



UK Health Alliance on Climate Change

UKHACC Response to All Party Parliamentary Group for Cycling & Walking (APPGCW) Active Travel and Social Justice Inquiry

The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (UKHACC) is an alliance of UK health organisations including Royal Colleges, journals, associations and societies representing more than one million health professionals, a significant proportion of the NHS workforce.

Who is currently prevented from enjoying the full benefits of active travel and why?

Active travel, including walking, cycling, and wheeling, has the potential to improve health, reduce environmental impact, and foster social connections. However, systemic barriers, infrastructure challenges, and societal inequities prevent many groups in the UK from fully engaging in and benefiting from active travel. Fewer than 1 in 5 people in the UK cycle even once a month. Safety concerns, including risks from motorised traffic and inadequate infrastructure, are major deterrents for walking and cycling.

Key groups affected:

1. Women

- **Safety Concerns:** Women are disproportionately affected by safety concerns. In a Scottish survey, 53% of women expressed dissatisfaction with cycling safety, and 38% with walking safety. Safety concerns are magnified at night, with women citing fears of harassment, sexual innuendo, and being followed.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Women cite inadequate cycling infrastructure and road danger as barriers. More women report near-misses in traffic compared to men.
- **Caregiving Responsibilities:** Women often perform "trip chaining" (multiple short trips for caregiving), making active travel less viable due to time constraints and infrastructure challenges.

2. People with Disabilities

- **Travel Limitations:** Disabled people make 30% fewer journeys annually than non-disabled people and report lower confidence in using public transport. Accessibility barriers, such as uneven pavements and obstructive barriers, limit their participation in active travel.
- **Multimodal Challenges:** Complex journeys involving multiple transitions (e.g., from bus to train) are particularly stressful for disabled individuals.

3. Low-Income Households

- **Transport Poverty:** People in low-income households often lack access to private vehicles and depend on limited public transport, which increases travel times and

costs. In rural areas, the reliance on expensive private cars further exacerbates financial strain.

- Safety and Infrastructure: Deprived areas see higher rates of road collisions and pedestrian injuries, making active travel unsafe.

4. Rural and Island Communities

- Limited Access: Longer distances and infrequent public transport options make active travel challenging. Rural residents face significantly higher costs for both public and private transport.

5. Older Adults

- Physical Challenges: Poorly maintained pavements, lack of resting areas, and icy pathways deter walking and wheeling. Fear of falls increases in cold weather.
- Social Isolation: Obstructions, such as parked cars, exacerbate transport-related social isolation.

6. BME Communities

- Cultural and Racial Barriers: Women from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds often report additional safety concerns, including fears of racist harassment.

Environmental and Systemic Challenges:

- Inadequate Infrastructure: Poor road conditions, insufficient cycle lanes, and a lack of inclusive design hinder active travel.
- Car Dependency: A car-centric culture marginalises other modes of transport, leaving active travel underfunded and unsafe.
- Transport Emissions: Active travel options are further limited by high levels of air and noise pollution in urban areas.
- Insufficiently inclusive policies: Transport policies need to be more inclusive, catering to the needs of affected groups mentioned above.

In what ways are people travelling actively affected unevenly by poor provision and/or the negative consequences of motorised travel, and why?

Active travellers in the UK face significant challenges due to systemic issues, including poor infrastructure provision and the negative impacts of motorised travel. These challenges disproportionately affect certain groups, exacerbating inequalities and limiting the uptake and benefits of active travel.

1. Safety Concerns

- Fear of Cars and Driver Behavior: Dangerous driving practices such as speeding are a major deterrent to active travel. Parents and carers frequently cite concerns about driver behaviour and the perceived risk of harm to children as key reasons for driving

them to school. This restricts young people's freedom to travel actively and independently, limiting opportunities for individual development and their understanding of risk.

- Higher Risks for Vulnerable Groups: Children in the most deprived areas are six times more likely to experience fatal or serious injuries as pedestrians compared to those in affluent areas. These disparities highlight the disproportionate danger faced by disadvantaged communities

2. Pollution and Health Impacts

- Air and Noise Pollution: The presence of cars in urban streets contributes to traffic noise and air pollution, making active travel unpleasant and harmful, particularly for people with respiratory conditions, neurodiversity, or other health issues.
- Disproportionate Burden on Deprived Areas: People in poorer neighbourhoods face greater exposure to air pollution despite contributing less to it through car use. This exacerbates existing health inequities.

3. Seasonal and Infrastructure Challenges

- Winter Conditions: In colder months, icy or snowy pavements are a significant barrier to active travel. Although councils have a legal duty to ensure safe passage along highways, pavements are often deprioritised for gritting and clearing compared to motorised roads. This disproportionately affects pedestrians and those reliant on active travel
- Inaccessible New Developments: New housing developments in rural and peri-urban areas often lack access to public transport or active travel routes, increasing car dependency. This limits opportunities for walking or cycling as viable options.

4. Economic Pressures

- Forced Car Ownership: People on low incomes, including single parents, unpaid carers, and disabled individuals, often find themselves forced to own cars due to a lack of alternatives. This financial strain leads to sacrifices in essentials such as heating, food, and social activities

5. Children's Limited Freedom

- Decline in Active School Travel: Despite living in urban areas, approximately one-third of children aged 5-16 years are driven to school, and fewer than 5% cycle. This reliance on motorised transport is often driven by safety concerns, which restricts children's independence and the developmental benefits of active travel.

Underlying Causes of Inequities

- Car-Centric Policies: Historical prioritisation of motorised transport over active travel infrastructure has left urban and rural areas underserved for walking and cycling routes.
- Economic Inequality: Low-income groups face compounded disadvantages due to a lack of affordable and accessible active travel options.

Which initiatives (in the UK and abroad) aimed specifically at widening participation in active travel are having the greatest positive impacts? How are they achieving this?

Below are some impactful initiatives in the UK and internationally that are successfully increasing participation in active travel. These programs focus on improving infrastructure, addressing safety concerns, and making active travel more inclusive and accessible.

In the UK: Initiatives such as the Low Traffic Neighborhoods (LTNs) where residential areas are redesigned to reduce traffic by introducing barriers, one-way systems, and cycle-only streets. Increases walking and cycling by making streets safer and quieter. A London study found that LTNs led to a 57% increase in cycling and a 13% increase in walking. Data-driven planning and ongoing monitoring to address community concerns and optimise implementation.

Abroad: Superblocks in Barcelona, Spain where entire neighbourhoods are redesigned to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists by restricting motorised traffic to perimeters. It reduces air pollution and noise while increasing walking and cycling. Residents report improved quality of life and public space usage due to holistic urban planning that integrates active travel with green spaces and local amenities. Similarly, in Paris, France a new cycling plan (Plan Velo) with increased financial investments of €250 million to make the city 100% cyclable by 2026. Significant investment in infrastructure and sustained political commitment to active travel, walking and cycling are now more popular than driving in the centre of Paris. In South Korea, a 5.5-mile protected bike path in the middle of a highway features a solar panel-covered roof that generates enough to power around 600 households. This innovative design not only supplies eco-friendly energy for streetlights and electronic displays but also provides cyclists with protection from sun and rain.

Which initiatives working to address transport exclusion (but not specifically active travel) have most to teach the active-travel community? How is their work effective?

Many people lack adequate public transport options and rely on community transport services. These include voluntary car schemes, group travel services, dial-a-ride, wheels-to-work programs (leased vehicles or bikes), demand-responsive or fixed-route services, and e-bike hire or cycle schemes. Community transport plays a critical role in connecting rural areas, reducing transport poverty, and fostering a sense of community. Funding and co-production of solutions within these communities can help expand active travel options. Subsidised bus fares have made local public transport more affordable, while subsidies for e-bike and bike hire schemes can enable people in deprived areas to access active travel without significant financial strain. For example, the Lime Micromobility program offers discounted access through its Lime Access initiative. Cornwall Council has also introduced a flexible e-bike loan scheme (£1 per day for 1 week to 3 months) through social prescribing to support individuals facing physical or mental health challenges, disabilities, or unemployment, demonstrating the potential of targeted interventions to promote active travel.

Which more general transport policies/schemes most reduce exclusion from active travel? How does this come about?

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), implemented in cities like London, restrict through traffic in residential areas, reducing road danger, noise and air pollution, thereby encouraging walking and cycling.

Following the introduction of London's Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in April 2019, a study found that 42% of children who previously travelled to school by car switched to more active modes of transport, such as walking, cycling, or public transit. In contrast, in Luton—a comparison area without ULEZ—only 20% of children made this shift. The study suggests that implementing clean air zones like ULEZ can effectively encourage active travel among schoolchildren, thereby enhancing physical activity and reducing air pollution.

Congestion charging, as implemented in London, discourages car use in central areas, reducing traffic and freeing up space for active travel. Integration of active travel with public transport is another key focus, seen in UK schemes providing bike storage at train stations and on buses, similar to initiatives in Copenhagen that encourage seamless multimodal journeys and enable equitable access across demographics.

Similarly, traffic calming measures in the Netherlands, such as speed humps and raised crossings, where redesigned intersections prioritise pedestrian and cyclist safety, making streets safer for all ages and abilities. Land use planning strategies, such as the creation of mixed-use developments, aim to bring residences, workplaces, and amenities closer together, reducing reliance on cars and promoting walking and cycling. These are inspired by European cities like Amsterdam, where compact urban design has made cycling a daily norm. Further, Vienna's Gender Mainstreaming approach to transport planning has led to equitable design, addressing the unique needs of women, caregivers, and marginalised groups.

What actions would be most effective in addressing social injustice in active travel? (financial incentives, regulation, infrastructure, institutional arrangements, funding for agencies, etc.)

Addressing social injustice in active travel in the UK requires a comprehensive strategy that integrates financial incentives, regulatory reforms, improved infrastructure, and institutional support.

- **Financial:** Provide grants or subsidies for bicycles, e-bikes, and cycling equipment, particularly targeting low-income groups. Introduce free community-based e-bike or bike-share programs in underserved areas.
- **Regulatory:** Mandate compliance with accessibility standards for walking and cycling infrastructure to ensure inclusivity for disabled individuals.
- **Infrastructure:** Allocate targeted funding to build and maintain safe cycling lanes, well-lit pedestrian pathways, and accessible crossings, especially in low-income neighbourhoods as deprived communities often lack access to safe active travel routes, exacerbating inequalities. Invest in walking and cycling infrastructure that links rural communities to essential services and transport hubs. Rural areas are disproportionately car-dependent, which excludes many from active travel.

- Public awareness: Highlighting the health and environmental co-benefits of active travel while addressing concerns around safety and misconceptions.