



Association of Directors of  
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

## Active Travel Facts & Figures

### Active travel for health

- A **third of all adults** in England are damaging their health due to a lack of physical activity<sup>1</sup>
- Sedentary lifestyles and inactivity raise the risk of **health problems** such as heart disease, type-2 diabetes and some cancers, and there have also been links between inactivity and poor mental health<sup>2</sup>.
- Air pollution is the biggest environmental threat to health in the UK, with between **28,000 and 36,000 deaths** a year attributed to long-term exposure<sup>3</sup>.
- Active travel has the potential to reduce the prevalence of these national health problems through increasing physical activity and improving air quality through decreasing reliance on motor vehicles.
- In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, active travel can play a crucial part in **slowing down the spread of the virus** by offering an alternative means of travel to crowded public transport.

### Active travel for the economy

- Economically, active transport brings significant benefits by boosting local town centres through modal shift away from the private car, **increasing productivity** and reducing health and environmental damage expenditure.<sup>4</sup>
- People who walk to the high street **spend up to 40% more** than those who drive<sup>5</sup>
- Employees who are physically active take **27% fewer sick days** than their colleagues<sup>6</sup>.
- **Road congestion costs** the UK economy £8 billion in 2018 which equates to an average of £1,300 per driver<sup>7</sup>
- Road projects produce returns of £3 to £5 for every £1 spent. Walking and cycling schemes in turn produce returns of **£4 to £19 for every £1 spent**.<sup>8</sup>

### Active travel for the environment

- The transport sector is estimated to have been responsible for **28% of UK greenhouse gas emissions** in 2018<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> NHS Digital; (2017); Health Survey for England 2016; available at <https://digital.nhs.uk>

<sup>2</sup> Public Health England (2016) *Working together to promote active travel*

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/523460/Working\\_Together\\_to\\_Promote\\_Active\\_Travel\\_A\\_briefing\\_for\\_local\\_authorities.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523460/Working_Together_to_Promote_Active_Travel_A_briefing_for_local_authorities.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Public Health England (2019) *Air Pollution evidence review* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/public-health-england-publishes-air-pollution-evidence-review>

<sup>4</sup> Sustrans, *Active Travel and Economic Performance* (2017) <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/4472/4472.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> TfL, *Town Centres*, (2016) <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/town-centres-report-2014-15.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> ERS, *Health at Work: Economic Evidence Report*, (2016) [file:///C:/Users/UKFAC001/Downloads/health\\_at\\_work\\_economic\\_evidence\\_report\\_2016.pdf](file:///C:/Users/UKFAC001/Downloads/health_at_work_economic_evidence_report_2016.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Sky News, *Congestion costs UK economy £8bn in 2018 - an average of £1,300 per driver* (2019) <https://news.sky.com/story/congestion-costs-uk-economy-8bn-in-2018-an-average-of-1-300-per-driver-11635271>

<sup>8</sup> Sustrans, Common Misconceptions Of Active Travel Investment. LCWIP Strategic Support. (2019) [online] Bristol: Sustrans. Available at: <<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/5224/common-misconceptions-of-active-travel-investment.pdf>> [Accessed 16 June 2020].

<sup>9</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2020. *2018 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Final Figures*. [online] London.

- Road transport specifically is the **single biggest contributor to poor air quality**, responsible for approximately 80% of roadside nitrogen dioxide concentration<sup>10</sup>.
- The UK Committee on Climate Change has identified that changing people's mode of travel choice from private car to walking and cycling as an **important way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions**.<sup>11</sup>
- Walking or cycling can **realistically substitute for 41% of short car trips**, saving nearly 5% of carbon dioxide emissions from car travel.<sup>12</sup>
- The National Planning Policy Framework requires local authorities to “*adopt proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change*”<sup>13</sup>, for example through the provision of convenient, safe and **attractive walking and cycling routes**.

#### Active travel for society

- Statistics on obesity, physical activity and diet in England 2019 show that activity levels decrease as deprivation increases; **72% of people in the least deprived areas meet government physical activity guidelines** in comparison to 57% of people in the most deprived areas<sup>14</sup>.
- Those who live in the most deprived areas have a **50% greater risk of dying from a road accident** compared with those in the least deprived areas<sup>15</sup>.
- Environments that encourage active travel can **reduce the likelihood of inequalities** by providing opportunities for physical activity and improving road safety.
- Children are one group in society where active travel can provide significant benefits, especially in terms of **school related travel**; children who cycle and walk have a better understanding of their surroundings as well as enabling better social interactions with their peers<sup>16</sup>.

#### Planning for active transport

- Planning that supports greater use of walking and cycling will enable better transport efficiency as well as improving the **sustainability of new developments**.
- Traditionally active transport has been given less priority than the private car and as a result new developments often **fail to provide good levels of active travel provision**.
- According to a national audit conducted by UCL, the **design of new housing developments** in England is overwhelmingly ‘mediocre’ or ‘poor’<sup>17</sup>.
- As a result, active transport is often viewed in isolation from wider planning initiatives and thus **needs to be given greater priority** in terms of the current planning system.

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<sup>10</sup> DEFRA, *UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations*, (2017) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/633270/air-quality-plan-detail.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/633270/air-quality-plan-detail.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> House of Commons Transport Committee, 2019. *Active Travel: Increasing Levels Of Walking And Cycling In England*. [online] House of Commons Transport Committee. Available at: <<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmtrans/1487/1487.pdf>> [Accessed 27 June 2020].

<sup>12</sup> Cope, A., 2018. *What Is The Carbon Emission Reduction Potential Of Active Travel?*. [online] Sustrans. Available at: <<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/opinion/2018/november/what-is-the-carbon-emission-reduction-potential-of-active-travel#:~:text=18th%20NOVEMBER%202018-,What%20is%20the%20carbon%20emission%20reduction%20potential%20of%20active%20travel,CO2e%20emissions%20from%20car%20travel.>> [Accessed 27 June 2020].

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *National Planning Policy Framework* (2012) [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework#paragraph\\_94](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework#paragraph_94)

<sup>14</sup> NHS, *Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet, England, 2019* (2019) <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet-england-2019/part-5-adult-physical-activity>

<sup>15</sup> The Kings Fund, *Active and Safe Travel* (2020) <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/improving-publics-health/active-and-safe-travel>

<sup>16</sup> School Streets Initiative, *Independent Mobility* (2020) <http://schoolstreets.org.uk/independent-mobility/>

<sup>17</sup> Transport Xtra, *Highways authorities don't recognise their role in creating a sense of place* (2020) <https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/local-transport-today/news/63178/highways-authorities-don-t-recognise-their-role-in-creating-a-sense-of-place-says-report>