

## Sustrans in Luton's Ten Week Active Travel Programme



  
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## Sustrans' ten week programme gets participants feeling fitter and more active

How do you help people who wish to get fitter, healthier, and happier and want to use the car less? By working with a small group of people that live and work within Luton, Sustrans' ten week programme has demonstrated improvements to health and reduced car use by simply helping to enable people to walk and cycle.

By giving participants support, tools, motivation and a fitness test at the beginning and the end of the programme, the proof of its success is in the results at the end of the programme –most participants had lost weight, lowered their BMI and blood pressure, and said that they felt fitter and were more active. Nine of these also said that on average they had reduced the distance they travelled by car each day from 5 up to 20 miles.

### **The participants:**

15 people were recruited via local adverts from eight employers in Luton. The programme was targeted at the people who:

- wanted to start walking or cycling
- were keen to improve their health and fitness
- were not very active and could therefore improve their current fitness levels
- had a regular journey, or journeys that could realistically be made on foot or by bike.

### **The health and fitness testing**

The programme started and ended with participants taking part in fitness tests carried out by an exercise specialist. The tests were incorporated into the programme, not only to help provide evidence of health improvements, but also to motivate participants, most of whom said that they were kept encouraged by the thought of a re-test at the end.

The tests included:

- Blood pressure and resting heart rate measurements
- Weight and height measurements
- Lifestyle and physical activity questionnaire
- A fitness test (either on an exercise bike or using a step)

### Support from the Active Travel team

Participants were offered either a free pedometer or Sustrans loan bike depending on whether they were interested in increasing the amount of walking or cycling in their daily routine.

For the ten week period, they also received:

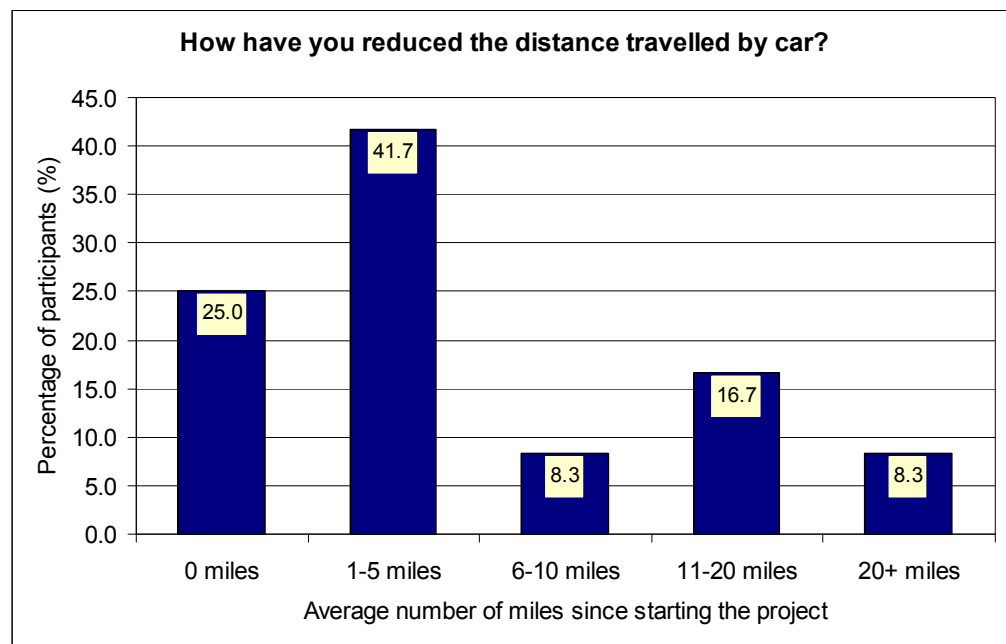
- Regular contact via telephone and email, including weekly group motivational email messages and updates from other participants
- Route advice and maps
- Bike accessories e.g. lights and a lock
- Cycle training

### The headline results

Participants had lost weight, lowered their BMI and blood pressure, and twelve said they felt fitter and were more active afterwards.

- The number of participants physically active for 30 minutes or more on 5 or more days per week increased from 8% to 42%
- Nine participants said on average they had reduced the distance they travelled by car each day from 1 up to 20 or more miles.
- Among the six that participated in cycling activities four said they never cycled before participation; after the project five said that they were currently cycling daily or several times a week.
- After participation ten of twelve participants said they were currently walking for 15 minutes or more daily or several times a week and everyone had walked in the last week.

**Figure 1:**  
How participants have reduced the distance they travel by car



## How the participants felt after the programme

When asked what had motivated them to take part, the fitness test, free pedometer, availability of a Sustrans loan bike and completing the travel diary were all seen as good incentives to join and helped them to stay motivated. All twelve said they felt fitter and were more active. Other top responses were that they walked more, feel more healthy, enjoy being outside more and use the car less.



Even though the programme took place in the winter months, participants reported consistent levels of walking and cycling throughout the ten week period, indicating that worsening weather conditions didn't lead to a decrease in activity.

The programme had a positive affect on how often participants walked, for example: "encouraged me to leave the car at home" and "I feel energised and want to do more".

When asked what they liked about the project, participants praised Sustrans staff; "Sustrans staff have been wonderful!" another described the benefits of the programme as "Friendliness of staff, having a great bike to use, gaining confidence".

Participants said they would recommend the project to a friend or relative and would continue walking and/or cycling in future.

### Conclusion:

The programme proved a success by working with a small group of people who wanted improve their health and reduce car use by walking and cycling more through day to day journeys – and did exactly that.