# Belfast Walking and Cycling Index 2023

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Sustrans

## Foreword

Our vision for walking, wheeling and cycling in Belfast

Since joining the Department for Infrastructure in September 2023, one of my key priorities is to deliver safe, sustainable transport infrastructure. The Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 states that we must develop sectoral plans for transport which set a minimum spend on active travel from the overall transport budgets of 10%. This presents our society with a massive opportunity to reconsider how we choose to travel.

Enabling more people to walk, wheel, or cycle for shorter journeys is the most cost-effective way of reducing transport emissions and improving air quality; whilst also contributing to making our towns and cities better places to live, work and socialise.

The health benefits of increased physical activity are widely accepted so, not only can we improve the efficiency of our transport network, but we can also improve our general health and wellbeing. Effective active travel networks can help to combat transport inequalities by providing options for the many people in our society who can’t drive or who don’t own a car.

The previous iteration highlighted increased uptake in active travel over the Covid period but now reflects a general return to pre-pandemic levels. This publication demonstrates the many benefits of active travel but also shows that Belfast still has much to do if we want a city where the majority of people feel safe and happy using our streets to get around. I am confident that change can be achieved without pitting modes of transport against one another.

The Department has taken a number of steps in recent years that will help us to ramp up as we strive to meet our Climate Change Act ambitions. We have reorganised internally and have added a number of key posts to our Active Travel team. We are currently finalising an Active Travel Delivery Plan for Northern Ireland. When complete, this plan will complement the Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan and the Strategic Plan for Greenways to seek to facilitate accelerated delivery of active travel infrastructure. We have also made changes to our supply chain that will increase our design and construction capacity in the coming years.

I would like to thank everyone involved in producing this report and I look forward to working with all our stakeholders and partners to improve active travel in Belfast and right across Northern Ireland.

**Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary**

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## The Walking and Cycling Index

The Walking and Cycling Index (formerly Bike Life) is the biggest assessment of walking, wheeling and cycling in urban areas in the UK and Ireland.

It is delivered by Sustrans in collaboration with 23 cities and urban areas. Each city[[1]](#footnote-2) reports on the progress made towards making walking, wheeling and cycling more attractive, everyday ways to travel.

The Walking and Cycling Index reports every two years. This is the fifth report from Belfast produced in partnership with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The data in this report comes from 2023 and includes local walking, wheeling and cycling data, modelling and an independent survey of 1,071 residents aged 16 or above in Belfast. The survey was conducted from March to June 2023. Social research organisation NatCen conducted the survey, which is representative of all residents, not just those who walk, wheel or cycle.

Across this report we have included comparisons to 2021 data where available.

Our thanks to the people of Belfast who took part in the survey and shared their stories with us.

More details on all reports can be found at [www.sustrans.org.uk/walking-cycling-index](https://www.sustrans.org.uk/walking-cycling-index). For more data, including 2019 figures where available, see the [Index Data Tool](https://www.sustrans.org.uk/walking-cycling-index).

Map of the UK and Ireland showing the cities participating in the Walking and Cycling Index: Aberdeen, Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Cork Metropolitan Area, Dublin Metropolitan Area, Dundee, Dunfermline, Edinburgh, Galway Metropolitan Area, Glasgow, Greater Cambridge, Greater Manchester, Inverness, Limerick Metropolitan Area, Liverpool City Region, Perth, Southampton City Region, Stirling, Tower Hamlets, Tyneside and Waterford Metropolitan Area.

### Defining wheeling

We recognise that some people who use wheeled mobility aids, for example a wheelchair or a mobility scooter, may not identify with the term walking and may prefer to use the term wheeling. We use the terms walking and wheeling together to ensure we are as inclusive as possible.

## Headlines

Belfast

### Population[[2]](#footnote-3)

**348,005**

### Survey area

Map showing the area covered by the survey with Belfast City Hall, Stormont and Cave Hill Country Park highlighted. The area is approximately **53** square miles and covers all of Belfast.

### The impact of the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic had a big impact on travel. In 2021 whilst most restrictions had been lifted, many people were taking fewer journeys and working from home.

#### Residents who travel by the following modes five or more days a week in Belfast

##### Walking or wheeling

**51%** in 2019

**54%** in 2021

**52%** in 2023

##### Driving[[3]](#footnote-4)

**54%** in 2019

**44%** in 2021

**51%** in 2023

##### Public transport

**13%** in 2019

**7%** in 2021

**12%** in 2023

##### Cycling

**5%** in 2019

**4%** in 2021

**5%** in 2023

Participation in walking, wheeling and cycling on a regular basis has decreased since 2021.

**52%** of residents walk or wheel at least five days a week (**54%** in 2021)

**12%** of residents cycle at least once a week (**17%** in 2021)

### Walking, wheeling and cycling participation is not equal

Residents’ travel choices and their perceptions of walking, wheeling and cycling sometimes vary widely between different groups.

#### Proportion of residents who walk or wheel at least five days a week

**44%** of disabled people

**55%** of non-disabled people

#### Proportion of residents who cycle at least once a week[[4]](#footnote-5)

**7%** of women

**16%** of men

### Not all residents feel safe and welcome in their neighbourhood

#### Proportion of residents who think walking or wheeling safety is good

**52%** of disabled people

**61%** of non-disabled people

#### Proportion of residents who think cycling safety is good

**38%** of people aged 16–25

**41%** of people aged 66+

#### Proportion of residents who feel welcome and comfortable walking, wheeling or spending time on the streets of their neighbourhood[[5]](#footnote-6)

**56%** of socio-economic group DE

**81%** of socio-economic group AB

### Everyone benefits when more people walk, wheel and cycle

Every day, walking, wheeling and cycling in Belfast take up to **80,000** cars off the road.[[6]](#footnote-7) Each year in Belfast these three modes combined:

* Prevent **707** serious long‑term health conditions
* Create **£201.5 million** in economic benefit for individuals and Belfast
* Save **13,000 tonnes** of greenhouse gas emissions

### Residents want to walk, wheel and cycle more and drive less

**30%** of residents want to drive less, yet **38%** of residents often use a car because no other transport options are available.

#### Percentage of residents who would like to use different types of transport more or less in the future:

##### Walk or wheel

**57%** more

**4%** less

##### Cycle

**47%** more

**2%** less

##### Take public transport

**37%** more

**9%** less

##### Drive

**14%** more

**30%** less

### Residents want more funding for walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport

#### Percentage of residents who would like to see more government spending in their local area:

**62%** on walking and wheeling (**60%** in 2021)

**54%** on cycling (**58%** in 2021)

**71%** on public transport (**66%** in 2021)

**29%** on driving (**29%** in 2021)

### Increased funding would help support more liveable neighbourhoods

#### Among Belfast residents:

**65%** support, while **17%** oppose, more cycle paths along roads, physically separated from traffic and pedestrians

**65%** agree, while **14%** disagree, that increasing space for people socialising, walking, wheeling and cycling on their local high street would improve their local area

**77%** support, while **7%** oppose, the creation of more 20-minute neighbourhoods[[7]](#footnote-8)

**61%** support, while **19%** oppose, banning vehicles parking on the pavement

**68%** support, while **12%** oppose, the creation of more low‑traffic neighbourhoods[[8]](#footnote-9)

**57%** support, while **17%** oppose, shifting investment from road building schemes to fund walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport

## Walking in Belfast

Walking and wheeling participation, safety and satisfaction

### Walking and wheeling participation

Overall in Belfast the number of people walking and wheeling regularly (at least five days a week) has stayed about the same since 2021.

Walking and wheeling are often overlooked in transport. This is despite being an efficient use of space, good for our health and having no environmental impact.

**94%** of all residents walk or wheel (**95%** in 2021)

**52%** of residents walk or wheel at least five days a week (**54%** in 2021)

#### Proportion of residents who walk or wheel at least five days a week

##### Gender[[9]](#footnote-10) and sexuality

**52%** of women (**53%** in 2021)

**52%** of men (**57%** in 2021)

**59%** of LGBTQ+ people

**50%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

##### Ethnicity

**53%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**53%** in 2021)

**52%** of white people (**55%** in 2021)

##### Age

**55%** of people aged 16–25 (**60%** in 2021)

**48%** of people aged 26–35 (**53%** in 2021)

**54%** of people aged 36–45 (**59%** in 2021)

**54%** of people aged 46–55 (**54%** in 2021)

**49%** of people aged 56–65 (**52%** in 2021)

**50%** of people aged 66+ (**51%** in 2021)

##### Disability

**44%** of disabled people (**51%** in 2021)

**55%** of non-disabled people (**57%** in 2021)

##### Socio-economic group[[10]](#footnote-11)

**56%** of AB (**61%** in 2021)

**52%** of C1 (**52%** in 2021)

**42%** of C2 (**53%** in 2021)

**48%** of DE (**50%** in 2021)

### Walking and wheeling safety and satisfaction

**58%** of residents think the level of safety for walking or wheeling is good (**70%** in 2021)

**46%** of residents think the level of safety for children walking or wheeling is good (**53%** in 2021)

**70%** of residents think their local area overall is a good place to walk or wheel (**74%** in 2021)

#### Proportion of residents who think walking or wheeling safety in their local area is good

##### Gender and sexuality

**57%** of women (**72%** in 2021)

**61%** of men (**71%** in 2021)

**53%** of LGBTQ+ people

**60%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

##### Ethnicity

**70%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**69%** in 2021)

**58%** of white people (**72%** in 2021)

##### Age

**52%** of people aged 16–25 (**68%** in 2021)

**55%** of people aged 26–35 (**66%** in 2021)

**60%** of people aged 36–45 (**75%** in 2021)

**60%** of people aged 46–55 (**74%** in 2021)

**64%** of people aged 56–65 (**76%** in 2021)

**63%** of people aged 66+ (**70%** in 2021)

##### Disability

**52%** of disabled people (**63%** in 2021)

**61%** of non-disabled people (**75%** in 2021)

##### Socio-economic group

**67%** of AB (**78%** in 2021)

**54%** of C1 (**66%** in 2021)

**62%** of C2 (**73%** in 2021)

**46%** of DE (**65%** in 2021)

### Quote from Nandan Rohilla

I live in student accommodation in Belfast city centre. The connectivity for public transport is not good in the city so I prefer to walk.

I can get about much quicker on foot.

If I want to go to Queens, I could be waiting 15 minutes for a bus and then it can take 20 minutes or more to drive there.

Walking is also good for de-stressing. It’s good to get outside. I enjoy it.

## Cycling in Belfast

Cycling participation, safety and satisfaction

### Cycling participation

Overall in Belfast the number of people cycling has decreased since 2021. Despite a much larger potential for cycling, only **12%** of people cycle regularly.[[11]](#footnote-12)

Cycling participation, however, is not equal. Barriers to cycling can be far more pronounced for some people. Safety, including road safety and personal safety, is the single largest barrier to cycling.[[12]](#footnote-13)

**32%** of all residents cycle (**35%** in 2021)

**12%** of all residents cycle at least once a week (**17%** in 2021)

#### Proportion of residents who cycle at least once a week

##### Gender and sexuality

**7%** of women (**11%** in 2021)

**16%** of men (**23%** in 2021)

**19%** of LGBTQ+ people

**10%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

##### Ethnicity

**14%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**36%** in 2021)

**12%** of white people (**15%** in 2021)

##### Age

**13%** of people aged 16–25 (**19%** in 2021)

**13%** of people aged 26–35 (**19%** in 2021)

**17%** of people aged 36–45 (**22%** in 2021)

**12%** of people aged 46–55 (**16%** in 2021)

**9%** of people aged 56–65 (**13%** in 2021)

**8%** of people aged 66+ (**9%** in 2021)

##### Disability

**8%** of disabled people (**10%** in 2021)

**14%** of non-disabled people (**20%** in 2021)

##### Socio-economic group

**13%** of AB (**24%** in 2021)

**11%** of C1 (**13%** in 2021)

**8%** of C2 (**9%** in 2021)

**13%** of DE (**15%** in 2021)

### Cycling safety and satisfaction

**35%** of all residents think the level of safety for cycling in their local area is good (**34%** in 2021)

**29%** of all residents think the level of safety for children cycling is good (**27%** in 2021)

**37%** of all residents think their local area overall is a good place to cycle (**36%** in 2021)

#### Proportion of residents who think cycling safety in their local area is good

##### Gender and sexuality

**31%** of women (**32%** in 2021)

**39%** of men (**37%** in 2021)

**35%** of LGBTQ+ people

**37%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

##### Ethnicity

**55%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**56%** in 2021)

**34%** of white people (**32%** in 2021)

##### Age

**38%** of people aged 16–25 (**42%** in 2021)

**36%** of people aged 26–35 (**32%** in 2021)

**35%** of people aged 36–45 (**34%** in 2021)

**32%** of people aged 46–55 (**30%** in 2021)

**30%** of people aged 56–65 (**36%** in 2021)

**41%** of people aged 66+ (**32%** in 2021)

##### Disability

**29%** of disabled people (**29%** in 2021)

**37%** of non-disabled people (**37%** in 2021)

##### Socio-economic group

**38%** of AB (**38%** in 2021)

**32%** of C1 (**27%** in 2021)

**40%** of C2 (**31%** in 2021)

**34%** of DE (**42%** in 2021)

### Quote from Kristopher Noronhe

I have been car-free for quite a while now. I choose to cycle because it keeps me active. It’s hard to set aside time just for exercise. I find I would rather cycle to work, cycle for my groceries. In North Belfast where I live, it’s quite hilly, and I only really manage it because I have an e-bike.

I used to live in the city centre, where there were lots of bus lanes that I could cycle in. My wife used to cycle when we lived there. I do notice that the infrastructure is lacking in North Belfast. If I’d started living in North Belfast first, I probably wouldn’t cycle, but I got used to it in the city centre.

Since we moved to North Belfast, my wife hasn’t cycled. She doesn’t drive, so she is unsure of what the road rules are, and it makes her nervous to cycle without good cycle lanes.

## Benefits of walking

Why everyone gains when more people walk or wheel

### Belfast residents walk or wheel 14 times around the world every day

There has been a reduction in trips to a destination and for enjoyment and fitness since 2021.

#### Annual walking and wheeling trips by purpose[[13]](#footnote-14)

##### 2023: 129.3 million trips

Destination – adults only (like work, school, shopping): **65,400**,**000** or **51%**

School – children only: **8,500**,**000** or **7%**

Enjoyment or fitness – adults and children (including running): **55,400**,**000** or **43%**

This adds up to **127.6 million** miles = **350,000 miles** a day

##### 2021: 137.5 million trips

Destination – adults only (like work, school, shopping): **68,400**,**000** or **50%**

School – children only: **8,000**,**000** or **6%**

Enjoyment or fitness – adults and children (including running): **61,100**,**000** or **44%**

This adds up to **151.8 million** miles = **420,000 miles** a day

### Walking and wheeling benefits residents and the local economy

The Walking and Cycling Index uses a model to understand the costs and benefits of driving and walking. For example travel time, vehicle operating costs, health benefits, air quality and taxation.

**36**p is saved[[14]](#footnote-15) for each mile walked or wheeled instead of driven in Belfast. (**6**p in 2021)

Over a year this adds up to **£11.5 million** from adults with a car in their household walking or wheeling to work, school and other destinations. (**£1.9 million** in 2021)

The total annual economic benefit from all trips walked and wheeled in Belfast is **£165.2 million**[[15]](#footnote-16) (**£182.1 million** in 2021)

### Walking and wheeling unlocks health benefits for everyone

**Walking in Belfast prevents 588 serious long-term health conditions each year (623 in** 2021**)**

##### Cases prevented

Hip fracture: **231**

Dementia: **171**

Depression: **67**

Coronary heart disease: **63**

Other conditions: **55**

‘Other conditions’ includes type 2 diabetes, stroke, breast cancer, colorectal cancer.

Saving the NHS in Belfast **£7.3 million** per year (**£4.1 million** in 2021), equivalent to the cost of **180,000** GP appointments (**140,000** in 2021)

These figures are based on applying Belfast data to Sport England MOVES tool which shows the return on investment for health of sport and physical activity.

In Belfast the physical activity benefits of walking prevent **131** early deaths annually (**139** in 2021), which is valued at **£475 million**[[16]](#footnote-17) (**£459 million** in 2021)

Please note wheelchair or mobility scooter trips are modelled as walking trips for the purposes of the MOVES and HEAT models.

People walking and wheeling more instead of driving improves air quality, saving annually:

**26,000 kg** of NOx (**30,000 kg** in 2021)

and

**3,400 kg** of particulates (PM**10** and PM**2.5**) (**4,000 kg** in 2021)

**44%** of residents agree the air is clean in their local area (**46%** in 2021)

### Walking and wheeling in Belfast helps mitigate our climate crisis

**8,800 tonnes** of greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) saved annually by walking or wheeling instead of driving (**8,800 tonnes** in 2021), equivalent to the carbon footprint of **19,000** people taking flights from Belfast to Tenerife (**20,000** people in 2021)

Transport now accounts for **17%** of Northern Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions, of which the main sources are the use of petrol and diesel in road transport.

Between 1990 and 2021, transport emissions went up by **3%**, while overall emissions went down by **23%**.

Greenhouse Gas Statistics 1990-2021, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

### Walking and wheeling keeps Belfast moving

Studies show walking or cycling frees up road space in comparison to driving.[[17]](#footnote-18) This helps to keep Belfast moving for all road users.

**70,000 return walking and wheeling trips** are made daily in Belfast by people that could have used a car. (**71,000** in 2021)

If these cars were all in a traffic jam it would tail back **210 miles** equivalent to the distance from Belfast to Waterford. (**210 miles** in 2021)

## Benefits of cycling

Why everyone gains when more people cycle

### Belfast residents cycle 4 times around the world every day

There has been an increase in commuter trips since 2021. However, cycling levels have stayed about the same for leisure trips.

#### Annual cycling trips by purpose in Belfast[[18]](#footnote-19)

##### 2023: 10.2 million trips

Work: **3,300**,**000** or **33%**

School, college or university (adults): **720,000** or **7%**

School (children): **260,000** or **3%**

Shopping, personal business and social trips: **3,700**,**000** or **36%**

Leisure: **2,200**,**000** or **22%**

This adds up to 35.2 million miles = **97,000 miles** a day

##### 2021: 9.5 million trips

Work: **2,400**,**000** or **26%**

School, college or university (adults): **600,000** or **6%**

School (children): **730,000** or **8%**

Shopping, personal business and social trips: **3,200**,**000** or **34%**

Leisure: **2,500**,**000** or **26%**

This adds up to 34.5 million miles = **94,000 miles** a day

### Cycling benefits residents and the local economy

The Walking and Cycling Index uses a model to understand the costs and benefits of driving and cycling. For example travel time, vehicle operating costs, health benefits, air quality and taxation.

**£1.30** is saved for each mile cycled instead of driven in Belfast. (**9**5p in 2021)

Over a year this adds up to **£21.6 million** from adults with a car in their household cycling to work, school and other destinations. (**£11.8 million** in 2021)

The total annual economic benefit from all trips cycled in Belfast is **£36.3 million**[[19]](#footnote-20) (**£25.8 million** in 2021)

### Cycling unlocks health benefits for everyone

#### Cycling in Belfast prevents 119 serious long-term health conditions each year (100 in 2021)

##### Cases prevented

Hip fracture: **40**

Dementia: **33**

Depression: **18**

Coronary heart disease: **15**

Other conditions: **13**

‘Other conditions’ includes type 2 diabetes, stroke, breast cancer, colorectal cancer.

Saving the NHS in Belfast **£1.5 million** per year (**£660,000** in 2021), equivalent to the cost of **38,000** GP appointments (**22,000** in 2021)

These figures are based on applying Belfast data to Sport England MOVES tool which shows the return on investment for health of sport and physical activity.

In Belfast the physical activity benefits of cycling prevent **12** early deaths annually (**10** in 2021), which is valued at **£43.6 million**[[20]](#footnote-21) (**£33.6 million** in 2021)

People cycling more instead of driving improves air quality, saving annually: **9,900 kg** of NOx (**7,900 kg** in 2021)

and

**1,300 kg** of particulates (PM10 and PM2.5) (**1,000 kg** in 2021)

**44%** of residents agree the air is clean in their local area (**46%** in 2021)

### Cycling in Belfast helps mitigate our climate crisis

**4,600 tonnes** of greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) saved annually by cycling instead of driving (**3,400 tonnes** in 2021), equivalent to the carbon footprint of **10,000** people taking flights from Belfast to Tenerife (**7,600** people in 2021)

Transport now accounts for **17%** of Northern Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions, of which the main sources are the use of petrol and diesel in road transport.

Between 1990 and 2021, transport emissions went up by **3%**, while overall emissions went down by **23%**.

Greenhouse Gas Statistics 1990-2021, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

### Cycling keeps Belfast moving

Studies show walking or cycling frees up road space in comparison to driving.[[21]](#footnote-22) This helps to keep Belfast moving for all road users.

**9,100** return cycling trips are made daily in Belfast by people that could have used a car. (**6,400** in 2021)

If these cars were all in a traffic jam it would tail back **27 miles** equivalent to the distance from Belfast to Ballymena. (**19 miles** in 2021)

## Walking solutions

What would help make walking and wheeling easier?

### Residents want more services and amenities within walking and wheeling distance

Ideally, walking or wheeling should be the most attractive option for short journeys. An area can support this by ensuring many of the things people need are found near to where people live. The environment should be safe, comfortable and welcoming.

20-minute neighbourhoods are places where you can walk from your home to many of the things you need on a regular basis.

**44%** of Belfast households are in neighbourhoods of more than 40 homes per hectare (**44%** in 2021). These are or can become 20-minute neighbourhoods.

These higher-density neighbourhoods with more people can sustain local businesses and public transport routes.[[22]](#footnote-23)

**57%** agree they can easily get to many places they need to visit without having to drive (**55%** in 2021)

#### What percentage of residents would find more local amenities and services useful to help them walk or wheel more?

**76%** More shops and everyday services, such as banks and post offices, close to your home (**82%** in 2021)

**74%** More government services, such as doctors surgeries and schools, close to your home (**76%** in 2021)

**84%** More parks or green spaces close to your home (**85%** in 2021)

**80%** More things to see and do close to your home, like cafés or entertainment venues (**84%** in 2021)

#### Proportion of households within an 800m radius of the following amenities

This is modelled as a straight-line distance, as opposed to the actual walking distance based on street layout which is likely to be longer (approximately equivalent to 960m).

Food shop: **93%**

Park or space for recreation: **94%**

Doctors surgery: **72%**

Primary school: **97%**

Library: **39%**

Post Office: **83%**

A mix of cultural and leisure venues:[[23]](#footnote-24) **95%**

Railway station: **21%**

Bus stop (within 400m): **98%**

### Residents want better streets

There are many ways to make our streets and neighbourhoods safe, welcoming and comfortable for everyone to walk or wheel in.

#### What percentage of residents think that these changes would help them walk or wheel more?

**73%** Wider pavements (**77%** in 2021)

**74%** More frequent road crossings, with reduced wait times (**76%** in 2021)

**82%** Nicer places along streets to stop and rest, like more benches, trees and shelters (**82%** in 2021)

**75%** Better pavement accessibility, like level surfaces, dropped kerbs at crossing points (**76%** in 2021)

**71%** Fewer cars parked on the pavement (**73%** in 2021)

**67%** Less fear of crime or antisocial behaviour in their area (**72%** in 2021)

#### In Belfast

on all roads making up junctions, **19%** of those with traffic lights for cars have no red and green man for pedestrians (**20%** in 2021)

**82%** of residents agree more measures to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour on the street or in public spaces would improve their local area (**84%** in 2021)

### Quote from Heather Ferguson

In recent years my job has changed and I now work from home.

In order to clear my head before work I take my dog for a walk before and afterwards. We walk to local parks and on the Comber Greenway. It wakes me up and gives me energy first thing in the morning.

It also makes me more sharp and able to focus. I find I meet people, it’s very sociable. I’ve also got to know a lot more people in my local area.

I would enjoy walking more if there were less cars parked on the pavement; drivers sticking to the speed limits so it feels less dangerous crossing the road.

It would also be good to have more greenways or places to walk away from busy roads.

I’m looking forward to the proposed new greenway at Sydenham.

## Cycling solutions

What would make cycling better?

### Many Belfast residents want to cycle

#### How do residents see themselves when it comes to cycling?

Regularly cycle: **7%** (**10%** in 2021)

Occasionally cycle: **17%** (**17%** in 2021)

New or returning to cycling: **4%** (**5%** in 2021)

Do not cycle but would like to: **35%** (**32%** in 2021)

Do not cycle and do not want to: **37%** (**36%** in 2021)

#### What proportion of residents said they ‘do not cycle but would like to’?

**38%** of women (**34%** in 2021)

**43%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**30%** in 2021)

**33%** of disabled people (**31%** in 2021)

### Residents want improved cycling infrastructure

#### What percentage of residents would be helped to cycle more by better facilities?

**67%** More traffic‑free cycle paths away from roads, like through parks or along waterways (**72%** in 2021)

**66%** More cycle paths along roads that are physically separated from traffic and pedestrians (**69%** in 2021)

**65%** More signposted local cycle routes along quieter streets (**69%** in 2021)

**68%** Better links with public transport, like secure cycle parking at train stations (**69%** in 2021)

There are **64** cycle parking spaces across all **11** railway stations (**64** in 2021)[[24]](#footnote-25) and **6** cycle parking spaces across the **2** bus stations in Belfast (**6** in 2021)

#### Belfast has:[[25]](#footnote-26)

**40 miles** of traffic‑free cycle paths away from the road (**39 miles** in 2021)

**2 miles** of cycle paths physically separated from traffic and pedestrians (**2 miles** in 2021)

**11%** of households within **125m** of these routes (**11%** in 2021)

**65%** of residents support building more cycle paths physically separated from traffic and pedestrians, even when this would mean less room for other road traffic (**68%** in 2021)

### Residents want more support to cycle

#### What percentage of residents think that these kinds of support would help them cycle more?

**48%** Cycling training courses and organised social rides (**47%** in 2021)

**56%** Access or improvements to a city cycle hire scheme (**59%** in 2021)

**57%** Access to secure cycle storage at or near home (**60%** in 2021)

**58%** Access to a bicycle (**62%** in 2021)

**49%** Access to an electric cycle (**48%** in 2021)

**40%** Access to a cargo cycle with space to carry children or shopping (**37%** in 2021)

**31%** Access to an adapted cycle, like a tricycle or handcycle (**28%** in 2021)

#### Belfast cycle hire scheme[[26]](#footnote-27)

**440** hire cycles (**450** in 2021)

**52** cycle hire stations (**47** in 2021)

**149,745** annual trips (**116,560** in 2021)

#### Reported cycle thefts

There were **562** reported cycle thefts in Belfast in 2022/23. (**463** in 2021/22)

For every **225** people who own an adult cycle in Belfast, there was **1** reported cycle theft in the past year.

There is a public cycle parking space for every **54** people who cycle in Belfast. (**64** in 2021)

#### Proportions of residents with access to an adult cycle

**45%** of residents (**43%** in 2021)

**36%** of socio-economic group DE (**34%** in 2021)

**52%** of socio-economic group AB (**56%** in 2021)

**56%** of residents support financial discounts for people on low incomes or not in employment to help them buy a cycle

**37%** of households are within 800m of a cycle shop[[27]](#footnote-28)

### Quote from Joanne Garland

I’ve had a trike for over two years, and recently upgraded to an e-trike. My walking can be bad because of cerebral palsy, but when I’m on my trike, it’s like my cerebral palsy just disappears.

I had been on anti-depressants for 9 years, but within two months of getting my trike, I was off the medication. It’s lifechanging.

I’ve named my new e-trike ‘Joy’, because that is what it gives me.

It can be tricky because there aren’t many good cycle lanes. The lanes that are there are usually too narrow for my trike, so I either go on the footpath or the road.

I would love to help more people with disabilities get involved in trying out trikes and e-trikes.

## Neighbourhood solutions

What would help make neighbourhoods better?

### All residents should feel welcome in their neighbourhood

#### Proportion of residents that feel welcome and comfortable walking, wheeling or spending time on the streets of their neighbourhood

**71%** of residents (**68%** in 2021)

**79%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**67%** in 2021)

**71%** of white people (**69%** in 2021)

**69%** of women (**71%** in 2021)

**73%** of men (**66%** in 2021)

**65%** of LGBTQ+ people

**73%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

**65%** of disabled people (**57%** in 2021)

**74%** of non-disabled people (**74%** in 2021)

**56%** of socio-economic group DE (**61%** in 2021)

**81%** of socio-economic group AB (**78%** in 2021)

### The dominance of motor vehicles can discourage walking, wheeling and cycling

Only **25%** of residents think that their streets are not dominated by moving or parked motor vehicles. (**21%** in 2021)

#### Residents would find fewer motor vehicles on their streets useful to:

**65%** Walk or wheel more (**68%** in 2021)

**61%** Cycle more (**68%** in 2021)

Unclassified roads are not designed to carry through-traffic, but in Belfast **17%** of their total length has nothing to prevent it (**18%** in 2021). This can result in rat-running.[[28]](#footnote-29)

**57%** agree that restricting through-traffic on local residential streets would make their area a better place. (**58%** in 2021)

**6%** of Belfast’s streets have 20mph speed limits.[[29]](#footnote-30) (**5%** in 2021)

#### Residents would find more streets with 20mph speed limits useful to:

**59%** Walk or wheel more (**58%** in 2021)

**57%** Cycle more (**60%** in 2021)

### Residents want local streets to be better spaces for people to spend time in

**65%** agree increasing space for people socialising, walking, wheeling and cycling on their local high street would improve their local area (**71%** in 2021)

**51%** agree they regularly chat to their neighbours, more than just to say hello (**49%** in 2021)

**68%** support low‑traffic neighbourhoods (**73%** in 2021)

### Quote from Pedro Donald

My commute is 15–20 minutes from Tates Avenue to the city centre. Cycling in the mornings gives me time on my own to think and plan my day.

The worst thing is the state of the roads – potholes, glass, stones, especially near the kerbs. The amount of punctures I’ve had is unbelievable.

The bike parking at the Sunflower bar is well used. I got nice ones, in the shapes of bikes, I thought it might as well be a bit of art!

A lot of the staff cycle and I’ve put them through the Cycle to Work Scheme so it’s good they’ve somewhere safe to lock their bikes.

It’s a big advantage at the end of their shifts because it’s hard to get a taxi and the roads are quieter then so they can get home quickly.

### Neighbourhoods must be designed with children in mind

Neighbourhoods should be places for children to thrive. Increasing independence, providing space to play and socialise, and improving the journey to school are all important.

If we design neighbourhoods with children in mind they will then work better for everyone else too.

**11 years old** average age when people living with children would let them walk, wheel or cycle independently in their neighbourhood. (11 years old in 2021)

**80%** of seven-year-olds in Germany are allowed to go alone to places within walking distance, other than school.[[30]](#footnote-31)

**44%** of residents agree there is space for children to socialise and play (**44%** in 2021)

**90%** of households are within 800m of a children’s playground

Among Belfast residents:

**46%** agree, while **29%** disagree, closing streets outside local schools to cars during drop-off and pick-up times would improve their local area (**51%** agreed, while **21%** disagreed, in 2021)

These are known as ‘School Streets’.

**0** schools in Belfast have School Streets schemes[[31]](#footnote-32)

## Developing Belfast

Recent walking, wheeling, cycling and neighbourhood changes

The Department for Infrastructure recognises that active and sustainable travel can contribute to meeting the challenge of climate change. We also know that it can help to create a more vibrant and liveable environment for our people and can contribute to good health and wellbeing. We want Belfast to have world-class infrastructure that is inclusive and attractive for all to help contribute towards these goals.

The Department continues to work with partners across all sectors to deliver better active travel infrastructure. £12m was spent on active travel capital related projects in 2022/2023 and as we move forward into future years, we look towards our commitments within the Climate Change Act to spend 10% of the Department’s overall transport budgets on active travel. The Department has also reorganised internally and added key posts to our Active Travel teams to help with this.

We have commissioned a Northern Ireland wide Active Travel Delivery Plan, including a full update of our design guidance which, when complete, will provide our teams with a firm basis for the prioritisation of the delivery of active travel infrastructure, within and connecting our towns and cities. The Department is also working closely with councils to better understand their five-year active travel programme and developing an appropriate grant and support framework for the delivery of greenways. Other recent developments include engagement on the development of the West Belfast Greenway and further commitment of funding for the Lagan Gateway Phase 2 project, delivered in partnership with Belfast City Council. Phase 2 will see the development of a greenway connection from Lagan Lands East at Annadale through to Belvoir Forest Park, to further encourage and enable more sustainable travel.

### Comber Greenway Lighting

The pilot scheme to light the urban part of the Comber Greenway switched on in April 2023. These eco-friendly lights are programmed to operate during the hours of darkness, from 6am to sunrise and from sunset until 10:30pm. As this is a pilot project, a full review of the scheme will be carried out after two years as well as an ecological and bat survey.

### Adelaide Street

Since the last publication of the Index, the Department for Infrastructure, in partnership with Belfast City Council, implemented a temporary scheme on Adelaide Street in the centre of Belfast. The scheme replaced a lane of traffic with a half-kilometre of urban garden and new public space. It has created a more pedestrian-friendly environment with enhanced lighting, shelter, cycle parking, significant greening, and seating.

### Upgrade to the A55 Upper Knockbreda Road and Cregagh Road Junction

In July 2023, a pedestrian and cyclist safety improvement scheme was completed at the busy A55 junction with the Cregagh Road. This has provided safe access for walking and cycling from the Rosetta and Cregagh residential areas across this busy dual-carriageway to complete the link between the Connswater Greenway and the Cregagh Glen. The scheme included the realignment, widening and resurfacing of the carriageway, the upgrade of the traffic signals and the addition of toucan crossings on all legs of the junction.

### Forth Meadow Community Greenway

The Forth Meadow Community Greenway was completed in August 2023. This 12km urban greenway weaves its way through mostly traffic free routes in north and west Belfast to the new Transport Hub in the city centre. It connects communities between Clarendon Park, Springfield Dam, and Falls Park, in an area with a history of interface tensions. This Belfast City Council project was supported by DfI. Sustrans was tasked with developing a volunteer programme that has resulted in more than 30 trained walk and cycle leaders from communities across the area. This has helped to animate the route and encourage residents to walk, wheel and cycle more.

## Looking forward

Better streets and places for everyone

### Eastern Transport Plan (ETP)

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is working alongside five local councils and key stakeholders to draft proposals for the future transport network including Belfast, which will be set out in the Eastern Transport Plan 2035 (ETP 2035). This will supersede the 2015 Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan.

The vision is to deliver an integrated plan to enhance and re-balance transport networks in favour of sustainable and efficient modes. The development of the ETP aims to reduce car dominance in the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area and surrounding areas by enabling safe, coherent and direct active travel infrastructure so that walking, wheeling and cycling become more attractive and feasible options for users. It will aim to improve active travel connections to city, town, district and local centres. These proposed improvements will offer our communities more sustainable transport options with the expectation of increasing the number of journeys made by walking, wheeling and cycling.

### The Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan (BCN) 2022-31

Design work and preparations for public engagement and statutory consultations are progressing well on most schemes on the BCN short-term list. These projects will make a significant difference to the attractiveness of cycling for many people in Belfast.

Work on the Sydenham to Holywood active travel routes, is under development for a 4km path along the railway track from Victoria Park, through Sydenham to the Holywood Exchange shopping area. As part of that route, work on the design to widen the existing path from Victoria Park to Millennium Park is progressing. The same is true of routes on Montgomery Road, from Castlereagh Road to the Connswater Greenway and on Island Street, between Dee Street and Ballymacarrett Road, linking to Titanic Railway Station.

We continue to work with stakeholders on the development of the West Belfast Greenway project. Following completion of a feasibility study for the route from the Bog Meadows to the Lagan Tow Path near Dunmurry, work has progressed to detailed design stage. It is expected that the first phase will commence construction this year.

In the South of the city work is ongoing on plans for the Ravenhill Road active travel route and the Department is aiming to commence procurement for a Design and Build contractor in 2024 to deliver the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge. This iconic new bridge will link south and east Belfast to the southern edge of the city centre at the Gasworks and on towards Dublin Road, Botanic Avenue, Queens University area and Grand Central Station.

In North Belfast, options are being further developed for cycle routes on Limestone Road and Cavehill Road with the intention of re-engaging with local stakeholders to find the most suitable outcome for residents and visitors in the area. We are also working in partnership with the Department of Communities to investigate options for enhanced active travel as part of their environmental improvement plans for Oldpark Road.

### Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

Legislative Requirement - Article 22 of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 states that “The Department for Infrastructure must develop sectoral plans for transport which set a minimum spend on active travel from the overall transport budgets of 10%”. The implications of this are currently under policy consideration.

### Next Steps

We have recently commenced work on an Active Travel Network Delivery Plan for Northern Ireland, including a full update of our design guidance. This plan will provide our teams with a firm basis for the prioritisation of active travel infrastructure delivery within and connecting our towns and cities. The plan and associated design guidance will complement and take account of the Belfast Cycle Network Delivery Plan and the Exercise, Enjoy, Explore strategic plan for greenways.

### Quote from Stephen Greenlees

Cycling is a way of including exercise into my daily routine that doesn’t require any additional time out of my day.

My job is predominately computer-based and can be quite emotionally draining. Getting a half hour cycle in the fresh air really helps to clear my head.

I think more resources into the cycling network would help.

The other thing would be changing facilities at work. You can’t change Belfast weather but it would be nice to be able to get dried off and changed before starting work!

## Notes on methodology:

The attitudinal survey was conducted from March to June 2023 by independent social research organisation NatCen.

The survey is representative of all Belfast residents, not just those who walk, wheel or cycle.

2021 survey data was collected from June to August 2021, also by NatCen, following the same methodology.

All other data is sourced from our city partners, national data sets or modelled and calculated by Sustrans.

Trip estimates use a model developed by Sustrans. When comparing to other travel surveys, some variation may exist in the proportion of journeys travelled by journey purpose.

Rounding has been used throughout the report. In many cases we have rounded to the nearest whole number. Rounding is avoided where this may cause confusion, for example with modelled estimates shown in the summary and benefits sections.

More information and a detailed methodology are available at [www.sustrans.org.uk/walking-cycling-index](https://www.sustrans.org.uk/walking-cycling-index)

Sustrans makes it easier for everyone to walk, wheel and cycle.

We work for and with communities, helping them come to life by walking, wheeling and cycling to create healthier places and happier lives for everyone.

Join us on our journey. [www.sustrans.org.uk](https://www.sustrans.org.uk/)

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1. City is used as a shorthand for Walking and Cycling Index cities, city regions, metropolitan areas and boroughs. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. NISRA 2022 mid-year population estimates. This is the most recent available for Belfast. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Travelling as driver or passenger of car, van or motorcycle. In 2019, questions did not include traveling by motorcycle. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The sample size for respondents who identified their gender ‘in another way’ was too low to be statistically significant and therefore is not presented here. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Socio-economic group is a classification based on occupation maintained by the Market Research Society. Groups A and B are professional and managerial. Groups D and E are semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, homemakers and people not in employment. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Based on walking, wheeling and cycling by residents that live in a household with a car. Does not include leisure cycling or leisure walking or wheeling trips. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See definition in **Walking solutions**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. For definition see [Methodology document](https://www.sustrans.org.uk/walking-cycling-index). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The sample size for respondents who identified their gender ‘in another way’ was too low to be statistically significant and therefore is not presented here. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Socio-economic group is a classification based on occupation maintained by the Market Research Society. Groups A and B are professional and managerial. Group C1 is supervisory/clerical and students. Group C2 is skilled manual. Groups D and E are semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, homemakers and people not in employment. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Based on people who cycle at least once a week. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. See Bike Life, 2019 Belfast report. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Trips for enjoyment or fitness include adults and children (with and without adult accompaniment). School trips are shown separately for children only. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Benefits have increased significantly, mainly because of increased costs of driving and greater traffic congestion. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. This includes trips walked or wheeled for enjoyment or fitness, and trips to destinations by people with and without a car. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Based on WHO/Europe Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT), which enables an economic assessment of the health benefits of walking by estimating the value of reduced mortality resulting from specified amounts of walking. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Litman, 2023. Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Based upon Eric Bruun and Vuchic, 1995. The Time-Area Concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Leisure trips include adults and children (with and without adult accompaniment). Education trips are shown separately for adults and children. All other trips are just adults. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. This includes trips cycled for enjoyment or fitness, and trips to destinations by people with and without a car. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Based on WHO/Europe Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT), which enables an economic assessment of the health benefits of cycling by estimating the value of reduced mortality resulting from specified amounts of cycling. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Litman, 2023. Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Based upon Eric Bruun and Vuchic, 1995. The Time-Area Concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Sustrans, 2017. Linking Active Travel and Public Transport to Housing Growth and Planning. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. A minimum of three distinct types of cultural and leisure venues, like cafés, pubs, bingo halls, cinemas, museums. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. This includes some cycle parking that is shared with bus users. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. To ensure comparability, these figures are correct as of 31 May 2023 for all city reports. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. 2023 data covers July 2022–June 2023. 2021 data covers July 2020–June 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Credit to the Association of Cycle Traders (ACT) for their assistance with cycle shop locations and services offered. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Based on analysis by CycleStreets [www.lowtrafficneighbourhoods.org](https://www.lowtrafficneighbourhoods.org/). Unclassified roads are all public roads that are neither motorways, A, B nor C roads. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Excludes motorways. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Children’s Independent Mobility: an international comparison and recommendations for action, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Figure given is correct as of 31 May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)