# Tower Hamlets Walking and Cycling Index 2023

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London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Sustrans

## Foreword

Our vision for walking, wheeling and cycling in Tower Hamlets

The climate emergency is one of the biggest issues we are confronted with today. To play its part, Tower Hamlets is committed to becoming a net zero borough by 2045 or sooner. Transport is the biggest contributor towards climate change emissions in Tower Hamlets. It is responsible for almost 40% of all carbon dioxide emitted in the borough. Whilst 80% of all trips in Tower Hamlets are made sustainably, the borough has pledged that 90% of journeys should be sustainable by 2041.

Tower Hamlets is well placed to meet this challenge. It benefits from excellent public transport connections. The new Elizabeth Line, connects Whitechapel and Canary Wharf with direct services to Heathrow Airport, Reading, Shenfield and Abbey Wood. However, more needs to be done to increase levels of active travel in the borough. 23% of local residents aged 19 and above are physically inactive and over 50% of children aged 11 or over are overweight or obese. There is significant untapped potential for increasing cycling in Tower Hamlets. The borough has reached just 8% of its cycling potential. There could be an additional 200,000 cycling trips possible each day based on data from the Strategic Cycling Analysis Tool for London.

The council’s existing 33 temporary School Street schemes will be made permanent to provide the right conditions to help families walk, scoot and cycle to school. To increase cycling levels within the local community, particularly amongst under-represented groups, the council will deliver cycle training to over 500 adults and 1,200 children annually for the next three years. We are working with Transport for London (TfL) to reduce road safety casualties as part of the London-wide Vision Zero programme: expanding 20mph speed limits on TfL’s road network, new and upgraded crossing facilities and more space for walking and cycling are all part of this work. The council is also committed to creating more attractive and sustainable street environments making use of parklets, Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) and planting over 1,000 trees within the next 3 years.

**Steve Halsey, Chief Executive**

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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-1) 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 third report from Tower Hamlets produced in partnership with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The data in this report comes from 2023 and includes local walking, wheeling and cycling data, modelling and an independent survey of 1,268 residents aged 16 or above in Tower Hamlets. 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 Tower Hamlets 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/index-data-tool).

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

Tower Hamlets

Population**[[2]](#footnote-2)**:

**310,231**

### Survey area:

Map showing the area covered by the survey with Canary Wharf, Mile End and Whitechapel highlighted. The area is approximately **8** square miles and covers all of Tower Hamlets.

### 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 Tower Hamlets

##### Walking or wheeling

**66%** in 2021

**67%** in 2023

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

**13%** in 2021

**12%** in 2023

##### Public transport

**23%** in 2021

**36%** in 2023

##### Cycling

**11%** in 2021

**9%** in 2023

Participation in walking, wheeling and cycling on a regular basis is similar to 2021.

**67%** of residents walk or wheel at least five days a week (**66%** in 2021)

**23%** of residents cycle at least once a week (**25%** 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

**60%** of disabled people

**69%** of non-disabled people

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

**10%** of socio-economic group DE

**30%** of socio-economic group AB

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

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

**62%** of people aged 26–35

**68%** of people aged 66+

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

**51%** of people from ethnic minority groups

**34%** of white people

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

**68%** of women

**65%** of men

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

Every day, walking, wheeling and cycling in Tower Hamlets take up to **52,000** cars off the road.[[6]](#footnote-6) Each year in Tower Hamlets these three modes combined:

* Prevent **413** serious long‑term health conditions
* Create **£160.5 million** in economic benefit for individuals and Tower Hamlets
* Save **9,300 tonnes** of greenhouse gas emissions

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

**12%** of residents want to drive less, yet **11%** 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

**50%** more

**4%** less

##### Cycle

**47%** more

**4%** less

##### Take public transport

**21%** more

**17%** less

##### Drive

**17%** more

**12%** 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:

**59%** on walking and wheeling (**61%** in 2021)

**50%** on cycling (**52%** in 2021)

**69%** on public transport (**69%** in 2021)

**24%** on driving (**27%** in 2021)

### Increased funding would help support more liveable neighbourhoods

#### Among Tower Hamlets residents:

**63%** support, while **18%** oppose, more cycle paths along roads, physically separated from traffic and pedestrians

**66%** agree, while **15%** disagree, that increasing space for people socialising, walking, wheeling and cycling on their local high street would improve their local area

**76%** support, while **8%** oppose, the creation of more 20-minute neighbourhoods[[7]](#footnote-7)

**62%** support, while **15%** oppose, the ban on vehicles parking on the pavement

**64%** support, while **14%** oppose, shifting investment from road building schemes to fund walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport

## Walking in Tower Hamlets

Walking and wheeling participation, safety and satisfaction

### Walking and wheeling participation

Overall in Tower Hamlets 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.

**97%** of all residents walk or wheel (**98%** in 2021)

**67%** of residents walk or wheel at least five days a week (**66%** in 2021)

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

##### Gender[[8]](#footnote-8) and sexuality

**68%** of women (**63%** in 2021)

**67%** of men (**70%** in 2021)

**79%** of LGBTQ+ people

**67%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

##### Ethnicity

**60%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**59%** in 2021)

**76%** of white people (**77%** in 2021)

##### Age

**63%** of people aged 16–25 (**66%** in 2021)

**71%** of people aged 26–35 (**70%** in 2021)

**73%** of people aged 36–45 (**69%** in 2021)

**71%** of people aged 46–55 (**61%** in 2021)

**60%** of people aged 56–65 (**65%** in 2021)

**51%** of people aged 66+ (**57%** in 2021)

##### Disability

**60%** of disabled people (**57%** in 2021)

**69%** of non-disabled people (**69%** in 2021)

##### Socio-economic group[[9]](#footnote-9)

**70%** of AB (**72%** in 2021)

**74%** of C1 (**66%** in 2021)

**52%** of C2 (**70%** in 2021)

**54%** of DE (**55%** in 2021)

### Walking and wheeling safety and satisfaction

**62%** of residents think the level of safety for walking or wheeling is good (**64%** in 2021)

**43%** of residents think the level of safety for children walking or wheeling is good (**45%** in 2021)

**71%** of residents think their local area overall is a good place to walk or wheel (**72%** in 2021)

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

##### Gender and sexuality

**64%** of women (**63%** in 2021)

**62%** of men (**65%** in 2021)

**60%** of LGBTQ+ people

**64%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

##### Ethnicity

**66%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**63%** in 2021)

**58%** of white people (**66%** in 2021)

##### Age

**61%** of people aged 16–25 (**71%** in 2021)

**62%** of people aged 26–35 (**65%** in 2021)

**66%** of people aged 36–45 (**63%** in 2021)

**57%** of people aged 46–55 (**61%** in 2021)

**63%** of people aged 56–65 (**60%** in 2021)

**68%** of people aged 66+ (**59%** in 2021)

##### Disability

**54%** of disabled people (**50%** in 2021)

**64%** of non-disabled people (**67%** in 2021)

##### Socio-economic group

**61%** of AB (**66%** in 2021)

**68%** of C1 (**60%** in 2021)

**53%** of C2 (**68%** in 2021)

**60%** of DE (**63%** in 2021)

### Quote from Shaheda

Walking is great for my health. I love to walk with my neighbours. They come walking when I tell them I’m going – the social aspect of our walks is like magic in keeping away stress and anxiety.

We had 27 that came on one group walk.

We learn about the history and the nature of the places we walk to, which makes it interesting.

The barrier for many of us to walk more is finding the time.

## Cycling in Tower Hamlets

Cycling participation, safety and satisfaction

### Cycling participation

Overall in Tower Hamlets the number of people cycling has stayed about the same since 2021. Despite a much larger potential for cycling, only **23%** of people cycle regularly.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Cycling participation, however, is not equal. Barriers to cycling can be far more pronounced for some people. Safety is the largest barrier to cycling.[[11]](#footnote-11) Encouragingly, perceptions of cycling safety have improved since 2021.

**45%** of all residents cycle (**47%** in 2021)

**23%** of all residents cycle at least once a week (**25%** in 2021)

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

##### Gender and sexuality

**17%** of women (**20%** in 2021)

**30%** of men (**32%** in 2021)

**30%** of LGBTQ+ people

**22%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

##### Ethnicity

**14%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**16%** in 2021)

**35%** of white people (**38%** in 2021)

##### Age

**19%** of people aged 16–25 (**22%** in 2021)

**28%** of people aged 26–35 (**35%** in 2021)

**26%** of people aged 36–45 (**24%** in 2021)

**24%** of people aged 46–55 (**17%** in 2021)

**19%** of people aged 56–65 (**21%** in 2021)

**10%** of people aged 66+ (**12%** in 2021)

##### Disability

**17%** of disabled people (**19%** in 2021)

**25%** of non-disabled people (**27%** in 2021)

##### Socio-economic group

**30%** of AB (**31%** in 2021)

**23%** of C1 (**26%** in 2021)

**10%** of C2 (**13%** in 2021)

**10%** of DE (**16%** in 2021)

### Cycling safety and satisfaction

**43%** of all residents think the level of safety for cycling in their local area is good (**39%** in 2021)

**32%** of all residents think the level of safety for children cycling is good (**27%** in 2021)

**49%** of all residents think their local area overall is a good place to cycle (**48%** in 2021)

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

##### Gender and sexuality

**40%** of women (**38%** in 2021)

**46%** of men (**40%** in 2021)

**38%** of LGBTQ+ people

**44%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

##### Ethnicity

**51%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**44%** in 2021)

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

##### Age

**51%** of people aged 16–25 (**48%** in 2021)

**38%** of people aged 26–35 (**39%** in 2021)

**47%** of people aged 36–45 (**35%** in 2021)

**43%** of people aged 46–55 (**38%** in 2021)

**39%** of people aged 56–65 (**44%** in 2021)

**37%** of people aged 66+ (**30%** in 2021)

##### Disability

**40%** of disabled people (**30%** in 2021)

**44%** of non-disabled people (**41%** in 2021)

##### Socio-economic group

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

**44%** of C1 (**37%** in 2021)

**50%** of C2 (**49%** in 2021)

**52%** of DE (**45%** in 2021)

### Quote from Sahra

I began cycling in 2021 when I came across the amazing Chrisp Street Community Cycle Hub. I was introduced to the hub by a friend, who told me about the free training lessons available.

I signed myself up, and started to learn to ride in a nearby park. But I cycle all over the place and it feels great!

The roads are not always easy but I can cycle to pick up my children.

I have told more friends about the opportunity to cycle, and I also won a bike in a raffle.

## Benefits of walking

Why everyone gains when more people walk or wheel

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

Walking and wheeling trips have declined slightly since 2021, when behaviour was more influenced by the pandemic. Children walking to school has stayed the same.

#### Annual walking and wheeling trips by purpose[[12]](#footnote-12)

##### 2023: 145.7 million trips

Destination – adults only (like work, school, shopping): **87,600**,**000** or **60%**

School – children only: **10,000**,**000** or **7%**

Enjoyment or fitness – adults and children (including running): **48,200**,**000** or **33%**

This adds up to **129.4 million** **miles** = **350,000 miles** a day

##### 2021: 154.1 million trips

Destination – adults only (like work, school, shopping): **90,700**,**000** or **59%**

School – children only: **10,300**,**000** or **7%**

Enjoyment or fitness – adults and children (including running): **53,100**,**000** or **34%**

This adds up to **154 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.

**£1.37** is saved[[13]](#footnote-13) for each mile walked or wheeled instead of driven in Tower Hamlets. (**£1.05** in 2021)

Over a year this adds up to **£28 million** from adults with a car in their household walking or wheeling to work, school and other destinations. (**£24.5 million** in 2021)

The total annual economic benefit from all trips walked and wheeled in Tower Hamlets is **£124.2 million**[[14]](#footnote-14) (**£152.6 million** in 2021)

### Walking and wheeling unlocks health benefits for everyone

Walking in Tower Hamlets prevents **312** serious long-term health conditions each year (**360** in 2021)

##### Cases prevented

Hip fracture: **107**

Dementia: **73**

Depression: **67**

Coronary heart disease: **32**

Other conditions: **33**

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

Saving the NHS in Tower Hamlets **£4.4 million** per year (**£2.5 million** in 2021), equivalent to the cost of **110,000** GP appointments (**83,000** in 2021)

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

In Tower Hamlets the physical activity benefits of walking prevent **95** early deaths annually (**92** in 2021) which is valued at **£345 million**[[15]](#footnote-15) (**£304 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:

**15,000 kg** of NOx (**20,000 kg** in 2021)

and

**2,100 kg** of particulates (PM**10** and PM**2.5**) (**2,700 kg** in 2021)

**28%** of residents agree the air is clean in their local area (**24%** in 2021)

### Walking and wheeling in Tower Hamlets helps mitigate our climate crisis

**5,600 tonnes** of greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) saved annually by walking or wheeling instead of driving (**6,400 tonnes** in 2021), equivalent to the carbon footprint of **6,900** people taking flights from London Heathrow to New York (**7,800** people in 2021)

In 2021 transport accounted for **26%** of the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions, of which the main sources are the use of petrol and diesel in road transport.

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2021 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Final Figures.

### Walking and wheeling keeps Tower Hamlets moving

Studies show walking or cycling frees up road space in comparison to driving.[[16]](#footnote-16) This helps to keep Tower Hamlets moving for all road users.

**45,000** return walking and wheeling trips are made daily in Tower Hamlets by people that could have used a car. (**51,000** in 2021)

If these cars were all in a traffic jam it would tail back **134 miles** equivalent to the distance from Tower Hamlets to Birmingham. (**153 miles** in 2021)

## Benefits of cycling

Why everyone gains when more people cycle

### Tower Hamlets residents cycle 6 times around the world every day

Cycling trips to work since 2021 have increased, while leisure trips have decreased. This may be related to the pandemic.

#### Annual cycling trips by purpose in Tower Hamlets[[17]](#footnote-17)

##### 2023: 18.7 million trips

Work: **7,200**,**000** or **38%**

School, college or university (adults): **1,500**,**000** or **8%**

School (children): **560,000** or **3%**

Shopping, personal business and social trips: **6,900**,**000** or **37%**

Leisure: **2,600**,**000** or **14%**

This adds up to **54.4 million** **miles** = **150,000 miles** a day

##### 2021: 17.7 million trips

Work: **5,900**,**000** or **33%**

School, college or university (adults): **1,300**,**000** or **7%**

School (children): **370,000** or **2%**

Shopping, personal business and social trips: **7,200**,**000** or **41%**

Leisure: **2,900**,**000** or **17%**

This adds up to **56.5 million** **miles** = **150,000 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.

**£2.31** is saved for each mile cycled instead of driven in Tower Hamlets. (**£1.94** in 2021)

Over a year this adds up to **£31 million** from adults with a car in their household cycling to work, school and other destinations. (**£26.2 million** in 2021)

The total annual economic benefit from all trips cycled in Tower Hamlets is **£36.3 million**[[18]](#footnote-18) (**£34.8 million** in 2021)

### Cycling unlocks health benefits for everyone

Cycling in Tower Hamlets prevents **101** serious long-term health conditions each year (**99** in 2021)

##### Cases prevented

Hip fracture: **28**

Dementia: **20**

Depression: **28**

Coronary heart disease: **11**

Other conditions: **13**

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

Saving the NHS in Tower Hamlets **£1.5 million** per year (**£700,000** in 2021), equivalent to the cost of **38,000** GP appointments (**23,000** in 2021)

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

In Tower Hamlets the physical activity benefits of cycling prevent **14** early deaths annually (**11** in 2021) which is valued at **£49.3 million**[[19]](#footnote-19) (**£37.6 million** in 2021)

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

**7,100 kg** of NOx (**7,600 kg** in 2021)

and

**1,000 kg** of particulates (PM**10** and PM**2.5**) (**1,100 kg** in 2021)

**28%** of residents agree the air is clean in their local area (**24%** in 2021)

### Cycling in Tower Hamlets helps mitigate our climate crisis

**3,700 tonnes** of greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) saved annually by cycling instead of driving (**3,700 tonnes** in 2021), equivalent to the carbon footprint of **4,500** people taking flights from London Heathrow to New York (**4,500** people in 2021)

In 2021 transport accounted for **26%** of the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions, of which the main sources are the use of petrol and diesel in road transport.

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2021 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Final Figures.

### Cycling keeps Tower Hamlets moving

Studies show walking or cycling frees up road space in comparison to driving.[[20]](#footnote-20) This helps to keep Tower Hamlets moving for all road users.

**6,900** return cycling trips are made daily in Tower Hamlets by people that could have used a car. (**6,700** in 2021)

If these cars were all in a traffic jam it would tail back **21 miles** equivalent to the distance from Whitechapel to Grays. (**20 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. Based on a 20-minute return journey this is around 480 metres each way for the majority of people.[[21]](#footnote-21)

**95%** of Tower Hamlets households are in neighbourhoods of more than 40 homes per hectare (**94%** 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-22)

**76%** agree they can easily get to many places they need to visit without having to drive (**72%** in 2021)

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

**83%** More shops and everyday services, such as banks and post offices, close to your home (**81%** in 2021)

**77%** More government services, such as doctors surgeries and schools, close to your home (**73%** in 2021)

**87%** More parks or green spaces close to your home (**87%** in 2021)

**86%** More things to see and do close to your home, like cafés or entertainment venues (**85%** in 2021)

#### Proportion of households within a 400m 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 480m).

Food shop **99%**

Park or space for recreation **98%**

Doctors surgery **67%**

Primary school **82%**

Library **22%**

Post Office **46%**

A mix of cultural and leisure venues[[23]](#footnote-23) **100%**

Rail, underground or DLR station (within 800m) **96%**

Bus stop **100%**

### 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?

**76%** Wider pavements (**74%** in 2021)

**76%** More frequent road crossings, with reduced wait times (**75%** in 2021)

**85%** Nicer places along streets to stop and rest, like more benches, trees and shelters (**81%** in 2021)

**76%** Better pavement accessibility, like level surfaces, dropped kerbs at crossing points (**69%** in 2021)

**64%** Fewer cars parked on the pavement (**64%** in 2021)

**76%** Less fear of crime or antisocial behaviour in their area (**77%** in 2021)

#### In Tower Hamlets:

**80%** of A and B roads have a pavement width greater than 3m if unobstructed[[24]](#footnote-24)

**86%** of C and unclassified roads have a pavement width greater than 2m if unobstructed

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

**78%** of residents agree more measures to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour on the street or in public spaces would improve their local area (**83%** in 2021)

### Quote from Sheila and Kathy

We love walking because it keeps us physically and mentally healthy. You also learn about the areas you visit.

We walk a lot, but on Mondays we go on a group walk led by Graham Barker from Walk East, who shows us interesting places. Walk East is a not-for-profit social enterprise, based in Tower Hamlets.

Walk East shares the pleasures and benefits of walking – for discovery, health and wellbeing, and community – with East London residents and visitors.

We like walking along the canals and the River Thames.

More free guide books would help us lead walks more easily.

## Cycling solutions

What would make cycling better?

### Many Tower Hamlets residents want to cycle

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

Regularly cycle: **14%** (**17%** in 2021)

Occasionally cycle: **19%** (**19%** in 2021)

New or returning to cycling: **7%** (**5%** in 2021)

Do not cycle but would like to: **29%** (**28%** in 2021)

Do not cycle and do not want to: **31%** (**31%** in 2021)

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

**32%** of women (**29%** in 2021)

**33%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**33%** in 2021)

**23%** of disabled people (**20%** in 2021)

### Residents want improved cycling infrastructure

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

**72%** More traffic‑free cycle paths away from roads, like through parks or along waterways (**71%** in 2021)

**70%** More cycle paths along roads that are physically separated from traffic and pedestrians (**70%** in 2021)

**68%** More signposted local cycle routes along quieter streets (**68%** in 2021)

**74%** Better links with public transport, like secure cycle parking at train stations (**73%** in 2021)

There are **494** cycle parking spaces across all **32** railway, underground and DLR stations in Tower Hamlets (**496** in 2021)

#### Tower Hamlets has:[[25]](#footnote-25)

**12 miles** of traffic‑free cycle paths away from the road (**12 miles** in 2021)

**8 miles** of cycle paths physically separated from traffic and pedestrians (**8 miles** in 2021)

**7 miles** of signposted routes along quieter streets (**7 miles** in 2021)

**37%** of households within 125m of these routes (**38%** in 2021)

**63%** of residents support building more cycle paths physically separated from traffic and pedestrians, even when this would mean less room for other road traffic (**59%** 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 (**46%** in 2021)

**58%** Access or improvements to a city cycle hire scheme (**56%** in 2021)

**66%** Access to secure cycle storage at or near home (**67%** in 2021)

**63%** Access to a bicycle (**64%** in 2021)

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

**41%** Access to a cargo cycle with space to carry children or shopping (**40%** in 2021)

**31%** Access to an adapted cycle, like a tricycle or handcycle (**30%** in 2021)

#### Tower Hamlets cycle hire scheme[[26]](#footnote-26)

**1,884** hire cycles (**1,914** in 2021)

**119** cycle hire stations (**120** in 2021)

**2,488**,**932** annual trips (**2,851**,**544** in 2021)

#### Reported cycle thefts

There were **1,319** reported cycle thefts in Tower Hamlets in 2022/23. (**1,837** in 2021/22)

For every **90** people who own an adult cycle in Tower Hamlets, there was **1** reported cycle theft in the past year.

There is a public cycle parking space for every **17** people who cycle in Tower Hamlets. (**19** in 2021)

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

**47%** of residents (**42%** in 2021)

**32%** of socio-economic group DE (**37%** in 2021)

**52%** of socio-economic group AB (**48%** in 2021)

**59%** of residents support financial discounts for people on low incomes or not in employment to help them buy a cycle

**79%** of households are within 800m of a cycle shop[[27]](#footnote-27)

### Quote from Khadijah

When I was younger I used to ride the bike a lot, to get around and to play. I find it more difficult to do this now that I’m older, so it’s nice to get on the free bicycle taxi provided by Bikeworks and enjoy.

It’s handy to have the bicycle to pick me up when I need it.

The first thing when you are on the bicycle you get to go to the park, enjoy the weather. You have company with you and you don’t have to walk. I live in a flat so no space for a bicycle.

Tower Hamlets is alright as it is to cycle with the taxi, but maybe we can have more time with it and stay in the park have something to eat and then come back.

## 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

**66%** of residents (**61%** in 2021)

**67%** of people from ethnic minority groups (**61%** in 2021)

**65%** of white people (**63%** in 2021)

**68%** of women (**61%** in 2021)

**65%** of men (**63%** in 2021)

**70%** of LGBTQ+ people

**67%** of non-LGBTQ+ people

**63%** of disabled people (**51%** in 2021)

**67%** of non-disabled people (**64%** in 2021)

**66%** of socio-economic group DE (**65%** in 2021)

**66%** of socio-economic group AB (**61%** in 2021)

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

Only **33%** of residents think that their streets are not dominated by moving or parked motor vehicles. (**27%** in 2021)

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

**66%** Walk or wheel more (**69%** in 2021)

**64%** Cycle more (**66%** in 2021)

Unclassified roads are not designed to carry through-traffic, but in Tower Hamlets **15%** of their total length has nothing to prevent it (**26%** in 2021). This can result in rat-running.[[28]](#footnote-28)

**53%** agree that restricting through-traffic on local residential streets would make their area a better place. (**51%** in 2021)

**94%** of Tower Hamlets’s streets have 20mph speed limits.[[29]](#footnote-29) (**90%** in 2021)

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

**62%** Walk or wheel more (**62%** in 2021)

**60%** Cycle more (**62%** in 2021)

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

**66%** agree increasing space for people socialising, walking, wheeling and cycling on their local high street would improve their local area (**64%** in 2021)

**39%** agree they regularly chat to their neighbours, more than just to say hello (**37%** in 2021)

### Quote from Jakir Hussain, Teacher

Bike It is a service provided by Sustrans which supports my school in enabling children to cycle.

The Bike Club have given me 30 bikes for Tower Hamlets schools, which has been amazing for the young people.

Children in this area face a lot of barriers to cycling, like their parents being unable to afford a bike, and fears of safety and theft.

So having the Bike It team come in and help with free bikes, cycle training and fixing up kids’ bikes has really made a difference.

### 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.

**13** **years old** average age when people living with children would let them walk, wheel or cycle independently in their neighbourhood. (**13 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-30)

**51%** of residents agree there is space for children to socialise and play (**49%** in 2021)

**93%** of households are within 400m of a children’s playground

Among Tower Hamlets residents:

**46%** agree, while **23%** disagree, closing streets outside local schools to cars during drop-off and pick-up times would improve their local area (**43%** agreed, while **22%** disagreed in 2021)

These are known as ‘School Streets’.

**9** **schools** in Tower Hamlets have School Streets schemes[[31]](#footnote-31) (**0** schemes in 2021)

## Developing Tower Hamlets

Recent walking, wheeling, cycling and neighbourhood changes

Since the previous Walking and Cycling Index Report for Tower Hamlets in 2021, continued progress has been made on both developing infrastructure and supporting the community to walk, wheel and cycle. By late 2023, Tower Hamlets Council had made 33 School Streets permanent following a successful 18-month trial. Over 1,500 children are benefitting from the removal of through traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times. Taking motor traffic off the roads improves air quality, reduces congestion and creates more attractive conditions for walking, cycling and wheeling to school. In another example of how the council is helping more people to travel actively, the Wapping Low Traffic Neighbourhood has also been made permanent. A bus gate stops through traffic entering the area at set times each day. The council made the bus gate permanent during 2022, after an 18 month trial.

Cycling infrastructure in the borough has been expanded too. Protected cycle lanes along Mansell Street in Aldgate were installed in 2022 by Transport for London(TfL). They provide a key link between Cycleways 2 and 3 and are used by over 3,000 cyclists every day. To make cycling possible for more Tower Hamlets residents, the council has delivered 140 new secure cycle parking spaces. These are in the form of individual lockers on residential estates and on-street cycle hangars.

Over 2,200 children have benefited from the council’s cycle training Bikeability programme. More than 800 adults have taken part in cycle training sessions since 2022 and 250 residents with physical and learning disabilities have taken part in the award winning All Ability Cycling Club programme based in Victoria Park. To break down barriers to cycling amongst under-represented groups we have expanded our network of community cycling hubs with housing association Poplar HARCA and trialled a bespoke cycling project with refugees and asylum seekers.

### Chrisp Street Cycle Hub

This busy cycle hub at Chrisp Street Market in Poplar continues to serve a wide range of people, providing free cycle loans, training, maintenance and social rides. Since opening in 2021, the cycle hub has engaged more than 3,400 people. Across 220 activities they have had more than 1,350 participants, predominantly women and their families from the local Bangladeshi and Somali communities. The hub employs two local female instructors and has trained 5 female participants to become ride leaders, with more training planned.

In addition to women-only group learn to ride sessions, they now offer bookable 1-2-1 family sessions so whole families can learn to cycle and improve their skills together. Dr Bike visits monthly and will offer some basic maintenance sessions, empowering people to feel more confident to tackle small repairs on their own cycles.

Run by housing association Poplar HARCA, funding for this year has been provided by The London Marathon Charitable Trust, with in-kind project management support from Poplar HARCA. Telford Homes has leased the space on a ‘peppercorn’ rent and the project has many other partners including London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Bikeworks, London Cycling Campaign and Joyriders.

### Medina Bazaar – Chrisp Street Delivers

I’ve always offered a delivery service to my customers due to the nature of my trade.

So, when Zedify, Poplar HARCA and Tower Hamlets Council set up this free cycle delivery service for my customers, Chrisp Street Delivers, I signed up to use it as a service.

I wanted to provide a greener delivery service to my customers, I also wanted my customers to receive their delivery during the day rather than me delivering to them after work, which can be very tiring and end up delivering very late to customers.

My customers are very happy with the service, especially when they are receiving their delivery during the day within working hours.

## Looking forward

Better streets and places for everyone

Tower Hamlets Council is committed to its 2019 Transport Strategy pledge that 90% of journeys in the borough will be made by walking, cycling and public transport by 2041.

The borough is now benefiting from the transformational improvements delivered by the completion of the Elizabeth Line in 2022. Stations at Canary Wharf and Whitechapel provide fast, frequent and fully accessible new services into Central London, Heathrow Airport and out to Reading and Shenfield (Essex). Wider benefits of the Elizabeth Line for the borough’s network include shorter journey times for trips involving interchanges with the route.

Tower Hamlets is set to benefit from substantial investment in the London bus network. New, frequent orbital routes due to be delivered over the next 18 months will connect the borough with South-East London and beyond as part of the new Superloop express bus network. The Docklands Light Railway (DLR) upgrade scheduled for 2024-26 will further improve Tower Hamlets’ connectivity. There will be more trains and new rolling stock will bring greater reliability and accessibility on DLR routes serving Tower Hamlets. The interchange between Poplar DLR and Canary Wharf Elizabeth Line station will also be improved.

Although the entire borough has benefited from the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) since 2021, Tower Hamlets has the fifth worst air quality out of all the London Boroughs. More work is required to address air pollution hotspots where it exceeds World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines. Tower Hamlets Council has already invested substantially in a network of over 300 electric vehicle chargers to date. The council has an ambitious programme to deliver a further 1,000 chargers over the next four years. The borough’s 33 School Streets will continue to operate permanently to help sustain improvements in air quality around schools. They will also improve road safety and encourage more families to walk, wheel and cycle to school. School Air Quality Audits will continue to be rolled out across Tower Hamlets. These will enable to the council to assess the impact of the measures they put in place to cut air pollution and identify further improvements.

Tower Hamlets Council is working closely with stakeholders to further develop new cycle infrastructure in the borough. Work with the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) on protected routes serving new neighbourhoods is taking shape in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The Canal & River Trust London is working on upgrades to canal towpath surfaces, enhancing the borough’s off-road walking and cycling network. The council will continue its work to make its town centres and transport corridors more accessible so the borough is as safe and as easy as possible for all residents to travel around.

### Quote from East End Cycles

With a passion for cycling, a group of cycling enthusiasts born and raised in the East End came together with the idea to provide an affordable repair service for all cyclists within their budget in East London.

Our mechanics equipped with many years of experience and professional qualifications, ensure no bike leaves our workshop without having the highest level of work carried out on each individual bike so all our customers are happy and feel safe on their journey.

We are located on the busy Mile End Road, which has a quality cycle path running alongside.

We are keen to be part of growing cycling in Tower Hamlets and beyond.

## 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 Tower Hamlets 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-1)
2. ONS Census 2021. This is the most recent available for Tower Hamlets. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Travelling as driver or passenger of car, van or motorcycle. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 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-4)
5. 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)
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-6)
7. See definition in Walking solutions. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 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-8)
9. 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-9)
10. Based on people who cycle at least once a week. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Bike Life 2019 Tower Hamlets report. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Trips for enjoyment or fitness include adults and children (with and without adult accompaniment). School trips are shown separately for children only. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Benefits have increased significantly, mainly because of increased costs of driving and greater traffic congestion. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This includes trips walked or wheeled for enjoyment or fitness, and trips to destinations by people with and without a car. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 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-15)
16. Litman, 2023. Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Based upon Eric Bruun and Vuchic, 1995. The Time-Area Concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 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-17)
18. This includes trips cycled for enjoyment or fitness, and trips to destinations by people with and without a car. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 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-19)
20. Litman, 2023. Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Based upon Eric Bruun and Vuchic, 1995. The Time-Area Concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Asher et al, 2012. Most older pedestrians are unable to cross the road in time: a cross-sectional study. Age and Ageing. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Sustrans, 2017. Linking Active Travel and Public Transport to Housing Growth and Planning. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. A minimum of three distinct types of cultural and leisure venues, like cafés, pubs, bingo halls, cinemas, museums. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. OS source measurement now excludes grass verges, so is more accurate than in the 2021 report. A and B roads are main roads. C roads and unclassified roads are more minor roads and often residential streets. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. To ensure comparability, these figures are correct as of **31** May 2023 for all city reports. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. 2023 data covers July 2022–June 2023. 2021 data covers July 2020–June 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Credit to the Association of Cycle Traders (ACT) for their assistance with cycle shop locations and services offered. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
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-28)
29. Excludes motorways. Unadopted roads were included in total street length in 2019 and 2021, but not 2023, this explains the large increase in percentages between 2019/ 2021 and 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Children’s Independent Mobility: an international comparison and recommendations for action, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Figure given is correct as of 31 May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)