



Belfast

# Walking and Cycling Index 2023



Department for  
**Infrastructure**

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Department for  
**Infrastructure**

[www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)



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Published March 2024

# 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 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](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/walking-cycling-index). For more data, including 2019 figures where available, see the [Index Data Tool](#).



### 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<sup>i</sup>

348,005

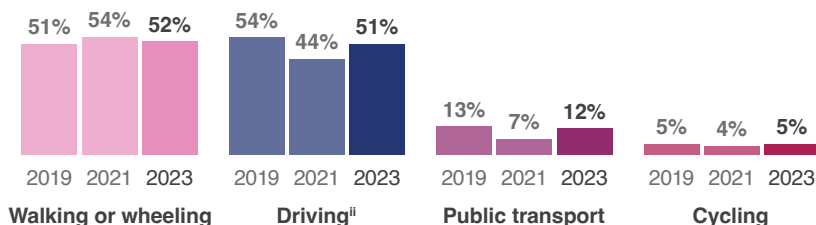
### Survey area



## 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



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

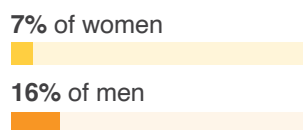
## Walking, wheeling and cycling participation is not equal

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



### Proportion of residents who cycle at least once a week<sup>iii</sup>

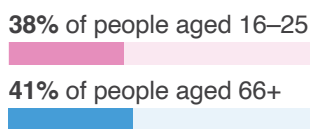


## Not all residents feel safe and welcome in their neighbourhood

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



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



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



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.

## 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.<sup>iv</sup> 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

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

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

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

17% oppose

more cycle paths along roads, physically separated from traffic and pedestrians

65% agree

14% disagree

that increasing space for people socialising, walking, wheeling and cycling on their local high street would improve their local area

77% support

7% oppose

the creation of more 20-minute neighbourhoods<sup>v</sup>

61% support

19% oppose

banning vehicles parking on the pavement

68% support

12% oppose

the creation of more low-traffic neighbourhoods<sup>vi</sup>

57% support

17% oppose

shifting investment from road building schemes to fund walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport

iv. 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.  
v. See definition on page 14. vi. For definition see [Methodology document](#).



# 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<sup>i</sup> 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<sup>ii</sup>

**56%** of AB



61% in 2021



**52%** of C1



52% in 2021



**42%** of C2



53% in 2021



**48%** of DE



50% in 2021



i. 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.

ii. 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.

## 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



**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.<sup>i</sup>

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.<sup>ii</sup>

**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

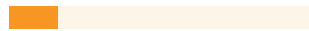
7% of women



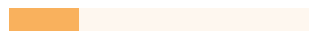
11% in 2021



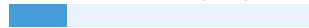
16% of men



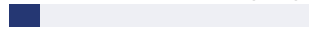
23% in 2021



19% of LGBTQ+ people



10% of non-LGBTQ+ people



#### Ethnicity

14% of people from ethnic minority groups



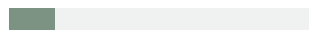
36% in 2021



12% of white people



15% in 2021



#### Age

13% of people aged 16–25



19% in 2021



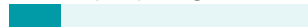
13% of people aged 26–35



19% in 2021



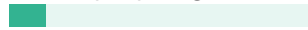
17% of people aged 36–45



22% in 2021



12% of people aged 46–55



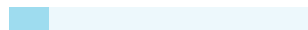
16% in 2021



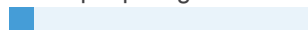
9% of people aged 56–65



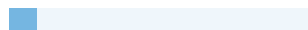
13% in 2021



8% of people aged 66+

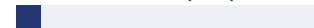


9% in 2021

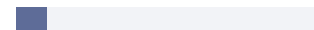


#### Disability

8% of disabled people



10% in 2021



14% of non-disabled people



20% in 2021



#### Socio-economic group

13% of AB



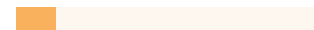
24% in 2021



11% of C1



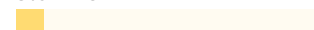
13% in 2021



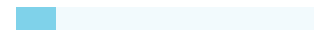
8% of C2



9% in 2021



13% of DE



15% in 2021



i. Based on people who cycle at least once a week.

ii. See Bike Life, 2019 Belfast report.



## 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%**

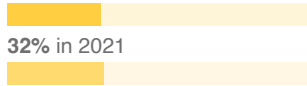
of all residents think their local area overall is a good place to cycle

36% in 2021

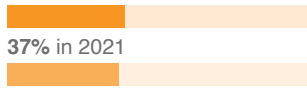
### Proportion of residents who think cycling safety in their local area is good

#### Gender and sexuality

**31%** of women



**39%** of men



**35%** of LGBTQ+ people

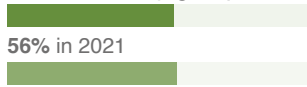


**37%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

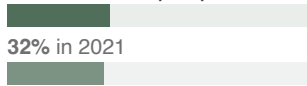


#### Ethnicity

**55%** of people from ethnic minority groups

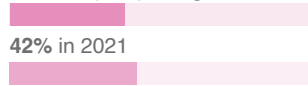


**34%** of white people

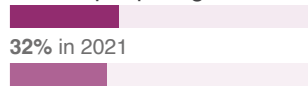


#### Age

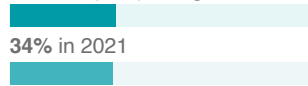
**38%** of people aged 16–25



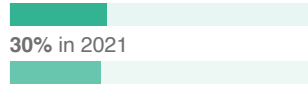
**36%** of people aged 26–35



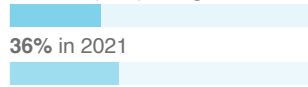
**35%** of people aged 36–45



**32%** of people aged 46–55



**30%** of people aged 56–65

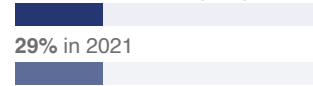


**41%** of people aged 66+

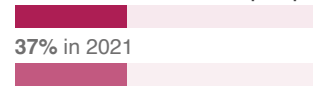


#### Disability

**29%** of disabled people

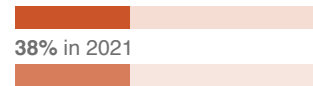


**37%** of non-disabled people

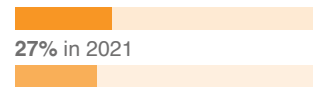


#### Socio-economic group

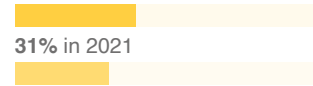
**38%** of AB



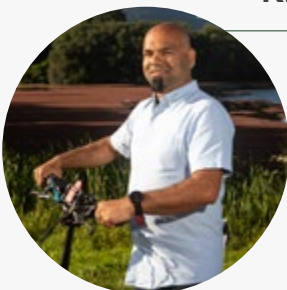
**32%** of C1



**40%** of C2



**34%** of DE



**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

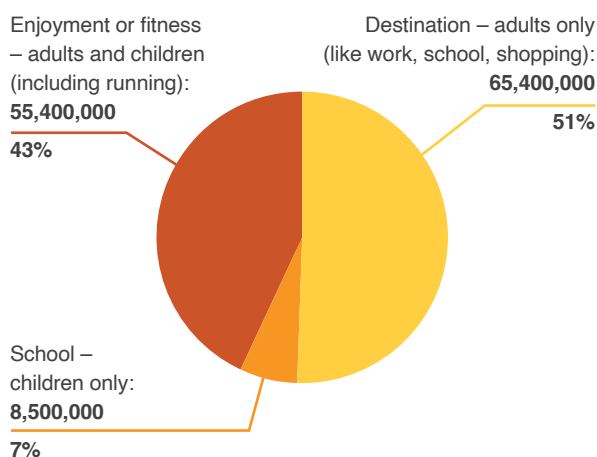
Why everyone gains when more people walk or wheel

## 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.

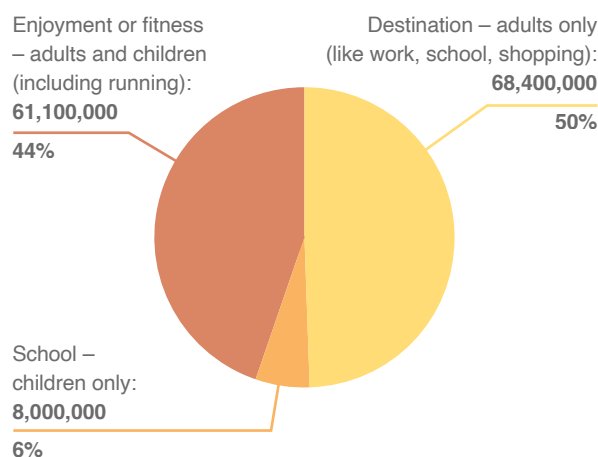
### Annual walking and wheeling trips by purpose<sup>i</sup>

**2023:**  
**129.3 million trips**



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

**2021:**  
**137.5 million trips**



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.

6p  
in 2021

**36p is saved<sup>ii</sup>**  
for each mile walked or wheeled  
instead of driven in Belfast.

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

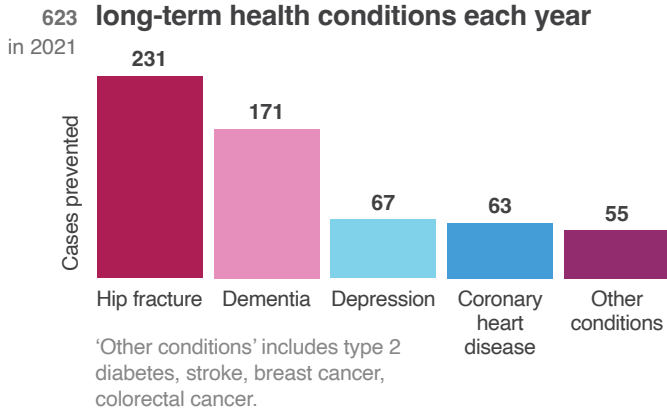
**£165.2 million<sup>iii</sup>**

£182.1  
million  
in 2021

i. Trips for enjoyment or fitness include adults and children (with and without adult accompaniment). School trips are shown separately for children only. ii. Benefits have increased significantly, mainly because of increased costs of driving and greater traffic congestion. iii. This includes trips walked or wheeled for enjoyment or fitness, and trips to destinations by people with and without a car.

## Walking and wheeling unlocks health benefits for everyone

### Walking in Belfast prevents 588 serious long-term health conditions each year



Saving the NHS in Belfast

**£7.3 million per year**

£4.1 million in 2021  
140,000 in 2021

equivalent to the cost of  
**180,000 GP appointments**

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<sup>iv</sup>**

£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 NO<sub>x</sub>**  
and

30,000 kg in 2021

**3,400 kg of particulates**  
(PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>)

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, equivalent to the carbon footprint of

**19,000 people taking flights** from Belfast to Tenerife

8,800 tonnes in 2021  
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.<sup>v</sup> 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.

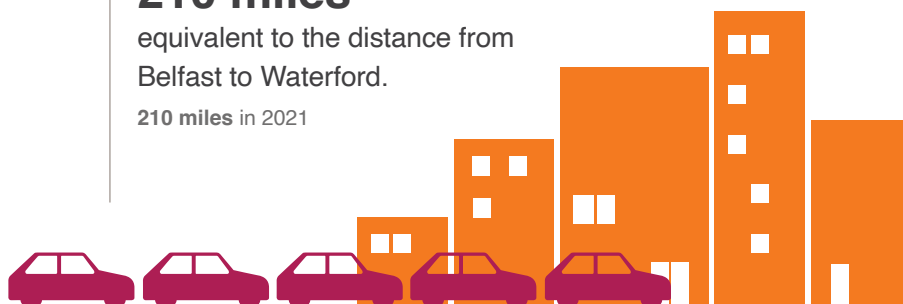
71,000 in 2021

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



v. Litman, 2023. Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Based upon Eric Bruun and Vuchic, 1995. The Time-Area Concept.

iv. 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.



# Benefits of cycling

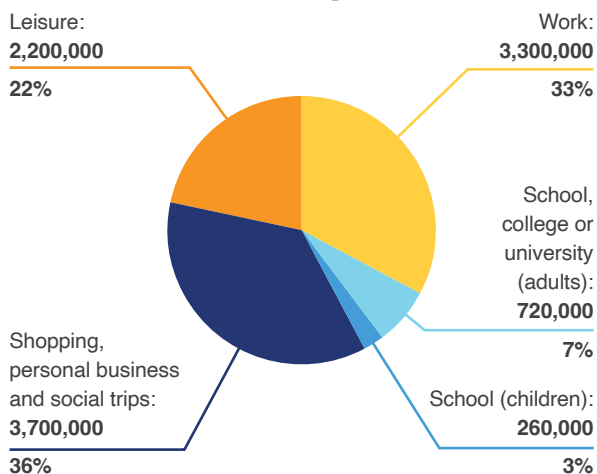
Why everyone gains when more people cycle

## 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<sup>i</sup>

**2023:**  
**10.2 million trips**

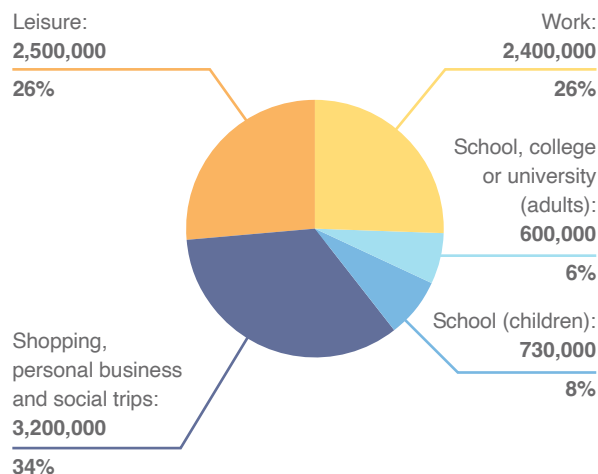


This adds up to

**35.2 million miles**

= 97,000 miles a day

**2021:**  
**9.5 million trips**



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.

95p 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<sup>ii</sup>**

£25.8 million in 2021

i. Leisure trips include adults and children (with and without adult accompaniment).

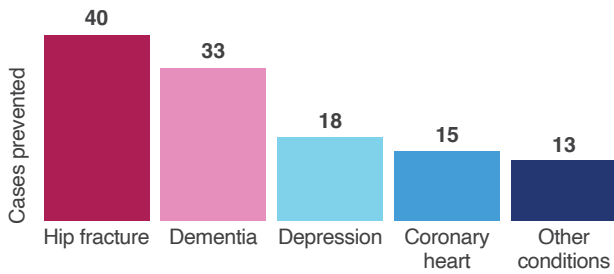
Education trips are shown separately for adults and children. All other trips are just adults.

ii. This includes trips cycled for enjoyment or fitness, and trips to destinations by people with and without a car.

## Cycling unlocks health benefits for everyone

### Cycling in Belfast prevents 119 serious long-term health conditions each year

100 in 2021



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

### Saving the NHS in Belfast

£660,000 in 2021

## £1.5 million per year

22,000 in 2021



equivalent to the cost of

## 38,000 GP appointments

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<sup>iii</sup>

£33.6 million in 2021

People cycling more instead of driving improves air quality, saving annually:

**9,900 kg of NO<sub>x</sub>** and

7,900 kg in 2021

**1,300 kg of particulates** (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>)

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

3,400 tonnes in 2021

## 4,600 tonnes

of greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) saved annually by cycling instead of driving, equivalent to the carbon footprint of



7,600 people in 2021

## 10,000 people taking flights

from Belfast to Tenerife

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.<sup>iv</sup> This helps to keep Belfast moving for all road users.

6,400 in 2021

## 9,100 return cycling trips

are made daily in Belfast by people that could have used a car.

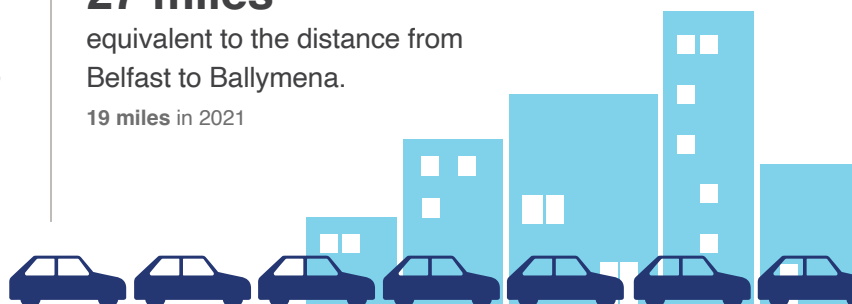
<sup>iv</sup> Litman, 2023. Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Based upon Eric Bruun and Vuchic, 1995. The Time-Area Concept.

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



<sup>iii</sup> 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.



# Walking solutions

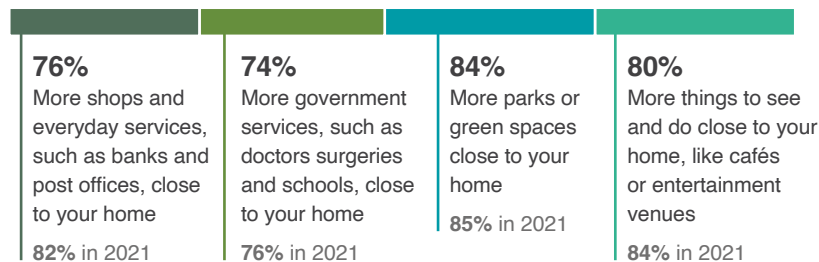
What would help make walking and wheeling easier?

## 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.

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



**44%**

of Belfast households are in neighbourhoods of more than 40 homes per hectare. These are or can become 20-minute neighbourhoods.

44% in 2021

These higher-density neighbourhoods with more people can sustain local businesses and public transport routes.<sup>i</sup>

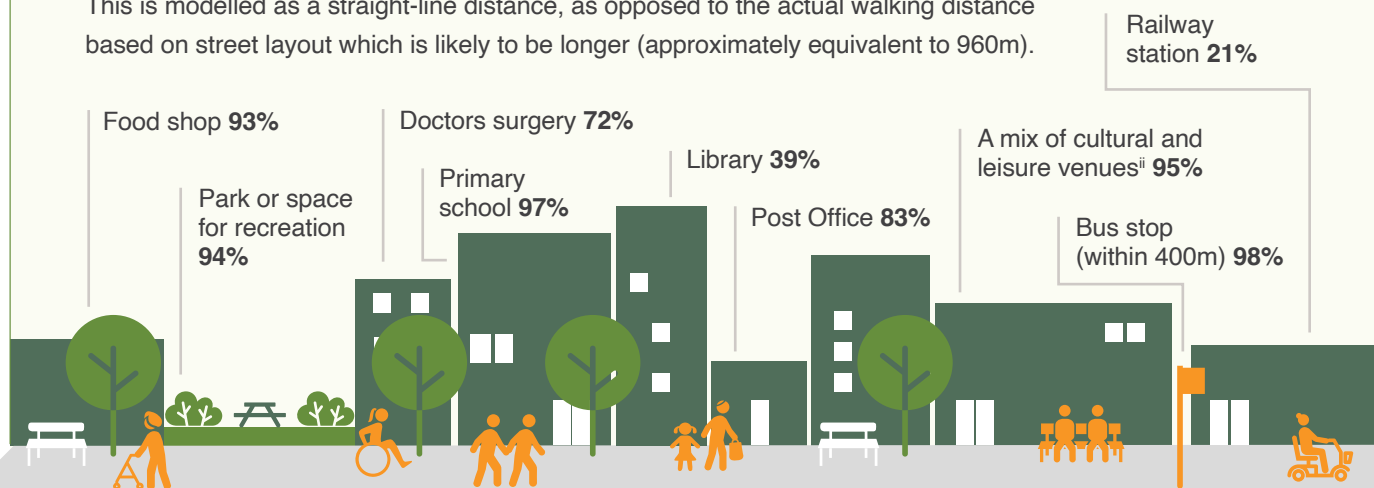
**57%**

agree they can easily get to many places they need to visit without having to drive

55% 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).



i. Sustrans, 2017. Linking Active Travel and Public Transport to Housing Growth and Planning.

ii. A minimum of three distinct types of cultural and leisure venues, like cafés, pubs, bingo halls, cinemas, museums.

## Residents want better streets

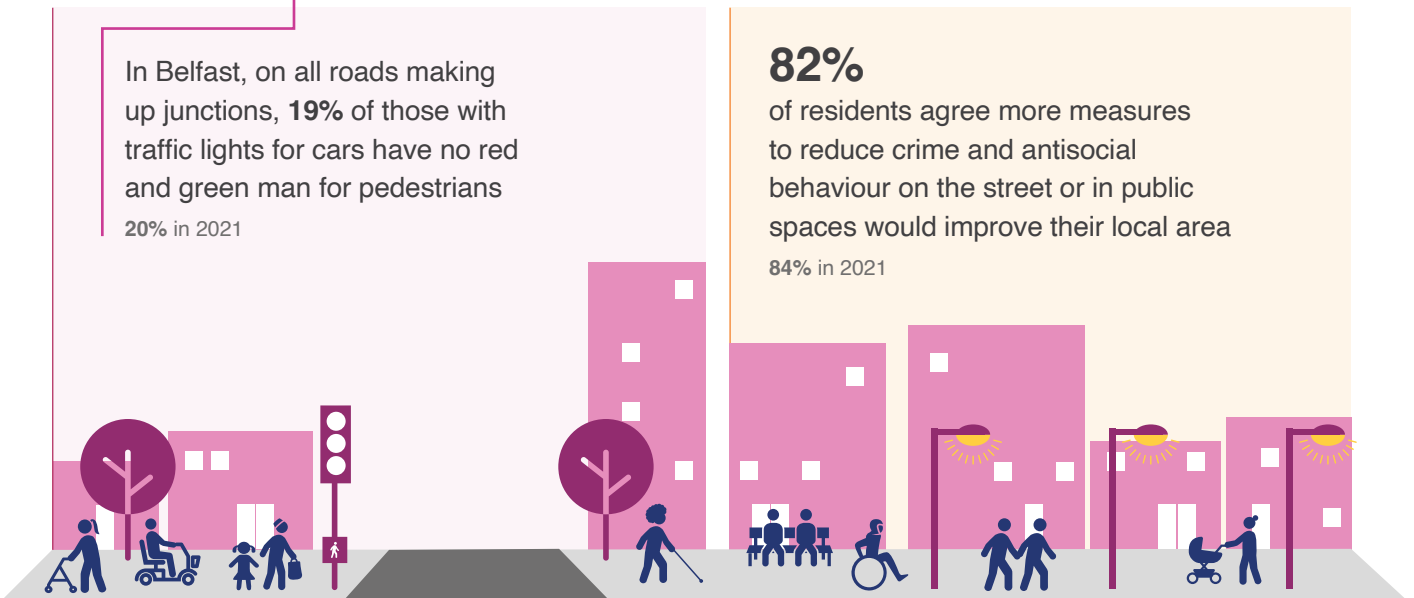
There are many ways to make our streets and neighbourhoods safe, welcoming and comfortable for everyone to walk or wheel in.

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

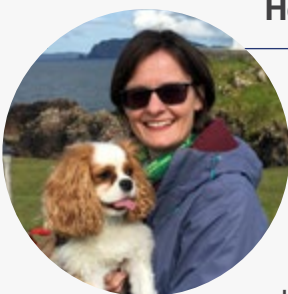
<b>73%</b> Wider pavements 77% in 2021	<b>74%</b> More frequent road crossings, with reduced wait times 76% in 2021	<b>82%</b> Nicer places along streets to stop and rest, like more benches, trees and shelters 82% in 2021	<b>75%</b> Better pavement accessibility, like level surfaces, dropped kerbs at crossing points 76% in 2021	<b>71%</b> Fewer cars parked on the pavement 73% in 2021	<b>67%</b> Less fear of crime or antisocial behaviour in their area 72% in 2021
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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



### 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.

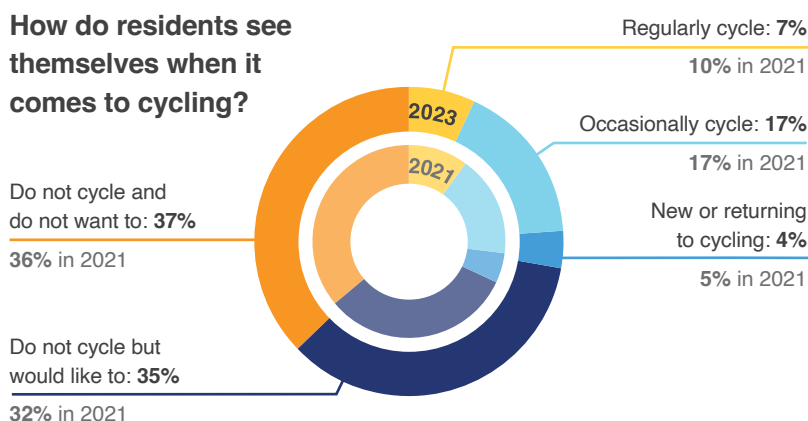


# Cycling solutions

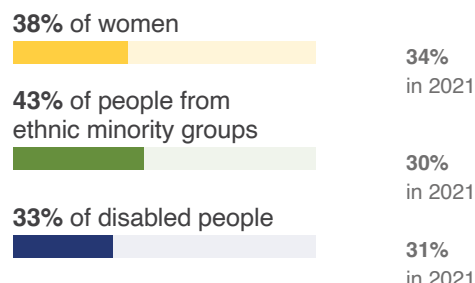
What would make cycling better?

## Many Belfast residents want to cycle

How do residents see themselves when it comes to cycling?

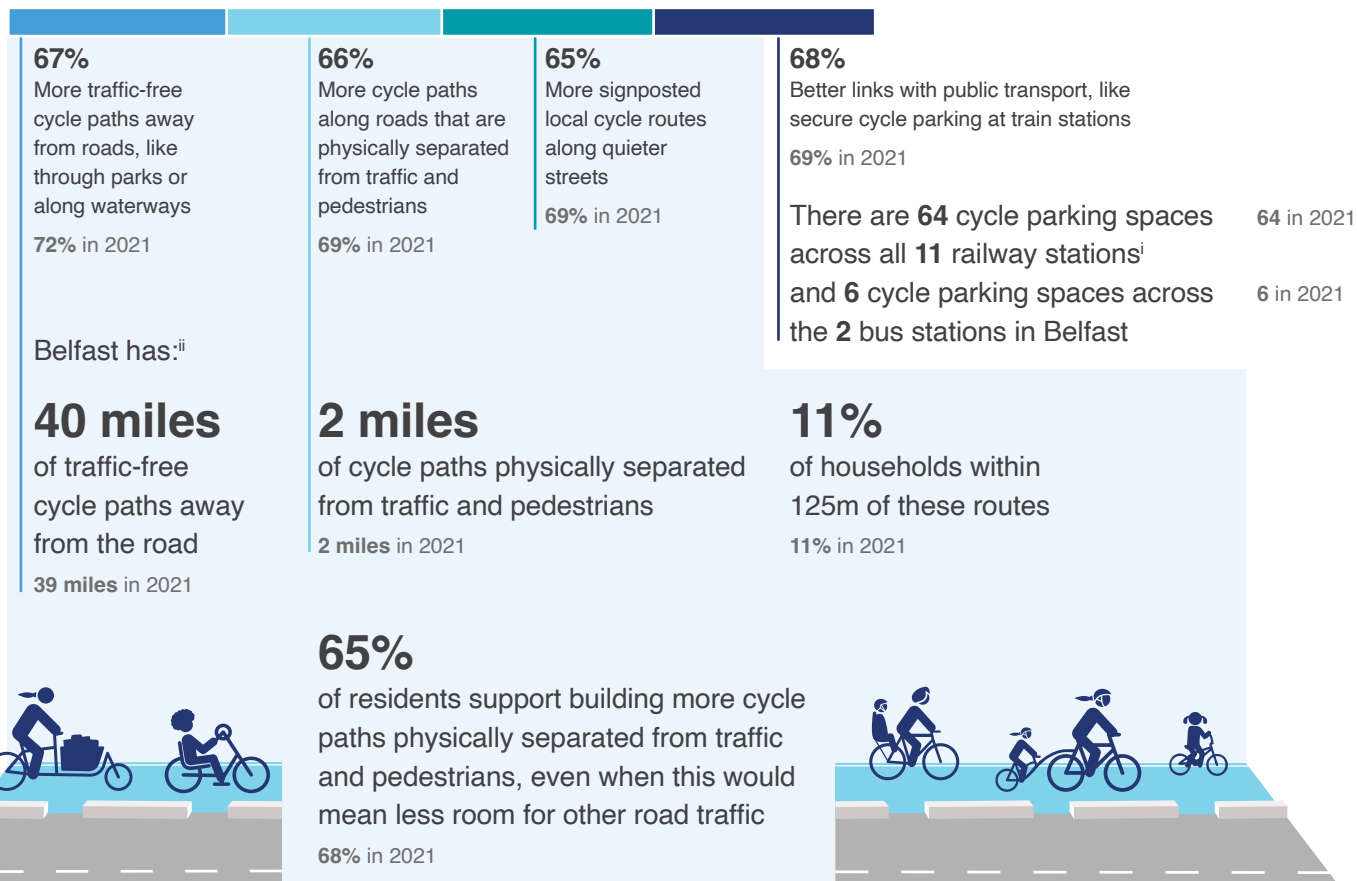


What proportion of residents said they 'do not cycle but would like to'?



## Residents want improved cycling infrastructure

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

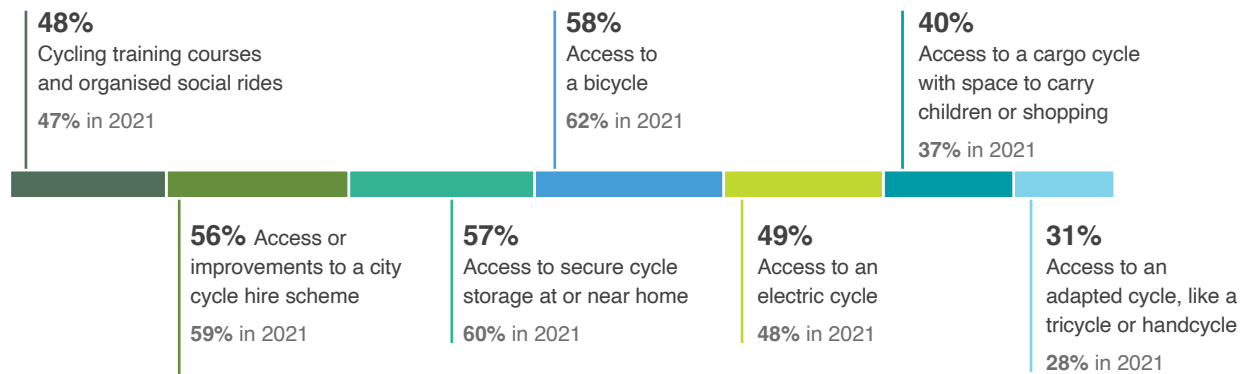


i. This includes some cycle parking that is shared with bus users.  
 ii. To ensure comparability, these figures are correct as of 31 May 2023 for all city reports.



## Residents want more support to cycle

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



#### Belfast cycle hire scheme<sup>iii</sup>

**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.

#### 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<sup>iv</sup>

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



**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.

iii. 2023 data covers July 2022–June 2023. 2021 data covers July 2020–June 2021.

iv. Credit to the Association of Cycle Traders (ACT) for their assistance with cycle shop locations and services offered.



# 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

69% of women



71% in 2021

73% of men



66% in 2021

65% of disabled people



57%  
in 2021

74% of non-disabled people



74%  
in 2021

67%  
in 2021

**79%** of people from ethnic minority groups



69%  
in 2021

**71%** of white people



65% of LGBTQ+ people



73% of non-LGBTQ+ people



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

21%  
in 2021

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

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

68%  
in 2021

**65%** Walk or wheel more



68%  
in 2021

**61%** Cycle more



Unclassified roads are not designed to carry through-traffic, but in Belfast **17%** of their total length has nothing to prevent it. This can result in rat-running.<sup>i</sup>

18% in 2021

**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.<sup>ii</sup>

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

71%  
in 2021

**65%**

agree increasing space for people socialising, walking, wheeling and cycling on their local high street would improve their local area

**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

i. Based on analysis by CycleStreets [www.lowtrafficeighbourhoods.org](http://www.lowtrafficeighbourhoods.org). Unclassified roads are all public roads that are neither motorways, A, B nor C roads. ii. Excludes motorways.



**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.<sup>iii</sup>

44% of residents agree there is space for children to socialise and play



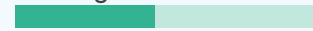
44% in 2021

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



Among Belfast residents:

46% agree



51% agreed in 2021

29% disagree



21% disagreed in 2021

closing streets outside local schools to cars during drop-off and pick-up times would improve their local area

These are known as ‘School Streets’.

**0 schools**

in Belfast have School Streets schemes<sup>iv</sup>



iii. Children’s Independent Mobility: an international comparison and recommendations for action, 2015.

iv. Figure given is correct as of 31 May 2023.



# Developing Belfast

Recent walking, wheeling, cycling and neighbourhood changes

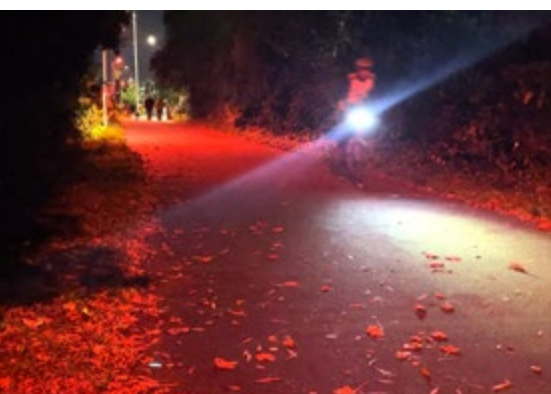
The Department for Infrastructure recognises that active and sustainable travel can contribute to meeting the challenge of climate change. We also know that it can help to create a more vibrant and liveable environment for our people and can contribute to good health and wellbeing. We want Belfast to 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.



We want Belfast to have world-class infrastructure that is inclusive and attractive for all to help contribute towards these goals.



## Comber Greenway Lighting

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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

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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

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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

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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 Active Travel Network Delivery Plan for Northern Ireland will provide our teams throughout Northern Ireland with a firm basis for the prioritisation of active travel infrastructure delivery within and connecting our towns and cities.

## 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 Hollywood active travel routes, is under development for a 4km path along the railway track from Victoria Park, through Sydenham to the Hollywood 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

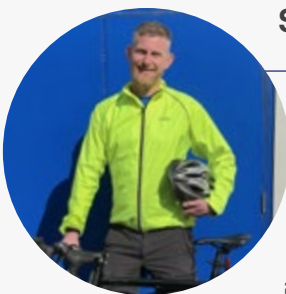
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Legislative Requirement - Article 22 of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 states that “The Department for Infrastructure must develop sectoral plans for transport which set a minimum spend on active travel from the overall transport budgets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

## Next Steps

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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.



**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](http://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](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

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Thanks to Open Route Service for their support with their isochrone plugin in QGIS.

Walking and Cycling Index Belfast has been funded and supported by The Freshfield Foundation and the Department for Infrastructure. The project is co-ordinated by Sustrans.

