- Ask 2:** Make walking and cycling a realistic and safe alternative to the car. Create a capital fund for development and improvement of **urban and rural greenways/ National Cycle Network** across Northern Ireland to ensure it is accessible for everyone and fulfil the Department for Infrastructure's Strategic Plan for Greenways [published in 2016].

- Ask 3:** Transform travel in the Belfast area by fully funding a Project Team with a timetable to deliver the **Belfast Cycling Network**, similar to the Glider project. Develop plans for cycling networks across all urban areas of Northern Ireland, including Derry~Londonderry.



Enable our children to travel by foot or cycle safely

More children than ever are being driven to school. Just under half (46%) of Primary school-children in Northern Ireland live under a mile from their school. However, more than half of these pupils (55%) are driven to school and just 38% walked. As many as a quarter of children here are overweight or obese.

The number of Primary School pupils being driven has risen in the past six years from 59% to 68% ([Department for Infrastructure, DfI statistics](#)).

The [Active School Travel Programme](#) has proven to be effective as a behaviour change programme increasing numbers walking, cycling and scooting, while reducing car travel.

- Active travel increased from 35% to 53% at participating schools (2018-19).
- At the same time, car use fell from 58% to 41%.

This is funded jointly by DfI and the Public Health Agency (PHA) and is an excellent example of a collaborative approach to tackling problems.

Come visit one of the schools taking part in the programme, we would love to show you the impact it is having!

We take on 60 new schools each year for a three-year period, but the programme needs to expand and provide more intensive and long-term support to school communities in order to turn around the statistics across Northern Ireland.

An expanded Schools programme should be augmented with an infrastructure programme to make the road safety improvements necessary around schools and give parents more confidence to allow their children to travel independently. It should also provide secure cycle and scooter parking at schools.

The Active School Travel Programme can only offer **cycle training** to 16 pupils per school and only in the first year of the school joining the programme. An expanded programme should offer all Primary 6 pupils cycle training.

Removing congestion from the roads around schools will create safer streets, keep children's lungs safe from harmful air pollution, as well as incorporate exercise into their daily routine. **School Streets** measures – closing streets around schools at drop-off and pick-up times – will enable this.

Ask 4: Ensure every child who can and wants to is able to safely walk and cycle to school.

- by maintaining and expanding the Active School Travel Programme.
- developing an infrastructure programme 'Safe Routes to School' to make the road safety improvements needed around schools.
- offering on-road cycle training to all Primary 6 pupils (9 & 10 year olds) to give them the skills to cycle safely and
- provide secure cycle and scooter parking at schools.

Ask 5: Create a programme for **School Streets** embedded within neighbourhoods that provide safe, car-free zones around Primary Schools.



Create more liveable, sustainable places for everyone



We define a 20-Minute Neighbourhood as one that allows residents to meet most of their needs by a 20 minute round trip on foot.

The way in which we have built housing developments over recent decades has been focused around the car, at the expense of providing local services, amenities and jobs for a community to thrive. The different lockdowns have forced us to reorganise our lives much closer to home. This sudden change brought into the spotlight the importance of having food retail, education, health services and green space close to where we live. It also highlighted that not everyone has equal access to those things, particularly when the private car is taken out of the equation.

We need to plan new homes and infrastructure in a sustainable way and put people's needs first. The concept of **20-Minute Neighbourhoods** should be used to better align spatial planning (i.e. what is in an area) with transport planning to enable more people to walk, cycle or use public transport. We want every new housing development to be a 20-Minute Neighbourhood and every mixed-use development linked by greenways for walking and cycling as well as served by public transport.

We need to stop building places for the car and put the needs of people and our planet first.

Ask 6: Help local authorities transform towns and cities to put people first by making **20-Minute Neighbourhoods** a central principle in local planning, transport, health and economic policy. Ensure all new developments and town regeneration schemes prioritise the most vulnerable road users and reduce car dependency to create more vibrant places for people.

Ask 7: Legislate for an **Active Travel Act**, similar to Wales, to ensure active travel is embedded in the statutory planning process, that urban and rural greenway development is a statutory duty of local authorities and fund the Act (as outlined in Ask 2).

Ask 8: **Implement 20mph speed limits** as the default in all built-up areas to improve road safety and encourage active travel in neighbourhoods.

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Tackling climate change and air pollution

We haven't had time to catch our breath from the Covid crisis for the biggest issue of our time to hit us – climate breakdown. The planet is warming at an alarming rate and scientists are unanimous that much of this has been caused by human activity.

Transport is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the UK at 28% of all our emissions; and the second largest emitter in Northern Ireland at 20% (DAERA figure). While many sectors have cut their emissions, transport has increased.

Electric vehicles will help reduce local emissions but they still have an environmental impact, and do not reduce congestion. Modelling suggests we need to reduce private vehicle use between 20% and 60% by 2030 if we are to meet governmental climate change targets that are necessary to mitigate against the cataclysmic predictions of floods, food shortages, droughts and wildfires.

We desperately need a **Climate Change Act** like the rest of the UK to ensure we are on track to reach Net Zero emissions by 2050 if not sooner. Again we lag behind our neighbours in taking action despite the fact our Assembly has declared a Climate Emergency.

Another vital issue we need to tackle is the invisible killer – **air pollution**.

We now have evidence that people who live in areas of poor air quality are more susceptible to Covid. Residents in heavily polluted areas are often not aware of the toxins in the air they are breathing.

Some of the most concerning levels of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) emissions, which largely come from diesel engines, were recorded across inner-city working-class communities, with heavy traffic prevalent.

NO₂ causes a range of harmful effects on the lungs, inducing cough, wheezing and asthma attacks.

There is also increasing evidence that tiny particulate pollution, from tyre and brake wear, as well as exhaust emissions, contribute to a range of health conditions including stroke and heart disease (Royal College of Physicians, 2016).

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About Sustrans

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

We are engineers and educators, experts and advocates. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

Sustrans works in partnership, bringing people together to find the right solutions. We make the case for walking and cycling by using robust evidence and showing what can be done.

We are grounded in communities and believe that grassroots support combined with political leadership drives real change, fast.

Join us on our journey. www.sustrans.org.uk

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