



Tackling inequalities

Transport affects our access to work, education, healthcare and a social life, all of which are crucial determinants of our wellbeing and life chances. Active travel can help address transport inequalities to ensure a fairer society that works for everyone.

Why isn't the current system working?

Transport poverty

Poorer households are much less likely to have access to a car than more affluent ones¹. For instance, 51% of people living in the most-deprived fifth of areas in Scotland have access to a car compared to 86% in the least-deprived fifth². Despite this, poorer communities are more likely to experience harms from cars, such as air pollution, traffic injuries and noise³. For instance, people living in Scotland's most deprived areas, particularly children, are up to five times more likely to be killed in traffic collisions than those living in the least deprived areas³.



Over the past decade, taking public transport has become more & more expensive, whilst driving has got much cheaper⁴. A lack of accessible travel options limits people's opportunities to shop around for essential goods, especially food, whilst the prohibitively high cost of season tickets or multi-trip passes may mean people end up paying more overall¹. These are examples of the 'poverty premium': the poorer you are, the more expensive life becomes.

Unequal streets



Women, older people and disabled people are less likely to drive, more likely to use public transport and spend more time in their immediate neighbourhoods⁵⁻⁷, yet are most badly affected by 'severance' – that is, the barriers to movement and social connections created by roads and traffic⁸.

Disabled people are more likely to mention transport as a concern than non-disabled people, with more than 60% not having a car in the household⁹. Many disabled people find their local environment prevents or discourages them from walking, wheeling or cycling – for instance, due to potholed or cluttered pavements, cycle lanes that are too narrow for non-standard bikes or sections that require them to dismount^{7,10}.

Many of the same problems affect older people. For example, more than three-quarters of people over 65 can't cross the road in the time currently allowed at most pedestrian crossings; among older people with disabilities, the proportion may be as high as 98%^{11,12}. Thanks to decades of poor design, many older people are missing out on opportunities for social connections, independence and physical activity.

Transport networks also tend to be designed around a 'hub and spoke model' prioritising the journeys more often made by working-age men, such as direct commuting journeys into town and city centres, rather than 'trip-chaining' of multiple short journeys more common for women¹.

Climate injustice

Finally, the climate emergency – to which transport is the biggest single contributor in Scotland⁴ – is already having a disproportionate impact on the poorest and most vulnerable globally^{13,14}. A more sustainable transport system is crucial if we are to address the unequal burden of the climate crisis.



How can active travel help?

Better travel options can help raise incomes by ensuring access to jobs, education and training, as well as supporting social inclusion and participation^{1,8}. There's also evidence that improving active travel links boosts the local economy, which in turn improves employment opportunities and can support neighbourhood regeneration^{15,16}. Measures to enable active travel and tackle car dominance – such as better walking and cycling infrastructure, lower speed limits and low-traffic neighbourhoods – reduce the burden of harms from traffic which disproportionately affect poorer neighbourhoods, like air pollution, noise and injuries³.

61% of areas in Scotland at high risk of transport poverty have essential services within a 10-minute cycle ride, suggesting that better active travel infrastructure can play a crucial role¹⁷. Twenty-minute neighbourhoods – combining direct active travel routes with compact and inclusive urban design – can ensure everyone has access to a mix of services, shops and amenities within easy walking distance¹⁸.

It's no wonder that two recent landmark reports on health inequalities recommended increasing active travel through better urban design^{19,20}.

At the moment, there's a huge unmet demand for better active travel infrastructure: an estimated 55% of people from ethnic minority groups, 38% of people at risk of deprivation, 36% of women and 31% of disabled people who do not cycle would like to start²¹. Reducing unnecessary car journeys through better active travel provision also frees up space for road users for whom private car use is a necessity^{5,7}.

However, thoughtful design and planning is required to ensure that measures to promote active travel tackle inequalities rather than reinforce them. For instance, clearly delineated space for people on foot and those bikes is preferable to shared use paths, which are often intimidating for pedestrians, whilst dedicated cycle routes need to be wide enough to accommodate the wide variety of bikes, trikes, and handcycles that help people get around.

What needs to change?

In order to realise the potential of active travel in tackling inequalities in Scotland, we're asking all candidates for the Holyrood election to sign up to our three asks:



- **Accessibility:** Ensure that our streets, paths and footways are accessible to everyone, whether on foot or using any form of mobility aid; by putting accessibility at the heart of our street design, we will create places everyone can use and enjoy.
- **Infrastructure:** Create a long-term programme to rebuild our villages, towns and cities around walking, wheeling and cycling, with active travel infrastructure everyone can use - the initial goal should be that every child who wants to can walk, wheel or cycle to their school.
- **Investment:** Provide the sustained, long-term investment needed to start this transformation of Scotland into a country that enables active travel everywhere - starting from 10% of the transport budget and rising to 20% over the course of the parliament.

¹Looking for footnotes? See <http://walkwheelcyclevote.scot/why/wealthier/inequalities-briefing-bibliography/> for all the documents and research cited here.