



The state of Scotland's economy is going to be top of the agenda over the coming parliament, as the full impacts of Covid-19 begin to be felt. Inclusive streets might not be the first thing that springs to mind when we think of the challenges ahead - but all the evidence points to a central role for accessible, sustainable and healthy transport in creating an economy that works for everyone.

Inclusive streets bring huge returns

Spending on walking, wheeling and cycling consistently comes out top of good-value public investments. The UK Department for Transport estimates that society gains at least £6 worth of benefits for every £1 spent on cycling infrastructure, while other studies have put this figure even higher^{1,2}. In comparison, most road-building schemes struggle to achieve half these returns³. For walking, return on investment can be as high as 36:1⁴. No wonder that enhancing sustainable transport infrastructure is among the top three expert recommendations for a green recovery from Covid-19⁵.



Investing in walking, wheeling and cycling can also help tackle inequalities, which - as well as their human cost - act as a drag on Scotland's economy⁶. For instance, lack of accessible travel options are an important barrier to jobs and training for many⁷: half of those living in the most deprived areas of Scotland, and up to two-thirds of job seekers, don't have access to a car^{8,9}. This particularly affects disabled people, who are almost twice as likely to be unemployed than non-disabled people and commonly experience difficulties with transport which limit their economic and social participation¹⁰.

Evidence suggests that local transport projects like protected cycle lanes and traffic calming create more jobs than big trunk road projects¹¹. Yet the economic modelling that informs our decision making tends to overestimate the individual value of slightly faster car journeys and underestimate the population benefits of more active travel¹². This inbuilt bias is the only way that major road expansions in Scotland have been able to get past the appraisal process, despite evidence they represent poor value for money (as well as locking in high levels of car use and carbon emissions for years to come^{13,14}).

Inclusive streets support local businesses

Places which are good for active travel are good for local businesses¹⁵. This is especially important for our town centres, reeling from the impacts of Covid-19 on top of longer-term challenges.

Local businesses thrive in places that people enjoy visiting (sometimes called 'sticky streets')¹⁶. To compete with out-of-town centres, our high streets need to offer unique and enjoyable experiences - space to walk, wheel, play and sit; green space; public art; cafes and food stalls^{17,18}. Cold places like Copenhagen and rainy ones like Vancouver show this is possible even in places with similar climates to ours^{16,19}.



This might explain why evidence reviewed by the Department for Transport found that people who walk and bike to their local shops visit more often and spend more overall than those who travel by car; and that cycle parking delivers 5x higher retail spend than the same area of car parking¹.

We tend to overestimate the importance of cars to our local high streets; surveys in city after city show that a much higher proportion of customers arrive by walking, wheeling or cycling than retailers think, and that most tend to live within easy walking distance²⁰. Similarly, people's choice of where to shop is much more influenced by how pleasant the area is and what's on offer than the availability of parking, with "less traffic" often coming out top of suggestions for improvement²¹.

Evidence from around the UK shows that active travel and public space improvements on high streets can increase retail sales by up to 30%¹⁵. More recently, the pedestrianisation of Dundee's Union Street has been a great success, with a boom in visitors and 84% of traders saying the change has been a positive one^{22,23}. A recent review led by the retailer Bill Grimsey found that to regenerate our local high streets, we need fewer cars and more active travel, green space and walkable neighbourhoods²⁴.



Reducing the overall dominance of cars in our public place can also help improve equity of access - careful redesigns can ensure that vehicle access and parking is reserved for those who really need it, like disabled people and business loading/unloading.

Active travel can enhance productivity

Creating streets and places that enable everyone to be active every day has huge benefits for the workforce. A whopping one-third of the cost of absences from work - around £5 billion across the UK - is attributable to physical inactivity²⁵. Active staff take fewer sick days, but also less 'presenteeism' - that is, coming to work while unwell, spreading germs and under-performing as a result²¹.

Work-related mental health problems affect 1 in 6 people and have been on the increase in recent years, costing the UK up to £45 billion²⁵⁻²⁸. Changing our commute has huge potential in this regard, since being more physically active is one of the most effective ways to prevent and treat common mental health conditions²⁹. Active travel is consistently found to be the least stressful way to get to work (even with the inadequate state of current infrastructure) and switching from a car commute to an active one has been shown to improve mental wellbeing^{30,31}.

Active travel is a booming sector

In 2018, cycling contributed £5.4 billion to the UK economy and employed 64,000 people³²: three times as much money as the steel industry and twice the jobs. That was when cycling accounted for less than 2% of journeys - these numbers may have increased since, thanks to the lockdown cycling boom.

Evidence suggests that the bike industry provides more jobs per million turnover than other transport sectors and that these jobs are more stable, more local, and more accessible to low-skilled workers⁸: just the kind of jobs we need for the post-Covid recovery.

These benefits could be especially valuable for Scotland's rural areas. People taking cycle holidays spend more than the average tourist and tend to explore more widely into rural areas¹. Some long-distance cycle routes in rural areas in the UK have been estimated to generate up to £30 million per year for the local economy of the communities they go through²¹.

Realising the economic benefits of inclusive streets

To achieve a step change in active travel throughout Scotland, we're asking all candidates for the Holyrood election to sign up to three pledges:

- **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.



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