# Belfast Walking and Cycling Index 2021

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Department for Infrastructure

Sustrans

## Foreword

Our vision for walking, wheeling and cycling in Belfast

### Making Belfast a more friendly city for everyone

I am delighted to present the fourth biennial publication of ‘Belfast Bike Life’, now named ‘Belfast Walking and Cycling Index’. The report has been extended to include data and opinions on walking as well as cycling. It provides us with a sense of the infrastructure improvements needed to help create a sustainable, liveable city, where people and businesses thrive.

Since the pandemic, many more people discovered or rediscovered the enjoyment and benefits of walking and cycling. This report reminds us that cycling participation remains low, with only 17% of people cycling at least once per week. However, the increase in participation – that we all saw in 2020 – reflects the finding that 69% of people tell us that more cycle tracks along roads would help them cycle more, where these are physically separated from traffic and pedestrians.

Following the last report in 2019, some notable changes have been made around the city. These include pop-up cycle lanes, pedestrianisation and quiet streets, the development of parklets and the roll-out of more people-focused infrastructure in the city. The Department for Infrastructure is keen to grasp opportunities to increase the allocation of road space for walking, wheeling and cycling on our urban streets – recognising the role that these streets have as community places. Most Belfast residents think that their streets are currently dominated by moving or parked motor vehicles.

Active travel has been a priority for the Department for Infrastructure in recent years. It is clear that active and sustainable travel should become a pillar of change within towns and cities in an effort to cut emissions, improve health and wellbeing, and better connect families and communities.

Last year, ‘Making Belfast an Active City – Belfast Cycling Network 2021’ was published. The supporting delivery plan identified key schemes throughout the city, with an objective of reaching into those areas of the city where there is currently little separated or traffic-free infrastructure.

‘Belfast Walking and Cycling Index 2021’ aligns with ‘A Bolder Vision for Belfast’, an ambitious blueprint to explore a shared approach to creating a more attractive, accessible, safe and vibrant city. A city that is more walking and cycling-friendly, to give everyone the freedom and confidence to be able to walk, wheel or cycle in Belfast.

**Liz Loughran, Walking and Cycling Champion, Department for Infrastructure**

## Contents

[Report summary 7](#_Toc103076105)

[Walking in Belfast 11](#_Toc103076106)

[Cycling in Belfast 14](#_Toc103076107)

[Benefits of walking 17](#_Toc103076108)

[Benefits of cycling 20](#_Toc103076109)

[Walking solutions 23](#_Toc103076110)

[Cycling solutions 26](#_Toc103076111)

[Neighbourhood solutions 29](#_Toc103076112)

[Developing Belfast 32](#_Toc103076113)

[Looking forward 34](#_Toc103076114)

## The Walking and Cycling Index

The Walking and Cycling Index (formerly Bike Life) is the biggest assessment of walking and cycling in urban areas in the UK and Ireland. This is the first year walking has been included.

It is delivered by Sustrans in collaboration with 18 cities and urban areas. Each city[[1]](#footnote-1) reports on the progress made towards making both walking and cycling more attractive, everyday ways to travel.

The Walking and Cycling Index reports every two years. This is the fourth report from Belfast produced in partnership with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The data in this report comes from 2021 and includes local walking and cycling data, modelling and an independent survey of 1,372 residents aged 16 or above in Belfast. The survey was conducted from June to August 2021 following Covid-19 travel restrictions across the UK being lifted. Social research organisation NatCen conducted the survey which is representative of all residents, not just those who walk or cycle.

Across this report we have included comparisons to 2019 data where available.

Our thanks to the people of Belfast who took part in the survey and shared their stories with us.

More details on all Walking and Cycling Index reports can be found at [**www.sustrans.org.uk/walkingcyclingindex**](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/walkingcyclingindex)

Map of the UK and Ireland showing the cities participating in the Walking and Cycling Index: Aberdeen, Belfast, Bristol, Cardiff, Dublin Metropolitan Area, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greater Cambridge, Greater Manchester, Inverness, Liverpool City Region, Perth, Southampton City Region, Stirling, Tower Hamlets, Tyneside and West Midlands.

### Defining wheeling

We recognise some people, for example wheelchair or mobility scooter users, identify with the term wheeling instead of walking. Therefore we use the terms walking and wheeling together and consider walking and wheeling to include the use of mobility aids and pushchairs.

All walking survey responses within this report include responses from people who wheel. However, please note for graph labels we use walking as a shorthand for walking and wheeling.

## Report summary

Belfast

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

342,560

### Survey area

Map showing the area covered by the survey with Belfast City Hall, Cave Hill Country Park and Stormont highlighted. The area is approximately 53 square miles.

### The impact of the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on how, when and the amount we travel, especially in relation to public transport and driving.

Transport use during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, Department for Transport, June 2020

#### Residents travelling by the following modes five or more days a week in Belfast in 2019 and 2021

##### Walking

2019: 51%

2021: 54%

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

2019: 54%

2021: 44%

##### Public transport

2019: 13%

2021: 7%

##### Cycling

2019: 5%

2021: 4%

Participation in walking, wheeling and cycling on a regular basis has increased since 2019.

54% of residents walk at least five days a week (51% in 2019)

17% of residents cycle at least once a week (12% in 2019)

### Walking, wheeling and cycling participation is not equal

Many more Belfast residents walk than cycle, with men more likely to be active than women because they cycle more.[[4]](#footnote-4)

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

53% of women

57% of men

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

11% of women

23% of men

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

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

72% of women

71% of men

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

32% of women

37% of men

#### Proportion of residents who feel welcome and comfortable walking or spending time on the streets of their neighbourhood

71% of women

66% of men

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

Every year, walking and cycling in Belfast:

* Prevents **723** serious long-term health conditions
* Creates **£207.9 million** in economic benefit for individuals and the region
* Saves **12,000 tonnes** of greenhouse gas emissions

### Walking, wheeling and cycling help to tackle the climate emergency

Every day, walking and cycling in Belfast takes up to 77,000 **cars off the road[[5]](#footnote-5)**

However, 64.7 millionjourneys up to three miles are driven in Belfast each year

If 80% of these journeys were walked or cycledit could save approximately 21,000 tonnesof greenhouse gas emissions[[6]](#footnote-6)

### Residents want more funding for walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport

#### Percentage of residents who would like to see more government spending on:

60% on walking (61% in 2019)

58% on cycling (58% in 2019)

66% on public transport (62% in 2019)

29% on driving (35% in 2019)

### This would help support more liveable neighbourhoods

#### Among Belfast residents:

68% support, while 14% oppose, more cycle tracks along roads, physically separated from traffic and pedestrians

71% agree, while 12% disagree, increasing space for people socialising, walking and cycling on their local high street would improve their local area

85% support, while 3% oppose, the creation of more 20-minute neighbourhoods [[7]](#footnote-7)

84% agree, while 3% disagree, more measures to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour on the street or in public spaces would improve their local area

73% support, while 7% oppose, the creation of more low‑traffic neighbourhoods

51% agree, while 21% disagree, closing streets outside local schools to cars during school drop-off and pick-up times would improve their local area

## Walking in Belfast

Walking and wheeling participation, safety and satisfaction

### Walking and wheeling participation

Overall in Belfast the number of people walking and wheeling regularly (at least five days a week) has increased since the pandemic.

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.

95% of all residents walk (95% in 2019)

54% of residents walk at least five days a week (51% in 2019)

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

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

53% of women (53% in 2019)

57% of men (48% in 2019)

##### Ethnicity

53% of people from ethnic minority groups (48% in 2019)

55% of white people (50% in 2019)

##### Sexuality

61% of LGBQ+ people

53% of heterosexual people

##### Age

60% of people aged 16–25 (43% in 2019)

53% of people aged 26–35 (48% in 2019)

59% of people aged 36–45 (60% in 2019)

54% of people aged 46–55 (47% in 2019)

52% of people aged 56–65 (53% in 2019)

51% of people aged 66+ (53% in 2019)

##### Disability

51% of disabled people (45% in 2019)

57% of non-disabled people (52% in 2019)

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

61% of AB (50% in 2019)

52% of C1 (56% in 2019)

53% of C2 (42% in 2019)

50% of DE (43% in 2019)

### Walking and wheeling safety and satisfaction

Important differences exist in how safe people feel when walking or wheeling. Safety includes both road and personal safety.

70%of residents think the level of safety for walking is good

53%of residents think the level of safety for children walking is good

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

##### Gender

72% of women

71% of men

##### Ethnicity

69% of people from ethnic minority groups

72% of white people

##### Sexuality

63% of LGBQ+ people

73% of heterosexual people

##### Age

68% of people aged 16–25

66% of people aged 26–35

75% of people aged 36–45

74% of people aged 46–55

76% of people aged 56–65

70% of people aged 66+

##### Disability

63% of disabled people

75% of non-disabled people

##### Socio-economic group

78% of AB

66% of C1

73% of C2

65% of DE

74%of residents think their local area overall is a good place to walk

### Quote from Martha Lavery, Andersonstown, West Belfast

I find some footpaths are a bit up and down. There can be trip hazards. I can be a bit of a klutz so it can be easy to fall.

I think there could be more seating around town. I have a hard time going up hills. If I could just rest for a few minutes that would be a big help.

I enjoy going out with the walking group because when you’re in company you’re busy talking and don’t notice the effort.

There is a lot of traffic in Belfast, that put me off driving. I stopped driving about 10 years ago, I just had enough.

## Cycling in Belfast

Cycling participation, safety and satisfaction

### Cycling participation

Overall in Belfast the number of people cycling has increased since the pandemic. Despite a much larger potential, only 17% 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, including road safety and personal safety, is the single largest barrier to cycling.[[11]](#footnote-11) Encouragingly, perceptions of cycling safety have improved since 2019.

35% of all residents cycle (28% in 2019)

17% of all residents cycle at least once a week (12% in 2019)

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

##### Gender

11% of women (5% in 2019)

23% of men (19% in 2019)

##### Ethnicity

36% of people from ethnic minority groups (10% in 2019)

15% of white people (12% in 2019)

##### Sexuality

14% of LGBQ+ people

18% of heterosexual people

##### Age

19% of people aged 16–25 (14% in 2019)

19% of people aged 26–35 (14% in 2019)

22% of people aged 36–45 (15% in 2019)

16% of people aged 46–55 (14% in 2019)

13% of people aged 56–65 (12% in 2019)

9% of people aged 66+ (4% in 2019)

##### Disability

10% of disabled people (8% in 2019)

20% of non-disabled people (14% in 2019)

##### Socio-economic group

24% of AB (14% in 2019)

13% of C1 (15% in 2019)

9% of C2 (8% in 2019)

15% of DE (7% in 2019)

### Cycling safety and satisfaction

34% of all residents think the level of safety for cycling in their local area is good (27% in 2019)

27% of all residents think the level of safety for children cycling is good (17% in 2019)

36% of all residents think their local area overall is a good place to cycle (36% in 2019)

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

##### Gender

32% of women (27% in 2019)

37% of men (28% in 2019)

##### Ethnicity

56% of people from ethnic minority groups (28% in 2019)

32% of white people (27% in 2019)

##### Sexuality

21% of LGBQ+ people

36% of heterosexual people

##### Age

42% of people aged 16–25 (40% in 2019)

32% of people aged 26–35 (24% in 2019)

34% of people aged 36–45 (20% in 2019)

30% of people aged 46–55 (29% in 2019)

36% of people aged 56–65 (26% in 2019)

32% of people aged 66+ (29% in 2019)

##### Disability

29% of disabled people (30% in 2019)

37% of non-disabled people (26% in 2019)

##### Socio-economic group

38% of AB (24% in 2019)

27% of C1 (26% in 2019)

31% of C2 (31% in 2019)

42% of DE (32% in 2019)

### Quote from Claire Monteith, Hospital Pharmacist

I work across the two hospital sites – Belfast City and the Royal Victoria Hospital. The secure cycle shelters at the hospitals have helped a lot. I’ve had a bike stolen from the Royal but now I feel my bike is safer.

Since Covid the traffic isn’t as bad and so I’ve done a lot more cycling. There are lots of cycle lanes on my route from Stranmillis but they just disappear. People don’t like you cycling on the footpaths and the cars don’t want you on the road, so you don’t feel very protected.

I would like to see more greenways and protected cycle lanes, like on the Lagan Embankment.

## Benefits of walking

Why everyone gains when more people walk or wheel

The large numbers of walking and wheeling trips in Belfast produce important health, economic and environmental benefits for everyone.

### Belfast residents walk or wheel 17 times around the world every day

137.5 millionwalking and wheeling trips were made in Belfast in the past year, which adds up to 151.8 million **miles** = 420,000 miles a day.

This equates to each resident spending 6 **days** walking or wheeling continuously in the past year

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

Destination – adults only (eg work, school, shopping): 68,400,000 (50%)

School – children only: 8,000,000 (6%)

Enjoyment or fitness – adults and children (including running): 61,100,000 (44%)

### Walking and wheeling benefit residents and the local economy in the region

In Belfast, the net annual economic benefit for individuals and society from all walking and wheeling trips is £182.1 million

Of this total, £1.9 millionis from people with a car choosing to walk or wheel for transport in the past year.

6**p** net benefit from each mile walked or wheeled instead of driven

These figures are based upon monetising the costs and benefits of driving and walking. This includes travel time, vehicle operating costs, medical costs, work absenteeism, congestion, infrastructure, local air quality, noise, greenhouse gases and taxation.

### Walking and wheeling unlock health benefits for everyone

#### Walking in Belfast prevents 623 serious long-term health conditions each year

##### Cases prevented

Hip fracture: 239

Dementia: 181

Depression: 75

Coronary heart disease: 68

Other conditions: 60

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

Saving the NHS in Belfast £4.1 million **per year**

equivalent to the cost of 140,000 **GP appointments**

These figures are based on applying Belfast data to the Sport England MOVES tool which calculates the return on investment for health of sport and physical activity.

In Belfast the physical activity benefits of walking **prevent** 139 **early deaths annually** which is valued at £459 million**[[13]](#footnote-13)**

Please note wheelchair and 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: 30,000 **kg of NOx**

And 4,000 **kg of particulates** (PM10 and PM2.5)

46% of residents agree the air is clean in their local area

### Walking and wheeling in Belfast help mitigate our climate crisis

8,800 tonnesof greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) saved annually by walking or wheeling instead of driving, equivalent to the carbon footprint of 20,000 **people taking flights** from Belfast International to Tenerife.

Transport now accounts for 20% of Northern Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions, of which the main sources are the use of petrol and diesel in road transport.

Between 1990 and 2019, transport emissions went up by 22%, while overall emissions went down by 18%.

Greenhouse Gas Statistics 1990-2019, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

### Walking and wheeling keep Belfast moving

Studies show walking or cycling frees up road space in comparison to driving.[[14]](#footnote-14) This helps to keep Belfast moving for all road users.

71,000 **return walking trips** are made daily in Belfast by people that could have used a car.

If these cars were all in a traffic jam it would tail back 210 milesequivalent to the distance from Belfast to Limerick.

## Benefits of cycling

Why everyone gains when more people cycle

### Belfast residents cycle 4 times around the world every day

There has been a reduction in commuter trips since 2019 as more people work from home. However, the total number of all cycling trips has increased.

#### Annual cycling trips by purpose in Belfast[[15]](#footnote-15)

##### 2021: 9.5 million trips

Work: 2,400,000 (26%)

School, college or university (adults): 600,000 (6%)

School (children): 730,000 (8%)

Shopping, personal business and social trips: 3,200,000 (34%)

Leisure: 2,500,000 (26%)

This adds up to 34.5 million **miles** = 94,000 miles a day

##### 2019: 9.1 million trips

Work: 3,300,000 (37%)

School, college or university (adults): 160,000 (2%)

Shopping, personal business and social trips: 3,500,000 (39%)

Leisure: 2,000,000 (23%)

This adds up to 34 million **miles** = 93,000 miles a day

### Cycling benefits residents and the local economy in the region

In Belfast, the net annual economic benefit for individuals and society from all cycling trips is £25.8 million**[[16]](#footnote-16)** (£26.2 millionin 2019)

Of this total, £11.8 millionis from people with a car choosing to cycle for transport in the past year. (£11.9 millionin 2019)

95**p** net benefit from each mile cycled instead of driven (92**p** in 2019)

These figures are based upon monetising the costs and benefits of driving and cycling. This includes travel time, vehicle operating costs, medical costs, work absenteeism, congestion, infrastructure, local air quality, noise, greenhouse gases and taxation.

### Cycling unlocks health benefits for everyone

#### Cycling in Belfast prevents 100 serious long-term health conditions each year (92 in 2019)

##### Cases prevented

Hip fracture: 35

Dementia: 25

Depression: 18

Coronary heart disease: 12

Other conditions: 11

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

Saving the NHS in Belfast £660,000 **per year** (£610,000in 2019)

equivalent to the cost of 22,000 **GP appointments** (20,000in 2019)

These figures are based on applying Belfast data to the Sport England MOVES tool which calculates the return on investment for health of sport and physical activity.

In Belfast the physical activity benefits of cycling **prevent** 10 **early deaths annually** (11 in 2019) which is valued at £33.6 million**[[17]](#footnote-17)** (£32.7 millionin 2019)

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

7,900 **kg of NOx** (8,700 **kg** in 2019)

And 1,000 **kg of particulates** (PM10 and PM2.5) (1,100 **kg** in 2019)

46% of residents agree the air is clean in their local area

### Cycling in Belfast helps mitigate our climate crisis

3,400 tonnes (3,800 tonnesin 2019) of greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) saved annually by cycling instead of driving, equivalent to the carbon footprint of 7,600 **people taking flights** from Belfast International to Tenerife. (8,200 **people** in 2019)

Transport now accounts for 20% of Northern Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions, of which the main sources are the use of petrol and diesel in road transport.

Between 1990 and 2019, transport emissions went up by 22%, while overall emissions went down by 18%.

Greenhouse Gas Statistics 1990-2019, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

### Cycling keeps Belfast moving

Studies show walking or cycling frees up road space in comparison to driving.[[18]](#footnote-18) This helps to keep Belfast moving for all road users.

6,400 **return cycling trips** are made daily in Belfast by people that could have used a car. (7,500in 2019)

If these cars were all in a traffic jam it would tail back 19 miles equivalent to the distance from Belfast to Antrim. (22 milesin 2019)

## Walking solutions

What would help make walking and wheeling better?

### Residents want more services and amenities within walking and wheeling distance

Ideally, walking should be the most attractive transport option for the vast majority of short journeys. A city can support this by ensuring many of the things people need are found near to where people live. The walking environment should be safe, comfortable, welcoming and attractive.

Neighbourhoods where many facilities can be reached on foot are known as 20-minute neighbourhoods. You can walk from your home to many of the things you need on a regular basis and back again within 20 minutes. This equates to around 800m each way.

44%of Belfast households are in neighbourhoods of at least 40 dwellings per hectare. These are or can become 20-minute neighbourhoods.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Lower density neighbourhoods have too few people to make much local business or public transport viable.[[20]](#footnote-20)

55%agree they can easily get to many places they need to visit without having to drive

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

82%More shops and everyday services, such as banks and post offices, close to your home

76%More government services, such as doctors surgeries and schools, close to your home

85%More parks or green spaces close to your home

84%More things to see and do close to your home, eg cafés or entertainment venues

#### Proportion of households within an 800m walk or wheel of the following amenities and services

Food shop 60%

Park or space for recreation 74%

Primary school 81%

Doctors surgery 60%

Library 31%

Post office 68%

Railway station 12%

A mix of cultural and leisure venues[[21]](#footnote-21) 73%

Bus stop (within 400m) 92%

### Residents want better streets

There are many ways to make our streets and neighbourhoods safe, welcoming and comfortable for everyone to walk in.

#### What percentage of residents think that these changes would help them walk or wheel more?

77% Wider pavements

76% More frequent road crossings, with reduced wait times

82% Nicer places along streets to stop and rest, eg more benches, trees and shelters

76% Better accessibility, eg level surfaces, dropped kerbs at crossing points

73% Fewer cars parked on the pavement

72% Less fear of crime or antisocial behaviour in your area

##### In Belfast:

On all roads making up junctions, 20%of those with traffic lights for cars have no red and green man for pedestrians

84%of residents agree more measures to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour on the street or in public spaces would improve their local area

### Quote from Pauline McCallion and family, North Belfast

The girls say they really like walking to school. We walk in all weathers.

The school closed the car park a few years ago because there were lots of problems with too many cars and bad parking. Now no one is allowed to drive into the school. It has made a huge difference. We have lovely grounds and we can now enjoy them. The problem of car parking however has been pushed down the street.

Car parking outside the school has meant the footpaths can be difficult to walk along. Our girls manage to squeeze between the parked cars and hedge but often I have to push the baby in the pram in the middle of the road.

One of the main barriers to walking to school is the dog poo everywhere. We have complained about it but the problem persists. There are also lots of people cycling on the footpaths so we have to watch out for them too.

We are lucky we live in a lovely area with lots of greenery so it is overall a pleasant place to walk.

## Cycling solutions

What would make cycling better?

### Many Belfast residents want to cycle

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

Regularly cycle: 10% (7% in 2019)

Occasionally cycle: 17% (14% in 2019)

New or returning to cycling: 5% (4% in 2019)

Do not cycle but would like to: 32% (31% in 2019)

Do not cycle and do not want to: 36% (44% in 2019)

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

34% of women (33% in 2019)

30% of people from ethnic minority groups (37% in 2019)

31% of disabled people (30% in 2019)

### Residents want improved cycling infrastructure

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

72% More traffic-free cycle routes away from roads, eg through parks or along waterways (80% in 2019)

69% More cycle tracks along roads that are physically separated from traffic and pedestrians (77% in 2019)

69% More signposted local cycle routes along quieter streets (74% in 2019)

69% Better links with public transport (eg secure cycle parking at train stations) (67% in 2019)

There are 64 cycle parking spaces across the 11 railway stations[[22]](#footnote-22) (96 in 2019) and 6 cycle parking spaces across the 2 bus stations in Belfast

##### Belfast has[[23]](#footnote-23):

39 milesof traffic-free cycle routes away from the road (39 miles in 2019)

2 milesof cycle tracks physically separated from traffic and pedestrians[[24]](#footnote-24) (2 miles in 2019)

11%of households are within 125m of these routes (11% in 2019)

68%of residents support building more physically separated on-road cycle tracks, even when this would mean less room for other road traffic (67% in 2019)

### Residents want more support to cycle

#### What percentage of residents think that these kinds of support would help them cycle more?

47% Cycling training courses and organised social rides (56% in 2019)

59% Access or improvements to a city cycle sharing scheme

60% Access to secure cycle storage at or near home

62% Access to a bicycle

48% Access to an electric cycle (47% in 2019)

37% Access to a cargo cycle (with space to carry children or shopping) (39% in 2019)

28% Access to an adapted cycle, eg a tricycle or handcycle (26% in 2019)

##### Belfast cycle share scheme[[25]](#footnote-25)

450shared cycles (388 in 2019)

47cycle share stations (47 in 2019)

116,560annual trips (181,740 in 2019)

##### Reported cycle thefts

There were 377 reported cycle thefts in Belfast in 2020/21. (584 in 2019/20)

For every 316people who own an adult cycle in Belfast, there was 1reported cycle theft in the past year.

There is a public cycle parking space for every 64 people who cycle in Belfast. (53 in 2019)

##### Cycle access

43%of residents have access to an adult pedal cycle (45% in 2019)

25%of households are within 800m of a cycle shop[[26]](#footnote-26)

### Quote from Richard Corr, Physiotherapist and cargo bike user

The greenways and bus lanes were a very big influence on where we bought our house. The Comber Greenway and Lagan towpath have made a huge difference to how I commute. I travel with my two young children, dropping them off at nursery on my way to the Royal. I find I can cross the city and feel relatively safe.

I find the cars take more notice of you when they see you cycling with children in the trailer.

As a healthcare worker it was great to get free transport on the buses during Covid. I think that’s a fantastic incentive and a great way to get people out of their cars. A lot of my colleagues who live in East Belfast take the Glider across the city and can get to work in 20 minutes.

From an employers’ perspective we have just one shower for all the physio staff, male and female, and we don’t have anywhere to dry clothes. Better facilities for cycle commuters would be helpful and secure cycle shelters that can fit cargo bikes.

## 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

68% of residents

71% of women

66% of men

67% of people from ethnic minority groups

69% of white people

57% of disabled people

74% of non-disabled people

56% of LGBQ+ people

72% of heterosexual people

61% of socio-economic group DE

78% of socio-economic group AB

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

Only 21% of residents think that their streets are not dominated by moving or parked motor vehicles.

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

68% Walk more

68% Cycle more (65% in 2019)

Unclassified roads are not designed to carry through-traffic, but in Belfast 18% of their total length has nothing to prevent it. This can result in rat-running.[[27]](#footnote-27)

58% agree that restricting through-traffic on local residential streets would make their area a better place. (63% in 2019)

5% of Belfast’s streets have 20mph speed limits.[[28]](#footnote-28) (7% in 2019)

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

58% Walk more

60% Cycle more (58% in 2019)

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

71% agree increasing space for people socialising, walking and cycling on their local high street would improve their local area (78% in 2019)

49%agree they regularly chat to their neighbours, more than just to say hello

73%support low-traffic neighbourhoods

### Quote from Chris McCracken, Managing Director of Linen Quarter Business Improvement District

I work for the Linen Quarter BID, a not-for-profit business improvement district which focuses on the long-term regeneration of the Linen Quarter area. Three car parking spaces were removed to create a 10-metre parklet in the heart of the business district of Belfast city centre in July 2021.

The parklet is an innovative representation of our understanding of the post-pandemic world and the on-going demand for outdoor shared places where people can safely socialise and enjoy their city.

A recent public consultation we carried out revealed that 91% of people are in support of the removal of car parking spaces, if doing so enhances pavement space and pedestrian areas, so this is a true reflection of the progress people want to see.

To restore economic vitality to Belfast, we need to create a public realm that is focused on health and well-being and the parklet has been well thought out to ensure it contributes to how the diverse demographics of our city live their lives. We have ensured it incorporates opportunities to work and socialise, all against a background of enhanced greenery.

### Neighbourhoods must be designed with children in mind

Neighbourhoods should be places for children to thrive: to grow up in, live their lives in and grow old in. 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.

11 **years old** average age when people living with children would let them walk, wheel or cycle independently in their neighbourhood.

Over 80% of seven-year-olds in Germany are allowed to go alone to places within walking distance, other than school (parents’ responses).[[29]](#footnote-29)

44% of residents agree there is space for children to socialise and play

64% of households are within 800m of a children’s playground

#### Among Belfast residents:

51% agree, while 21% disagree, closing streets outside local schools to cars during drop-off and pick-up times would improve their local area.

51% agreed, while 26% disagreed in 2019

These kind of closures are known as ‘School Streets’.

## Developing Belfast

Recent walking, wheeling, cycling and neighbourhood changes

Given the importance of active travel and the contribution it can make to improving physical and mental health, and to tackling climate change, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is committed to creating more opportunities for those who want to walk, wheel and cycle.

The Department recognises that it is essential that we meet our aspirations in relation to decarbonisation and invest in quality walking and cycling routes to create a cleaner and more attractive option that encourages people to move away from their reliance on cars.

A new Blue/Green Infrastructure Fund was set up in the Department for Infrastructure in 2020/21 to act as a catalyst for positive infrastructure and cultural change in the way we live and travel. The £20 million fund is being used to create safer routes for those who choose to walk, wheel or cycle as part of their everyday routine and to create green, liveable places. Investments are being made in new cycle and footway networks, secure cycle parking and cycle repair stations. For example, following a public consultation, the urban section of the Comber Greenway will be lit in a pilot scheme from this summer, to ensure it can be used during the winter and after dark.

The designation of a senior official as a Walking and Cycling Champion is a clear commitment to delivering upon the Programme for Government goal of increasing the number of journeys made by walking and cycling. The priority for the Champion is to lead a change in culture within the Department for Infrastructure, so that walking and cycling will be at the heart of all that the Department does.

The Champion, supported by a Walking and Cycling Advisory Group, has made progress in moving forward a programme of measures to reallocate road space, creating more opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling to drive a green recovery and improve public health.

### Lagan Gateway Project

In 2020/21 the Department for Infrastructure committed £1.45 million towards the construction of the new bridge across the River Lagan in South Belfast. The Lagan Gateway Bridge, which was opened to the public in September 2021, is part of what will ultimately be a safe traffic-free commuter route from Belvoir Estate, Cairnshill Park & Ride and Beechill to Stranmillis. It also extends access to the popular Lagan Towpath, which is part of National Cycle Network Route 9 from Belfast to Lisburn. The Department is continuing to invest in this project and has committed a further £550,000 in 2021/22 towards the cost of paths on the Annadale side, to link the new bridge to Belvoir Park Forest.

### Parklets

The Covid pandemic and lockdowns have had a negative impact on footfall in our city centres, with many people working from home and shopping online. To encourage people to return to our city centres, DfI worked in partnership with a number of organisations to develop innovative solutions that would make better use of our footways and on-street parking spaces. Parklets have been introduced by transforming car parking spaces to encourage more people to enjoy their local environment in a safe way. And in doing so, support our local traders by allowing them to use more outdoor space. They were designed to meet the social distancing rules and include cycle parking to encourage active travel to and from the destination.

In October 2020, the Department for Infrastructure opened the first parklet on Ormeau Road, Belfast with a further parklet on Linenhall Street in July 2021.

### Pop-up cycle lanes

At the outset of the Covid pandemic the DfI took steps to temporarily reallocate road space to facilitate social distancing and active travel choices. As part of the Green Recovery plans, DfI installed a number of pop-up cycle lanes in Belfast, including on Dublin Road, Grosvenor Road and Donegall Road.

Initially the pop-up cycle lanes were designed to help key workers travel to and from the hospitals by bicycle but in the longer term they are designed to deliver safe, convenient and sustainable infrastructure that drives a green recovery and transforms our lives and communities.

## Looking forward

Better streets and places for everyone

### Belfast Cycling Network Plan

On 4 June 2021, ‘Making Belfast an Active City – Belfast Cycling Network 2021’ was published.

The publication of the Network provides a blueprint for the development and delivery of coherent, connected and safe infrastructure for everyday cycling in Belfast city over the next ten years.

As part of a £3 million investment in walking and cycling in the Belfast area, some £750,000 is earmarked for Belfast Cycling Network schemes in 2021/22. This includes the start of design work on numerous schemes. The Delivery Plan for the Belfast Cycling Network was published in March 2022.

The Network is intended to dovetail with other urban strategies for Belfast including ‘A Bolder Vision for Belfast’. This is an ambitious blueprint to explore a shared approach to creating a more attractive, accessible, safe and vibrant city. It has been developed jointly by Belfast City Council, the Department for Communities and the Department for Infrastructure.

A further strategy which will impact on the public realm of the city centre is ‘Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5’ which is being led by the Department for Communities to regenerate a large area of the south side of the centre. In the next five years there will also be the addition of the new Belfast Transport Hub at Weavers Court and work will begin on the north-south phase of the Glider or Belfast Rapid Transit. All of these aim to reduce the dominance of the private car in the city and encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling.

‘A Bolder Vision for Belfast’ is built on the principles of:

* promoting wellbeing for all
* prioritising walking, cycling and public transport
* creating lively, safe and green streets
* removing barriers to movement between the city centre and surrounding communities.

### Forth Meadow Community Greenway

The Forth Meadow Community Greenway is a Belfast City Council project, which the Department for Infrastructure is supporting through the Blue/Green Infrastructure Fund.

This urban greenway will create 12km of high quality, safe, greenway network, enhancing links between communities and promoting sustainable transport and active travel opportunities in North and West Belfast. It will connect communities between Clarendon Park, Springfield Dam and Falls Park, and help foster many positive and long-term relationships between people from all sections of the community, in an area with a long history of interface tensions.

Alongside the physical infrastructure, the project is also delivering exciting community engagement at key sections along the greenway.

Building the greenway has commenced and it is due to be completed by Autumn 2022.

### Quote from Karen Gruhn, Volunteer Cycle Leader, Forth Meadow Community Greenway

I’m very fortunate to live right behind the Connswater Greenway in East Belfast. I was really impressed with it and decided to try cycling again, which I hadn’t done since I was a teenager.

I would have avoided the road before I did on-road cycle training with Sustrans and wouldn’t have been confident to cycle on it. I would never have thought about getting a bike if the traffic-free greenway had not been there.

The greenway here is well kept and cared for. It’s very clear to see how much the local people love it, not just cyclists but walkers and everyone else. I really need to get outside, it’s so important for my mental health. Getting out and seeing the greenery, hearing the birds and meeting other people – it’s amazing.

I decided to volunteer as a Ride Leader for the Forth Meadow Community Greenway. I ride for enjoyment and thought I would love to encourage other people to do the same. I thought about the possibility of the greenway connecting North and West Belfast, with the standard of what we have here in the east. As volunteers working with communities, we spread the message about what we are doing and why we are there. As people start to get used to the space, they will start to own it and become more proud of it.

I’ve had to weave through back streets to get up to Springfield Dam from where I live, so I can’t wait for it to all be connected up and off-road.

I would love to see Belfast be like Copenhagen, where everyone has a bike and bikes are just a primary way of getting around.

## Notes on methodology:

The attitudinal survey was conducted from June to August 2021 by independent social research organisation NatCen.

The survey is representative of all Belfast residents, not just those who walk or cycle.

2019 survey data was collected from April to July 2019, 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 cycled 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/walkingcyclingindex](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/walkingcyclingindex)

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute. Join us on our journey. [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

Sustrans is a registered charity in the UK No. 326550 (England and Wales) SC039263 (Scotland)

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Department for Infrastructure

Sustrans

1. City is used as a shorthand for Walking and Cycling Index cities, city regions and boroughs. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. NISRA mid-year 2020 population estimates. This is the most recent available data for Belfast. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Travelling as driver or passenger of car, van or motorcycle. In 2019, questions did not include traveling by motorcycle. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 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-4)
5. Based on walking and cycling by residents that live in a household with a car. Does not include leisure cycling or leisure walking trips. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Based upon each journey being 1.5 miles in length. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See definition on [page 23](#_Residents_want_more). [↑](#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 Belfast 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. 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-13)
14. Litman, 2021. Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Based upon Eric Bruun and Vuchic, 1995. The Time-Area Concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 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-15)
16. Benefit has gone down despite a greater number of cycled miles because of a greater proportion of transport trips by people without a car; these trips carry a net cost. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 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-17)
18. Litman, 2021. Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Based upon Eric Bruun and Vuchic, 1995. The Time-Area Concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021, National Model Design Code. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Sustrans, 2017. Linking Active Travel and Public Transport to Housing Growth and Planning. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. A minimum of three distinct types of cultural and leisure venues, eg cafés, pubs, bingo halls, cinemas, museums. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This includes cycle parking that is shared with bus users. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. To ensure comparability, figures given are correct as of 26 May 2021 for all city reports. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This does not include ‘pop-up’ cycle tracks installed during the pandemic. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Belfast Bikes cycle hire data. 2021 data for July ‘20-June ‘21, 2019 data for July ‘18-June ‘19. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Credit to the Association of Cycle Traders (ACT) and Cycling UK for their assistance with cycle shop locations and services offered. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Based on analysis by CycleStreets [www.lowtrafficneighbourhoods.org](http://www.lowtrafficneighbourhoods.org). Unclassified roads are all public roads that are neither motorways, A, B nor C roads. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Excludes motorways. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Children’s Independent Mobility: an international comparison and recommendations for action, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)