

UK report

# Children's Walking and Cycling Index 2024



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# Foreword

A shared vision for walking, wheeling and cycling



We are delighted to launch the first ever Children’s Walking and Cycling Index, sponsored by Halfords. This is the first time we have used our rich Index data to dig into the behaviours, barriers, attitudes and solutions for children.

Children’s views on travel are too often overlooked by decision-makers. Where they are considered, the focus tends to be on the school journey.

This leaves out the vital role that travel plays in children’s day-to-day lives, supporting the development of their independence, socialisation skills and overall mental health and wellbeing.

With the rise in child obesity and mental health issues showing no signs of stopping, making walking, wheeling and cycling the default for more journeys is vital. However, national statistics suggest both walking and cycling to school have fallen since 2002.

Worryingly, there has been a continued gradual reduction in children travelling independently over the past 20 plus years.

More and more journeys are escorted by parents and guardians, limiting children’s freedom and personal development, and increasing family workloads.

By working in partnership, Sustrans and Halfords hope this new report will give a voice to children across the UK, reshaping how we approach children’s journeys so we can give them back the healthy independence that we all need for a better present and future.

**Xavier Brice**  
Chief Executive, Sustrans

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## The Children’s Walking and Cycling Index

The Children’s Walking and Cycling Index assesses walking, wheeling and cycling across the UK.<sup>i</sup>

We hope, like the adult Walking and Cycling Index, to repeat this survey every two years to track progress made towards making walking, wheeling and cycling a more attractive, and everyday way for children to travel.

The data in this report comes from an independent survey of 1,089 children aged 6 to 15, representative of the UK population. The survey was conducted in June 2024 as part of YouGov’s Children and Parents Omnibus Survey.

Our thanks to children across the UK who took part in the survey and shared their stories with us through the case studies found within this report.

More details on the Walking and Cycling Index can be found at [www.sustrans.org.uk/walking-cycling-index](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/walking-cycling-index)



Halfords is proud to sponsor Sustrans’ first Children’s Walking and Cycling Index. As the UK’s leading provider of motoring and cycling products and services—and with over 130 years as the nation’s leading cycling services provider—we are deeply invested in the future of active travel across the UK.

Active travel offers countless benefits, from improving children’s physical and mental health to fostering independence, building social connections, and contributing to greener communities.

These are aspirations we share for the next generation. However, challenges remain, and it’s vital to create safe, inspiring opportunities for every child.

For families, travel by car is often essential but active travel offers a balance –promoting healthier lifestyles while reducing congestion and emissions. It’s about empowering a future where children confidently embrace walking and cycling.

At Halfords, we are committed to working with Sustrans to champion low-carbon transport and build a healthier, more sustainable future for all.

**Graham Stapleton**  
CEO, Halfords

<sup>i</sup> 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

UK report

**UK child population<sup>i</sup>**  
8,149,302

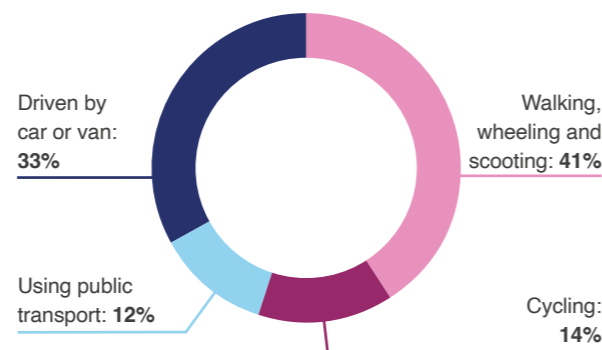
**Total number of children surveyed**  
1,089

## How do children get around?

Over two-fifths of trips by children are made by walking, wheeling and scooting. Cycling is also popular, with 14% of trips made by cycle.

Children have the highest modal share of any age group for active travel.<sup>ii</sup>

**Mode share for all trips made by children in the last week**

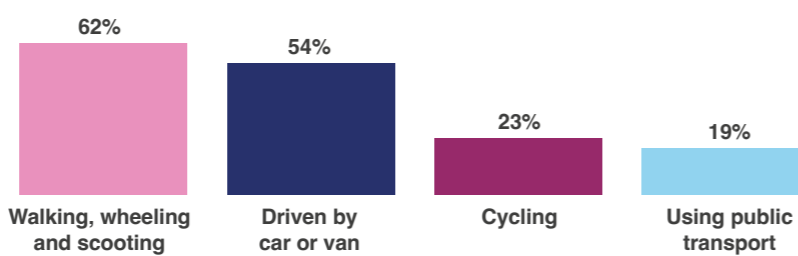


## Most children walk, wheel or use a scooter everyday

Almost two-thirds (62%) of children walk, wheel or scoot five or more days a week.

At the same time 54% of children are driven five or more days a week, showing their dependency on adults for transport.

**Children who travelled by the following modes five or more times in the last week**

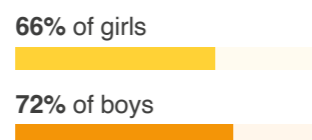


## A gender gap exists in children's cycling

**Proportion of children who cycled at least five times in the last week**



**Proportion of children who think their local area is a good place to cycle**



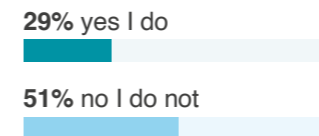
**Proportion of children who see themselves as someone who often cycles**



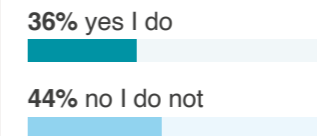
## Children want the government to do more to meet their needs

What percentage of children think the government is doing enough to:

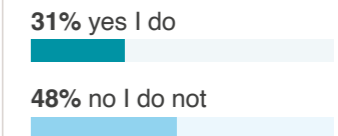
**Give children a say in improving their neighbourhood and country**



**Help children to be healthy**



**Help children to play and socialise outdoors**



## Children want to travel more, especially when it comes to cycling

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

**Walk or wheel**



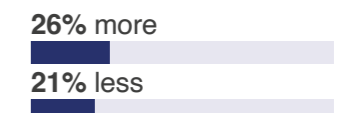
**Take public transport**



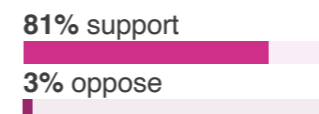
**Cycle**



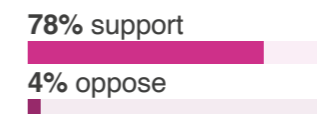
**Be driven**



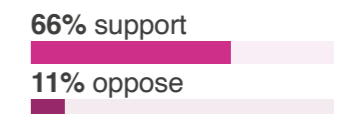
## Children support actions to improve walking, wheeling and cycling



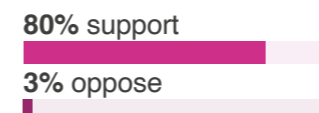
More traffic-free paths and quiet routes for walking and cycling



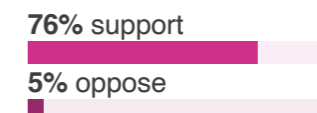
Creating more cycle paths along roads separated from cars



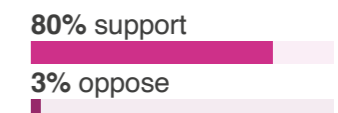
Closing streets outside schools to cars during school drop-off and pick-up



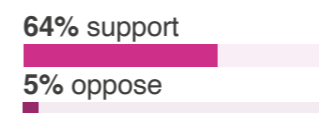
Making sure more things they need to get to are within walking distance



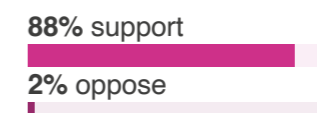
Stopping cars parking on the pavement



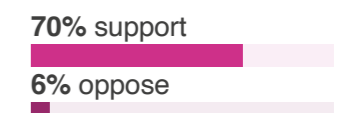
More road crossings



More public transport



Free travel for children on public transport



Reducing the speed of cars



# Walking and wheeling

## Participation, trips and purpose

### Walking and wheeling participation

Walking, wheeling and scooting are vital for children's travel needs and practised by most children almost daily.

These activities improve children's physical and mental health, while allowing quality time together as a family and a chance for children to spend time with their friends outside of school.

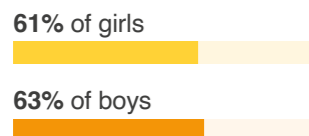
Walking levels are broadly the same in primary and secondary school, as well as for gender and ethnicity. However, differences occur, for example, between disabled children and non-disabled children as well as when comparing socio-economic groups.

**86%** of all children walked, wheeled or used a scooter in the last week

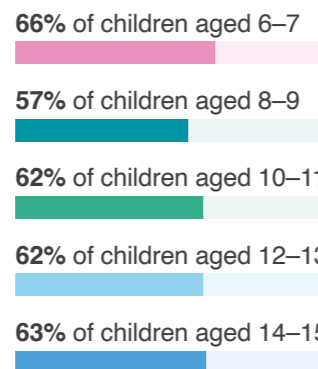
**62%** of all children walked, wheeled or used a scooter at least five times in the last week

### Proportion of children who walked, wheeled or used a scooter at least five times in the last week

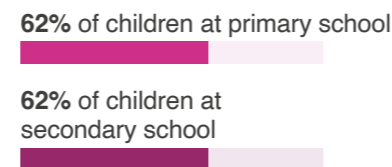
#### Gender



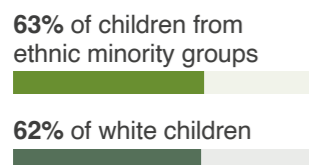
#### Age



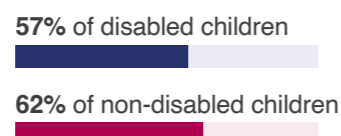
#### School level<sup>i</sup>



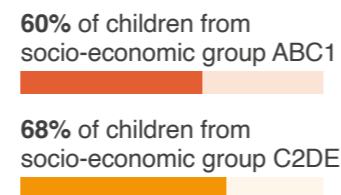
#### Ethnicity



#### Disability



#### Socio-economic group<sup>ii</sup>



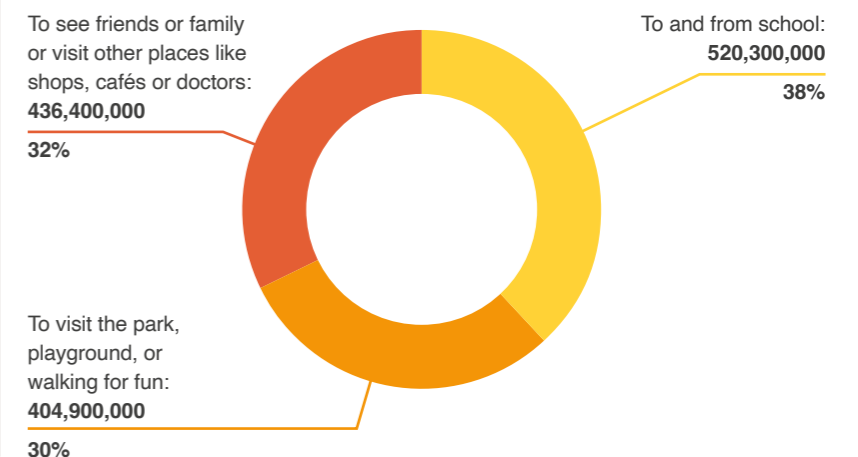
### Child walking, wheeling and scooting trip frequency and purpose

1.36 billion trips are walked, wheeled or scooted by children each year in the UK.

Whilst most trips by children are made to and from school (38%), high numbers of trips are also taken for other purposeful journeys (32%) and to visit green space or for recreation (30%).

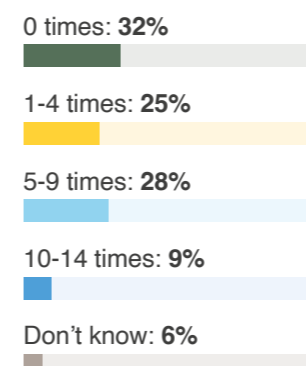
This shows the need to consider children's travel beyond the journey to school.

### Annual child walking, wheeling and scooting trips by purpose

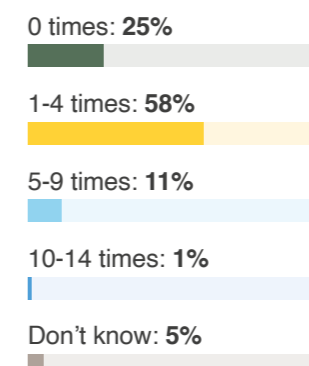


### Child walking, wheeling and scooting trips in the last week by purpose and frequency

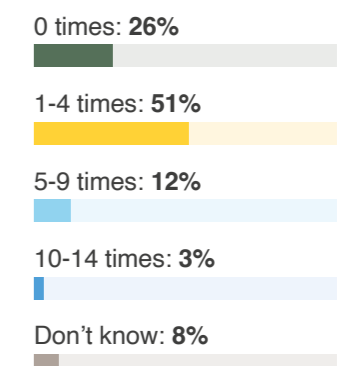
#### To and from school



#### To visit the park, playground or walking for fun



#### To see friends or family or visit other places like shops, cafés or doctors



Eilidh, Dundee



I travel to a lot of places on my own in my powered wheelchair.

I go into town on the bus a lot, as the city centre is pretty good for wheelchair access. But outside the city centre I come across a lot of problems, even just on my journey to school.

I'm very determined, so I work around everything. But I don't want to always have to do that.

If simple things like surfaces and dropped kerbs were improved, I would be able to be a lot more independent.

i. Includes children who are home-schooled. 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.





# Cycling

## Participation, trips and purpose

### Cycling participation

Positively, almost half of children cycled in the last week, however big differences exist across different demographic groups in cycling behaviour.

For example, only 17% of girls cycle at least five times a week in comparison to 28% of boys.

**48%**  
of all children cycled in the last week

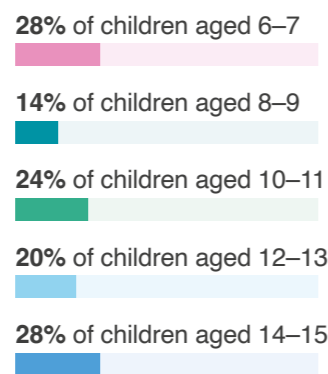
**23%**  
of all children cycled at least five times in the last week

### Proportion of children who cycled at least five times in the last week

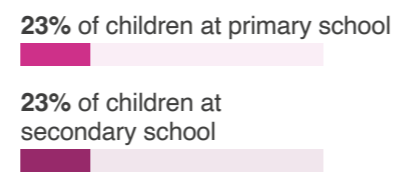
#### Gender



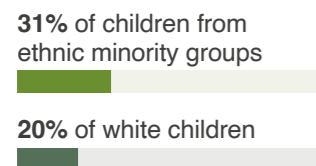
#### Age



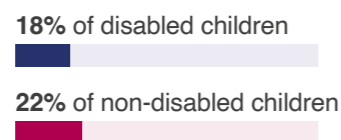
#### School level



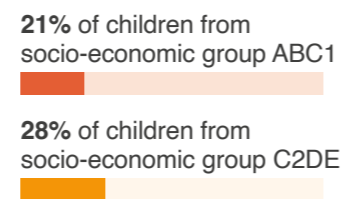
#### Ethnicity



#### Disability



#### Socio-economic group

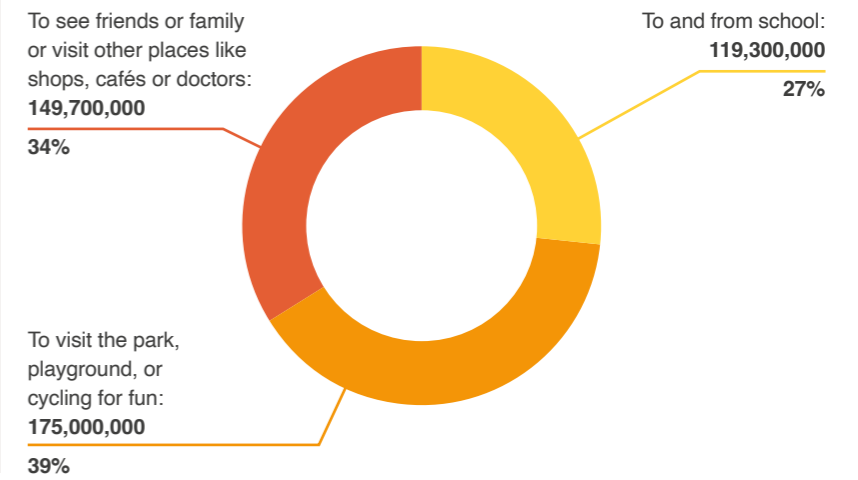


### Child cycling trip frequency and purpose

444 million trips are cycled by children each year in the UK.

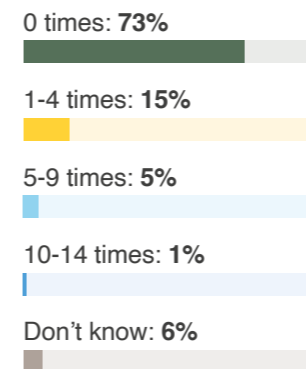
The most popular reason for cycling is to visit the park or purely for fun and recreation which makes up 39% of trips children cycle each year. Cycling is often far easier for children in a green space away from roads and less attractive to both children and families for journeys that are shared with traffic.

#### Annual child cycling trips by purpose

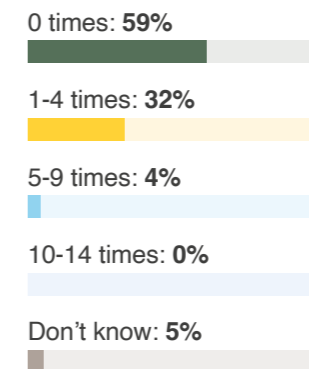


#### Child cycling trips in the last week by purpose and frequency

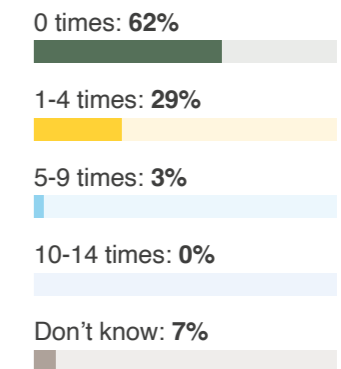
##### To and from school



##### To visit the park, playground or cycling for fun



##### To see friends or family or visit other places like shops, cafés or doctors



Ethan, Orkney

I got a new bike for Christmas – my first one without stabilisers! It was a bit hard at the beginning, but it didn't take me that long to practice.

I like cycling because it's good exercise and it's fun. It's like sitting and walking at the same time, but faster, like a car.

We normally cycle to school and cycle back home. But only when it's a sunny day.

I'm definitely gonna need a bigger bike as I get bigger. When I'm a grown up and I cycle, I'll be a master at it!







# Walking and wheeling solutions

What would help make walking and wheeling easier?

## Walking and wheeling safety and satisfaction

Ideally, walking or wheeling should be the most attractive option for short journeys. The environment should be safe, comfortable and welcoming.

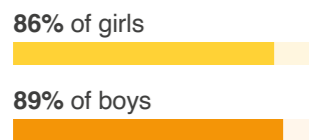
Positively, most children are satisfied with their local area as a good place to walk or wheel, and consider it safe to do so. However, not all groups feel as safe as others, for example disabled children are far less likely to feel safe (79%) than non-disabled children (89%).

**89%**  
of children think their local area is a good place to walk or wheel

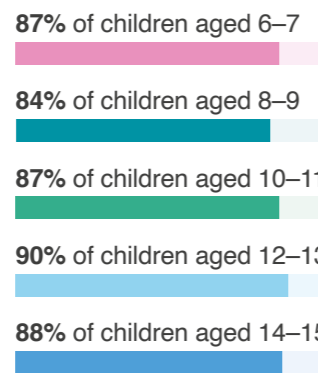
**87%**  
of children think the level of safety for walking or wheeling in their local area is good

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

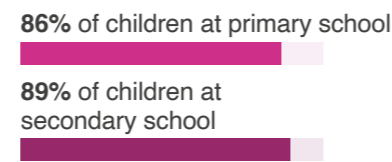
#### Gender



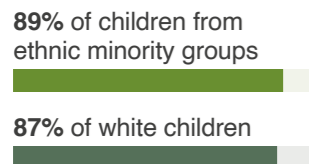
#### Age



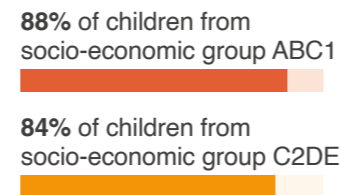
#### School level



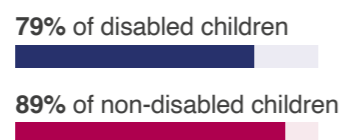
#### Ethnicity



#### Socio-economic group



#### Disability



## Children want their school and amenities within walking and wheeling distance as well as fewer and slower cars on the roads

To help more children to walk and wheel we need to ensure many of the things children need are found near to where they live

**74%**  
of children would find it useful if their school was closer to their home

**79%**  
of children would find it useful if things like parks, shops and playgrounds were closer to their home

Children need pavements clear from obstructions and convenient crossing points to walk and wheel more

**72%**  
of children would find it useful if there were fewer cars parked on the pavement

**83%**  
of children would find it useful if there were more road crossings

We need to reduce the dominance of cars to make walking and wheeling feel safer for children

**72%**  
of children would find it useful if there were slower speed limits for cars

**75%**  
of children would find it useful if there were fewer cars on our streets

## Parents and guardians support the views of children to improve walking and wheeling<sup>i</sup>

**58%**  
of parents and guardians support a ban on cars parking on the pavement

**62%**  
of parents and guardians support the creation of more low-traffic neighbourhoods



Sam and Susanna, Leicester



**Sam:** “It [walking] makes me feel relaxed when I go outside, especially at the park where we walk my dog Chico.

“Me and my friends play together while we’re going to school; it makes me concentrate a lot more. But on the main road, there are no railings and there’s cars everywhere.

“I would feel much safer walking to school if more of the roads had railings and the paths were wider.”

**Susanna:** “I encourage Samuel to go alone for independence, but I feel a bit worried, particularly in the areas where it can be challenging to cross the road.”

i. Parents and guardian data is a subset of respondents (aged 16+ years) with children in the household taken from the 2023 Walking and Cycling Index UK aggregated data set. This may include other people, for example siblings or grandparents, not just parents and guardians.



# Cycling solutions

What would make cycling better?

## Most children cycle or want to cycle

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



More than twice as many boys see themselves as someone who cycles often than girls

### Proportion of children who see themselves as someone who cycles often by gender



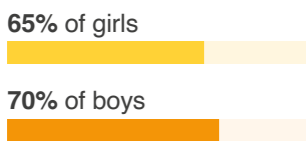
## Cycling safety and satisfaction

**69%** of children think their local area is a good place to cycle

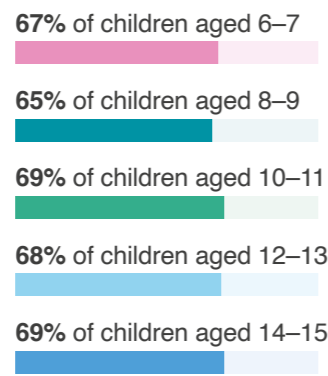
**67%** of children think cycling safety in their local area is good

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

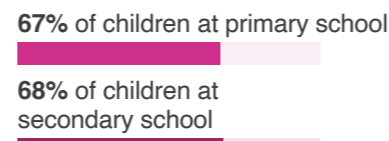
#### Gender



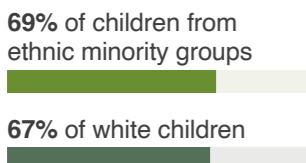
#### Age



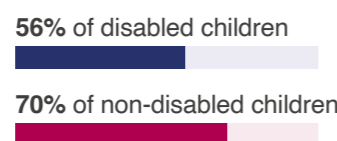
#### School level



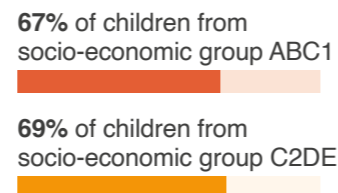
#### Ethnicity



#### Disability



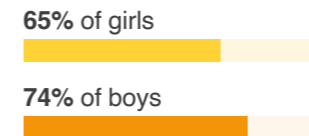
#### Socio-economic group



## Increasing access to cycles and cycle training

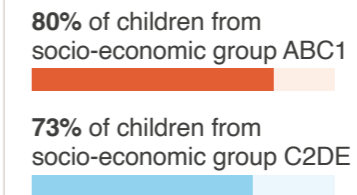
**69%** of children would find it useful to have a cycle to help them cycle more

### Children who would find it useful to have a cycle to help them cycle more by gender



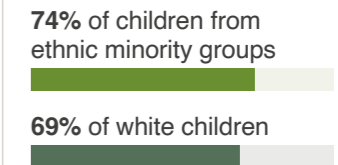
**78%** of children have access to a cycle

### Children's cycle ownership by socio-economic group



**70%** of children would find cycle training useful to help them cycle more

### Children who would find cycle training useful to help them cycle more by ethnicity



## Improving the environment for cycling

**Children need safe cycling infrastructure that protects them from cars**

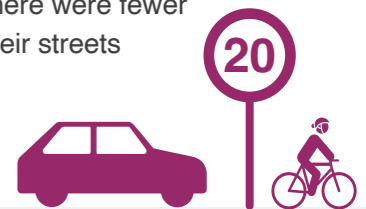
**81%** of children would find it useful to have more traffic-free cycle paths away from cars

**76%** of children would find it useful to have cycle routes along quiet streets where there are fewer cars

**We need to reduce the dominance of cars to make cycling feel safer for children**

**74%** of children would find it useful if there were slower speed limits for cars

**74%** of children would find it useful if there were fewer cars on their streets



**James, Birmingham**

When I joined school in year seven, I wanted to cycle in, but my parents decided it was too dangerous. But then new cycle paths were put in on my route and that convinced them to let me cycle.

I'm now able to control what time I leave, not having to worry about buses being late.

As well as getting new cycle paths, I think we need to maintain the ones that we have, so that they're safe.

I hope that conditions of the road improve so more people can cycle to school and experience the joy that I have on my cycle.





# Children's views about transport

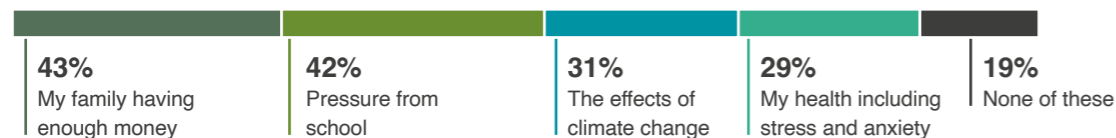
Who gets a good deal?

## Children are worried and don't think the government shares their concerns

Transport has a direct link to accessing education and opportunity. It can improve both physical and mental health while having the potential to either positively or negatively impact the environment.

Many children worry about these things and we need to improve transport for children and their families to improve their lives.

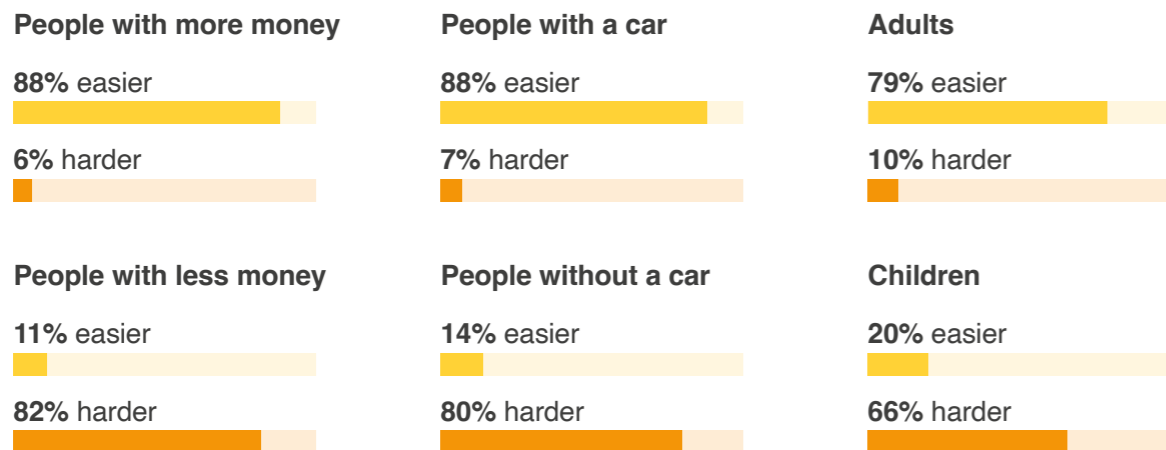
### What percentage of children worry about issues that affect them, their family or the planet?



## Children believe having a car and money makes it easier to get around

Most children agree that certain groups, including themselves, find it much harder to get around than others.

### Who do children believe has an easier or harder time getting around?

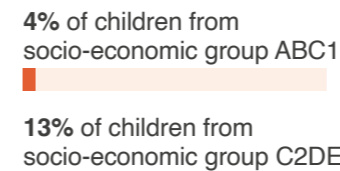


## Children living in households on a lower income are more likely to find it difficult to access the things they need to live well

Children living in households on a lower income are less likely to have access to a car or van, less likely to live in an area with everything they need, and less likely to be able to access local places. This reduces life opportunities and can be detrimental for health and wellbeing.

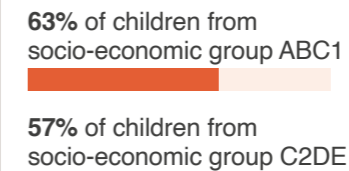
**7%**  
of children live in households without access to a car or van

### Children who live in households without access to a car or van, by socio-economic group



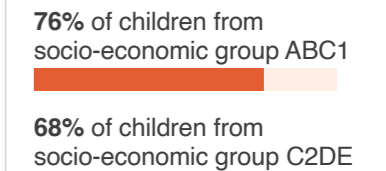
**61%**  
of children agree their neighbourhood has everything they need

### Children who agree their neighbourhood has everything they need, by socio-economic group



**74%**  
of children agree they can easily get to places they need to visit

### Children who agree they can easily get to places they need to visit, by socio-economic group

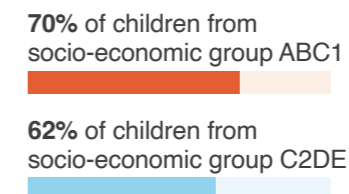


Both children and parents and guardians on a lower income are likely to think the air is less clean in their neighbourhood.

Households on a lower income are more likely to be in places with poorer air quality, often as a result of increased traffic levels.

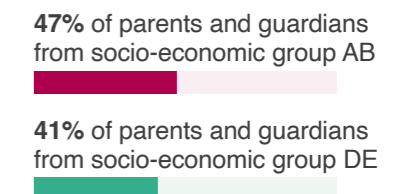
**68%**  
of children agree the air is clean in their neighbourhood

### Children who agree the air is clean in their neighbourhood, by socio-economic group



**47%**  
of parents and guardians agree the air is clean in their neighbourhood

### Parents and guardians who agree the air is clean in their neighbourhood, by socio-economic group







# What do children want?

Giving children a voice to improve transport

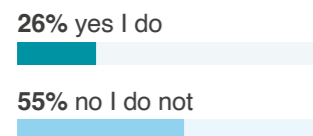
## Children do not think the government does enough to meet their needs

Most children think the government needs to do more to meet their own and their family's needs. This should start with giving children a greater say in how their local neighbourhood, city or country should be improved.

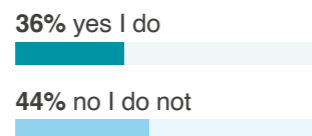
**51%** of children do not think the government is doing enough to give them a say in improving their neighbourhood and country

### What percentage of children think the government is doing enough to:

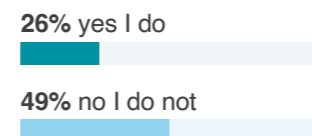
#### Ensure families have enough money to live well



#### Help children to be healthy

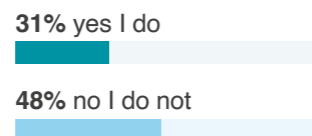


#### Tackle climate change

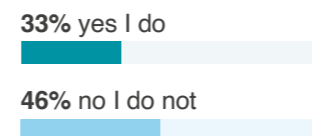


In the UK fewer children play out on their streets than ever before.<sup>i</sup>

#### Help children to play and socialise outdoors

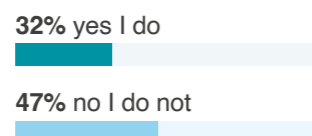


#### Help children access nature

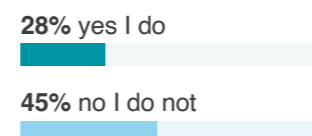


People should have the choice to travel sustainably.

#### Help people reduce car use by providing other transport choices



#### Help people without a car access the things they need to live well



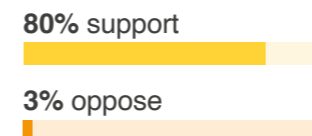
Without this, children's transport choices are curtailed as they cannot drive.

## Children support actions to improve walking, wheeling and cycling

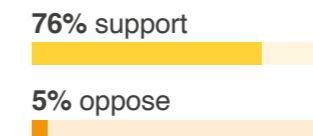
Children support actions to make it easier to walk and wheel, and make cycling accessible and safe. Children also want to see more services and affordable public transport where they live.

### What percentage of children support or oppose these measures?

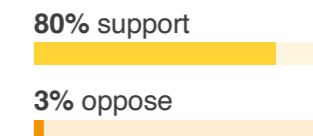
#### Making sure more things they need to get to are within walking distance



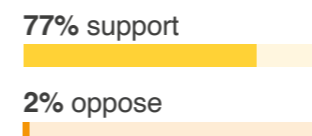
#### Stopping cars parking on the pavement



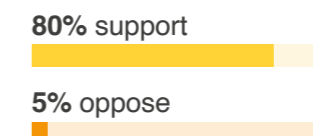
#### More road crossings



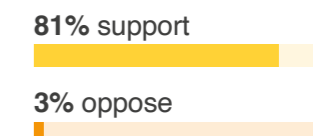
#### Reducing the prices of cycles



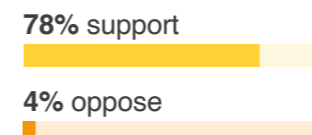
#### Giving all children cycle training



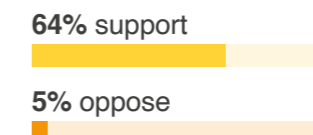
#### More traffic-free paths and quiet routes for walking and cycling



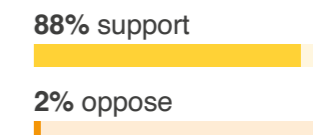
#### Creating more cycle paths along roads separated from cars



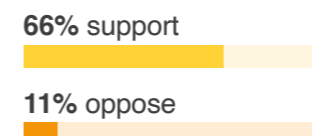
#### More public transport



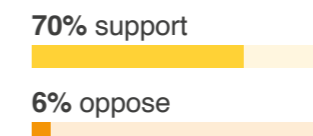
#### Free travel for children on public transport



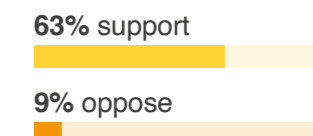
#### Closing streets outside schools to cars during school drop-off and pick-up



#### Reducing the speed of cars



#### People driving less







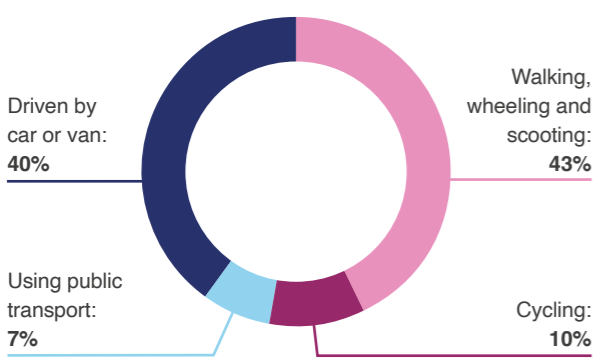
# Primary school journeys

How are children getting to school?

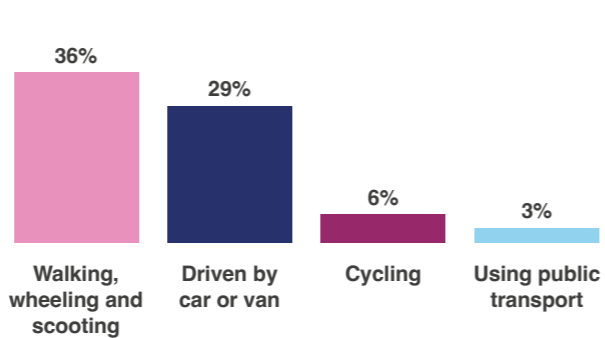
## Walking and wheeling are the most common modes of travel

Most journeys to and from primary school are walked, wheeled or scooted or by car or van. Many children live nearby their school, are driven because they live further afield, or are dropped off by parents or guardians on their way to work or other places.

Mode share for all primary school trips in the last week



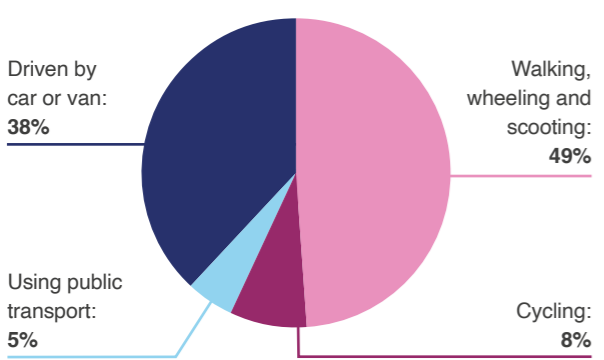
Children who travelled to primary school by the following modes five or more times in the last week



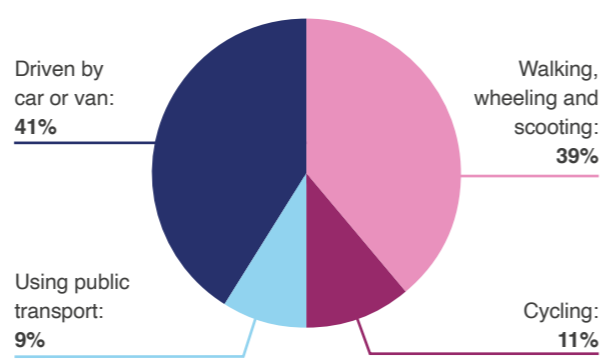
## Mode share for all primary school trips last week by gender

Primary school children have similar patterns of mode share, however girls appear to walk, wheel or scoot more frequently than boys for school journeys.

Girls

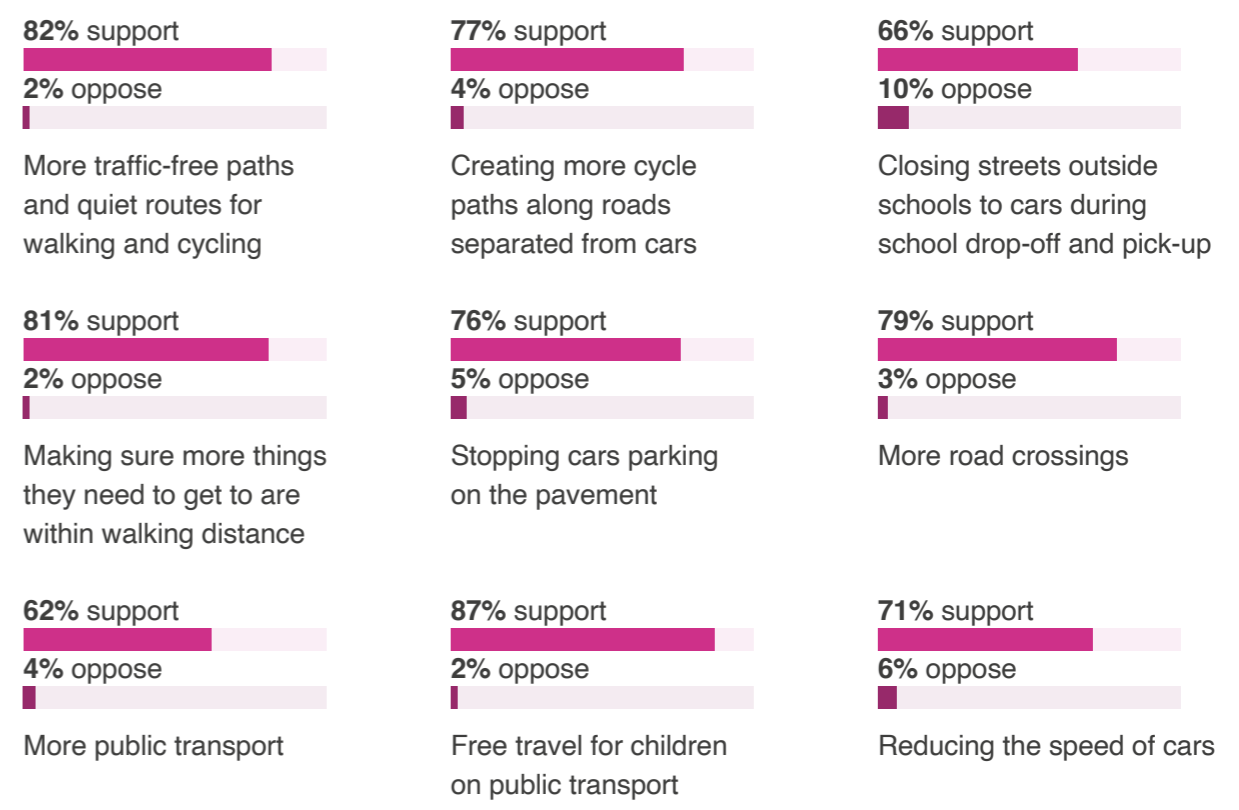


Boys



## Children at primary level support actions to make their neighbourhood better for walking, wheeling and cycling

Children at primary school level support actions to improve walking, wheeling and cycling as well as public transport.



Anita, North Belfast



I think I cycle quite a lot. I don't really walk that much. I probably should walk more!

Sometimes, on dark evenings I am a bit scared cycling home from school. I feel blinded by car lights.

I talked with my mum and she said I could get myself to my friend's house and she would pick me up in the evening.

Sometimes on busy roads, when I am cycling by myself, I cycle on the path, and it can be very narrow, and I feel that I might wobble on to the road.

I would like more cycle paths. I would like to visit my friends. Sometimes I would get a bus. I might walk or cycle if the weather was good.

When I am older, I don't know if I will cycle because I don't see many older girls on bikes. 14 or 15 year old girls go on the bus or their parents drive them.





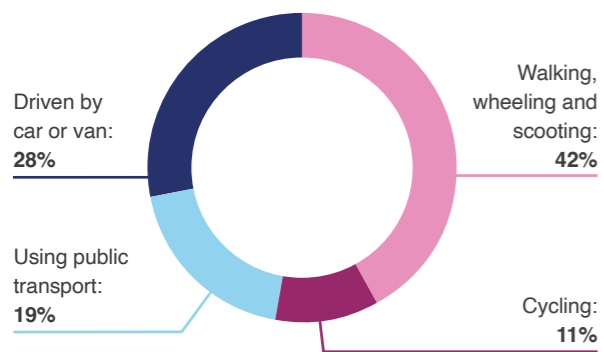
# Secondary school journeys

How are children getting to school?

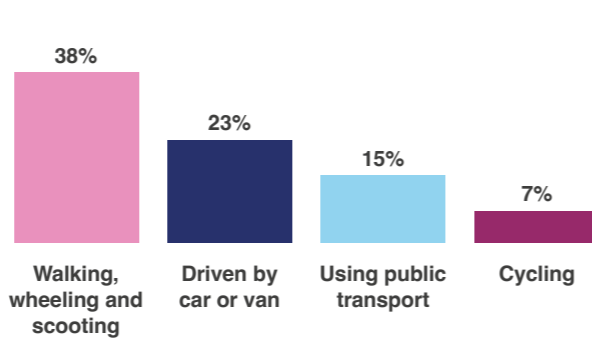
## Walking and wheeling are the most common modes of travel

In comparison to primary, secondary schools are often further away from where children live. While driving still plays a role, public transport is increasingly used as children become more independent.

### Mode share for all secondary school trips in the last week



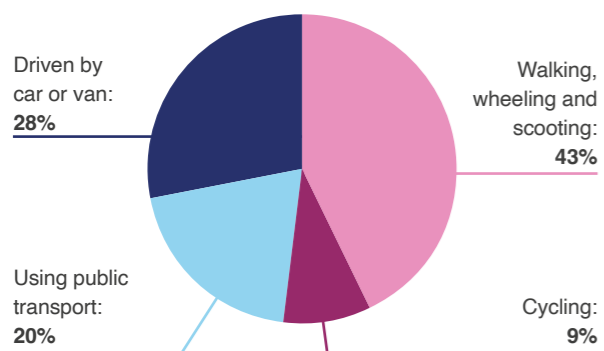
### Children who travelled to secondary school by the following modes five or more times in the last week



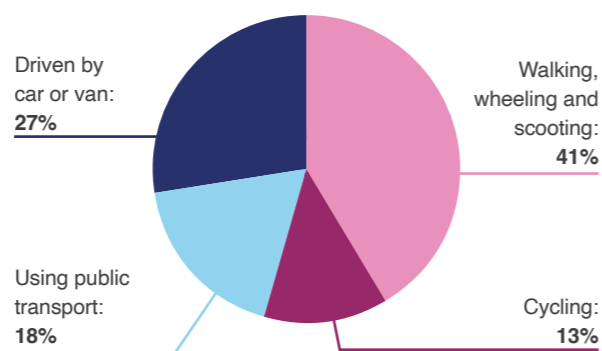
## Mode share for all secondary school trips last week by gender

Mode share becomes more similar by gender within secondary school journeys except for cycling, where boys cycle more than girls.

### Girls

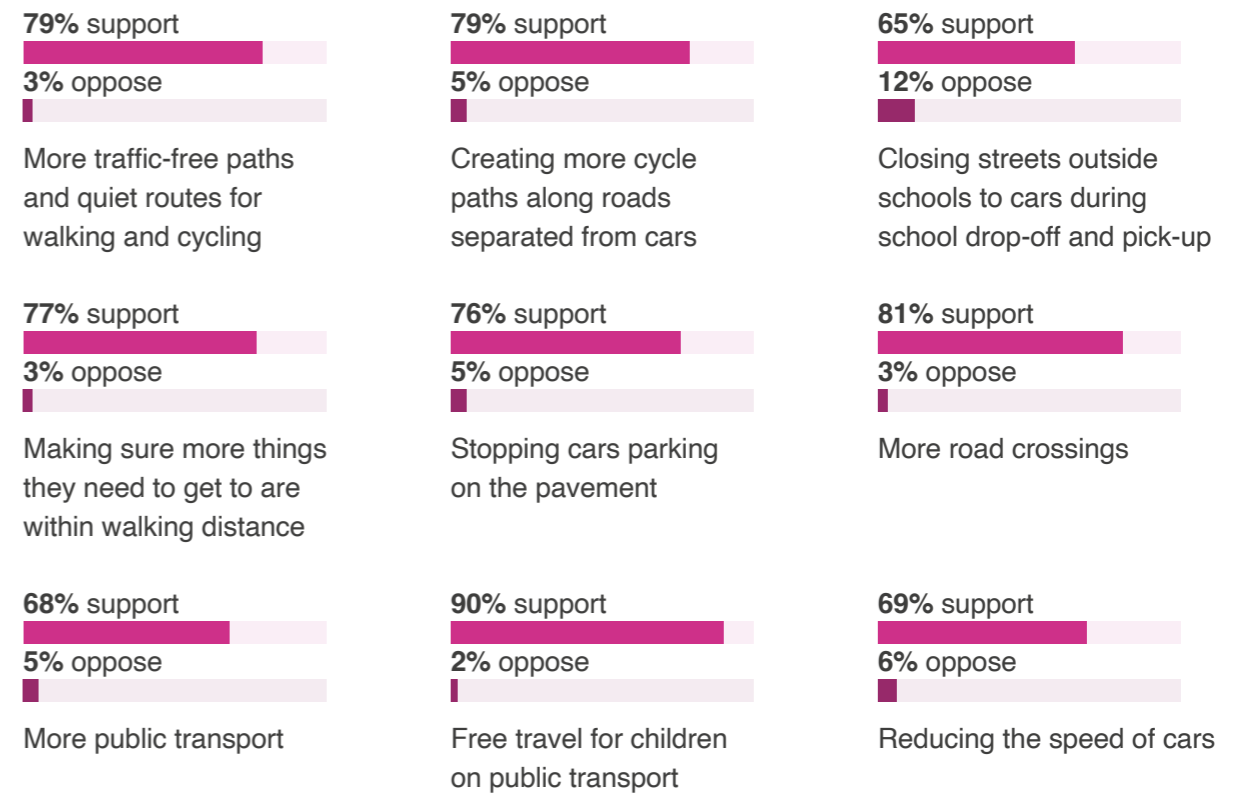


### Boys



## Children at secondary level support actions to make their neighbourhood better for walking, wheeling and cycling

Children at secondary school level support actions to improve walking, wheeling and cycling as well as public transport.



Lily, Swansea



The friendship group that I tend to hang out with around the skate park is gender mixed, and I see the difference in the way we travel.

Me and the girls, if it gets too late, will get a ride home or walk as a group. But the guys, whenever they go, they just tend to walk by themselves during the night or just cycle.

I did have a bike and I used to cycle around my neighbourhood and parks, but I grew out of it.

I think many girls my age don't really tend to cycle or use bikes. I think this is because our clothes don't really allow us, especially if we're wearing skirts, and it seems a lot of the equipment for cycling is made for men instead of women.

It's not really seen as cool and we can be quite self-conscious about that.





## Looking forward

### What children need to become more active

Across the UK, we need to do more to prioritise safer school neighbourhoods and active journeys for children.

This needs to take a joined-up approach by government, local authorities and schools. But most importantly it should be led by children themselves, alongside their parents and guardians.

Children are all too often left out of the conversation when it comes to policy making and investment decisions. They are too young to vote, ignored in research and left out of consultations and engagement exercises.

*Without the voices of children, including those from groups more likely to be marginalised, changes are less likely to meet their needs.*

There are of course many programmes that have been proven to work, often starting at school. For example, all children should have access to cycle training, including disabled children who may need non-standard cycles.

And programmes like School Streets should be scaled up based upon the success seen in many areas that has led to more active travel, improved safety and reduced air pollution.

Of course, its not just around the school gate where action is required. Steps should be taken to introduce more low-traffic school neighbourhood schemes alongside walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure to ensure safer routes to school.

A clear message from this report is that children's journeys are far wider and more complex than purely the school run. Many initiatives that benefit walking, wheeling and cycling for adults will also benefit children, and vice versa, such as giving all UK local authorities the power to clamp down on pavement parking, and the resources to reduce speed limits, implement segregated cycle lanes, improve crossing points and expand off-road networks.

Changes to planning laws should also place active travel at the heart of the vision for new towns and new developments to avoid locking families into car dependency and give children a genuine option to travel both actively and by public transport.

By giving children the tools to make the changes they need, we can make it possible for more people to walk, wheel and cycle safely, healthily and joyfully.

**Across the UK there are many examples of local authorities taking action to improve walking, wheeling and cycling for children.**

### I Bike for Schools, Aberdeen

In 2022/23, Bikeability training was provided at six schools across Aberdeen. 68 pupils benefitted from “learn to cycle” lessons, and nearly all of them can now cycle independently. Positive feedback from pupils indicates increased confidence cycling, with one school pupil saying they felt “on top of the world”.

### School Streets, Birmingham

Birmingham has 20 School Streets (including 8 that are being made permanent or are on trial), where the road outside a school is closed to motor vehicles at the start and end of the school day. This means that over 7,000 children and their carers arrive at school in a healthier and safer space.

### By Ours, Liverpool

This community project helps residents, businesses and schools design better local streets. The community, including children are creating vibrant neighbourhoods with cleaner air, where more people walk to shops and services, stop and chat to each other, and children can play out safely.

### Making the school journey safer, Perth

To make the school journey safer Aberdeen has implemented a new shared use path and a new crossing nearby Robert Douglas Memorial School. New bike shelters have also been installed at the school, making cycling a more practical option.

### Safer Routes to School, Southampton

The Safer Routes to School project makes it easier and safer to walk, wheel or cycle to school in Southampton. It is complemented by the delivery of the national cycle training programme, Bikeability, where we are seeking to train 80% of eligible Year 5 and 6 pupils to Bikeability Level 2 by 2025.



## Notes on methodology:

The online behaviour and attitudinal survey was conducted from 16–22 May 2024 by international online research group YouGov.

The survey is representative of all children aged 6–15 years old in the UK, not just those who walk, wheel or cycle.

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.

More information is 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.

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

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The logo consists of a white square icon containing a stylized arrow pointing upwards and to the right, positioned above the word 'sustrans' in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. Below the name, the tagline 'JOIN THE MOVEMENT' is written in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font.

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