



Fair Transition Unit

STRIDE AND RIDE

**ENGLAND'S PATH FROM LAGGARD
TO LEADER IN WALKING, WHEELING,
AND CYCLING**

**Maya Singer Hobbs
and Stephen Frost**

February 2024

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CONTENTS

Summary	5
1. Introduction	7
The UK government’s vision for active travel has been ambitious but failed to deliver.....	8
Investment in active travel has been insufficient, short-term and uncoordinated	10
2. Defining the future of England’s active travel network	12
Ambitions to create more space to walk, wheel and cycle in England	13
3. The case for investing in active travel	15
Breaking down barriers: The cost of living case	16
Growth and jobs: The economic case.....	17
Living well: The health case.....	18
Climate action: The environmental case	19
Safer streets: The safety case.....	19
4. Our investment plan for England’s active travel network	20
Identifying funding sources amid a constrained fiscal remit for transport.....	21
IPPR’S investment plan for England’s active travel network.....	22
5. Conclusions and recommendations	26
IPPR’S investment plan for active travel	26
References	28

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SUMMARY

During the pandemic, there was a surge of people walking, wheeling, and cycling. The UK government published a set of active travel targets and a route map to reach them. But since 2020, there has been a rowing back of both ambition and funding for active travel. This curtailing of active travel's potential locks in more congestion, worse air quality and health outcomes, makes it harder to meet emissions reductions targets, and stifles local economic growth. It also serves to worsen inequality and makes it harder for people to access the opportunities that help them get on in life.

The next government has an opportunity to correct the historic underfunding of our walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure and make England an active travel nation. This report analyses 12 Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plans (LCWIPs) to identify the level of investment needed to deliver a world class active travel network.

KEY FINDINGS

- Disparities in active travel spending led to an investment gap of around £2.3 billion between London and the rest of the country between 2016 and 2021. While London spent the equivalent of £24 per head per year in that period, the rest of the country spent the equivalent of only £10 per head. Investment in active travel has historically been low across England, accounting for just two per cent of total transport spend, leading to some of the lowest cycling and walking rates in Europe.
- In a cost of living crisis, where running a car continues to get more expensive, well-integrated active travel infrastructure can make travelling more affordable for many. The investment disparity across the country leads to a postcode lottery: those without active travel infrastructure do not benefit from the savings of reduced car use or improved health and wellbeing enabled by shifting short journeys from cars to active travel (projected to save the NHS £17 billion over 20 years).
- Analysis of 12 LCWIPs across England found an average spend per head of £35 capital investment is needed each year for 10 years to deliver the change needed. An additional £15 per head will deliver further interventions required to boost walking, wheeling and cycling numbers. This might include cycling training, a large-scale subsidy scheme to increase access to standard and adapted cycles, cargo bikes and electric bikes, cycle storage, integration of active travel infrastructure with public transport or public engagement. This is in line with funding in Scotland, which is heading towards £58 per head.
- Spending on active travel pales in comparison to the amounts spent on roads. In the 2016–2021 period, an average of £148 per person per year was spent on roads – more than 10 times the amount spent on active travel across the country.
- Spend on active travel is among the most secure investments that government can make. For every £1 spent, active travel infrastructure has an average return on investment of £5.62, and these returns increase over time. In comparison, average road building returns are £2.50 for every £1 spent, while some projects realise no return on investment at all. The Lower Thames Crossing (costing up to £9 billion) is expected to deliver a maximum return of £1.46 for every £1 spent. If invested in active travel, £9 billion could deliver over 3,800 miles of separated cycle paths - more than double the length of the road network in Birmingham.

- Reducing car journeys is essential to reach net zero and improve air quality. Doubling cycling and increasing walking would prevent 8,300 premature deaths and save £567 million per year through improved air quality. Cycling must increase by at least 20 per cent by 2030 to fairly reduce car use in line with meeting the UK's climate commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To unlock the potential of active travel, and deliver meaningful change in active travel provision for communities across the country, IPPR calls for the next UK government to implement the following five recommendations:

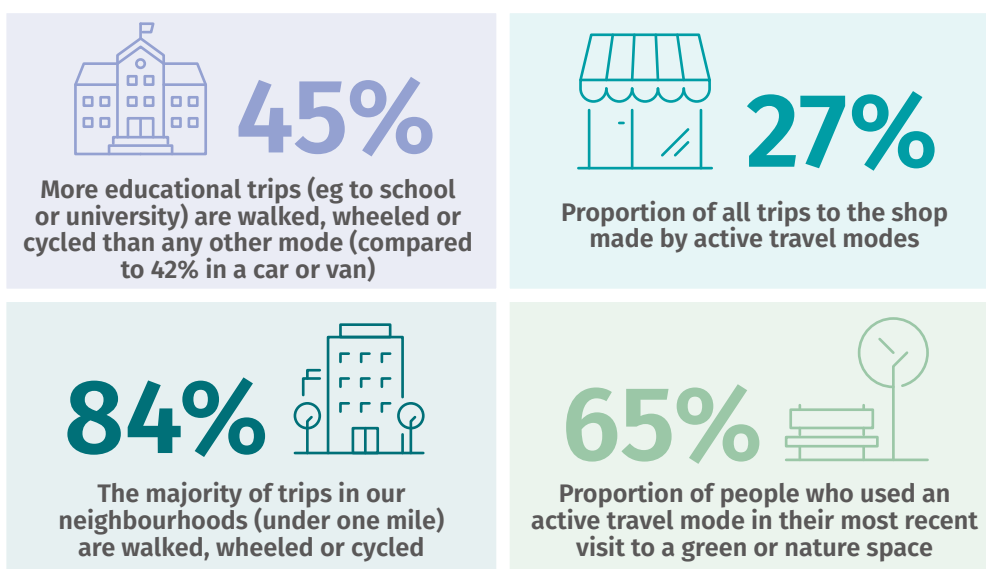
- **Put in place a 10-year investment guarantee for walking, wheeling and cycling in England** that covers the period from 2025–35. This should include a commitment to spend at least £50 per head on active travel in England by 2029–30, £35 of which should be on physical infrastructure. For the entire fourth cycling and walking investment strategy (CWIS4) period (2030–2035), spending should be equivalent to at least 10 per cent of the total transport budget (roughly £2 billion per year).
- **Funding should be drawn from multiple sources.** This should include new green investment of at least £225 million per year, and the reallocation of a proportion of transport funding currently earmarked for road expansion during this period.
- **Wherever feasible, active travel funds should be allocated as part of single-pot, long-term funding settlements to local and regional authorities, and be coordinated and administered with the support of Active Travel England (ATE).** The settlements should ensure a minimum level of investment in active travel and have clear outcome-based requirements.
- **The National Cycle Network should have a 10-year investment plan.** This funding would be administered via ATE, who should play an active role in prioritising schemes, monitoring progress, and evaluating impact.
- **Urgently produce a national transport strategy for England,** covering all domestic transport modes, which sets out a vision for the future of the transport system and the goals that all transport spending should seek to achieve, including a fair reduction in car use.

1. INTRODUCTION

Walking, wheeling¹ and cycling are a crucial part of many people's lives. Between them, they accounted for a third of all trips in England in 2022, and four in 10 of all trips by those on the lowest income (DfT 2023a). Most public transport journeys start with a walk or wheel.

FIGURE 1.1: MANY TRIPS IN THE UK ARE MADE USING ACTIVE TRAVEL MODES, PARTICULARLY THOSE IN OUR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOODS

Percentage of people using active travel modes in the UK for some common activities



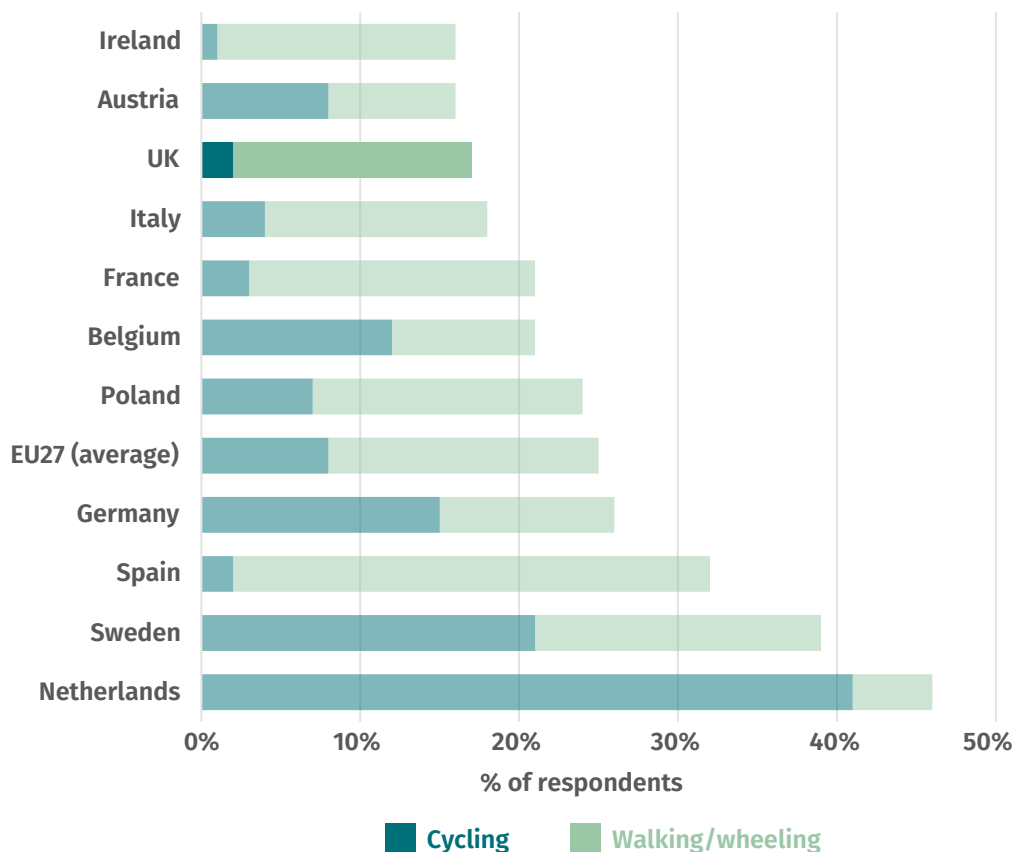
Source: IPPR analysis of DfT (2023b) and Natural England (2023)

Successive UK governments have failed to protect safe space for cycling, and have seen cycling levels drop well below those in other European countries (figure 1.2) as a result. Cycling in the UK peaked 75 years ago, when it accounted for over a third of all traffic (37 per cent in 1949), dropping to 10 percent in 1952 and crashing to just one per cent in 1973 (Golbluff and Aldred 2012). Despite the best efforts of advocacy groups to reverse this decline, UK government policy has locked in car dependency through 'predict and provide'² approaches to transport policy, and investment that has favoured roadbuilding to address increasing traffic congestion (Frost et al 2021).

- ¹ We use the term 'wheeling' to capture the diversity of people and uses that are hidden when we solely focus on 'walking'. In the UK's national statistics, 'walking' also refers to the use of non-motorised wheelchairs, prams or pushchairs, toy pedal cycles, roller-skates, skateboards and non-motorised scooters. Walking is also a term that some wheelchair and mobility scooter users do not identify with, so using 'wheeling' alongside 'walking' is more inclusive.
- ² Predict and provide' sought to match increasing levels of car use with increasing capacity for cars across the country. It stands in contrast to new approaches to transport planning which encourage transport decision making to be based on setting out a desirable vision for the future, and testing the mix of investments and interventions that could deliver this, sometimes referred to as "vision and validate" or "decide and provide".

FIGURE 1.2: THE UK HAS SOME OF THE LOWEST RATES OF WALKING, WHEELING AND CYCLING IN EUROPE

Active travel responses to the Eurobarometer survey question: ‘On a typical day, what is your main mode of transport? By main mode, we mean the one that takes the longest time.’ Fieldwork undertaken in 2019. Showing individual responses from the top 10 economies of the EU, the EU average, and the UK



Source: IPPR analysis of EU (2020)

These comparatively low levels of walking, wheeling and cycling matter, and they weren't inevitable. In chapter three, we describe the impact that side-lining active travel has had on the environment, health, communities and the economy, and the benefits that can be accrued by rectifying this. However, we know that the story we tell here is nothing new to those who have long advocated for a change in priorities - or to the UK government.

THE UK GOVERNMENT'S VISION FOR ACTIVE TRAVEL HAS BEEN AMBITIOUS BUT FAILED TO DELIVER

Under Boris Johnson, the UK government announced a “new golden age for cycling” (MacMichael 2020). The government published ‘Gear Change’, which put forward a “bold vision for cycling and walking” (DfT 2020a). But this enthusiasm has not translated into results; the **Department for Transport (DfT) is currently off-track to meet its walking and cycling targets**³ (Committee for Public Accounts 2023).

³ These targets include; increasing the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled, increasing annual walking activity, doubling cycling rates, increasing the percentage of children aged five to 10 years who walk to school. London aside, there has been no evidence of a sustained increase in walking and cycling. In some cases, there has even been a decrease, particularly in numbers of children walking to school.

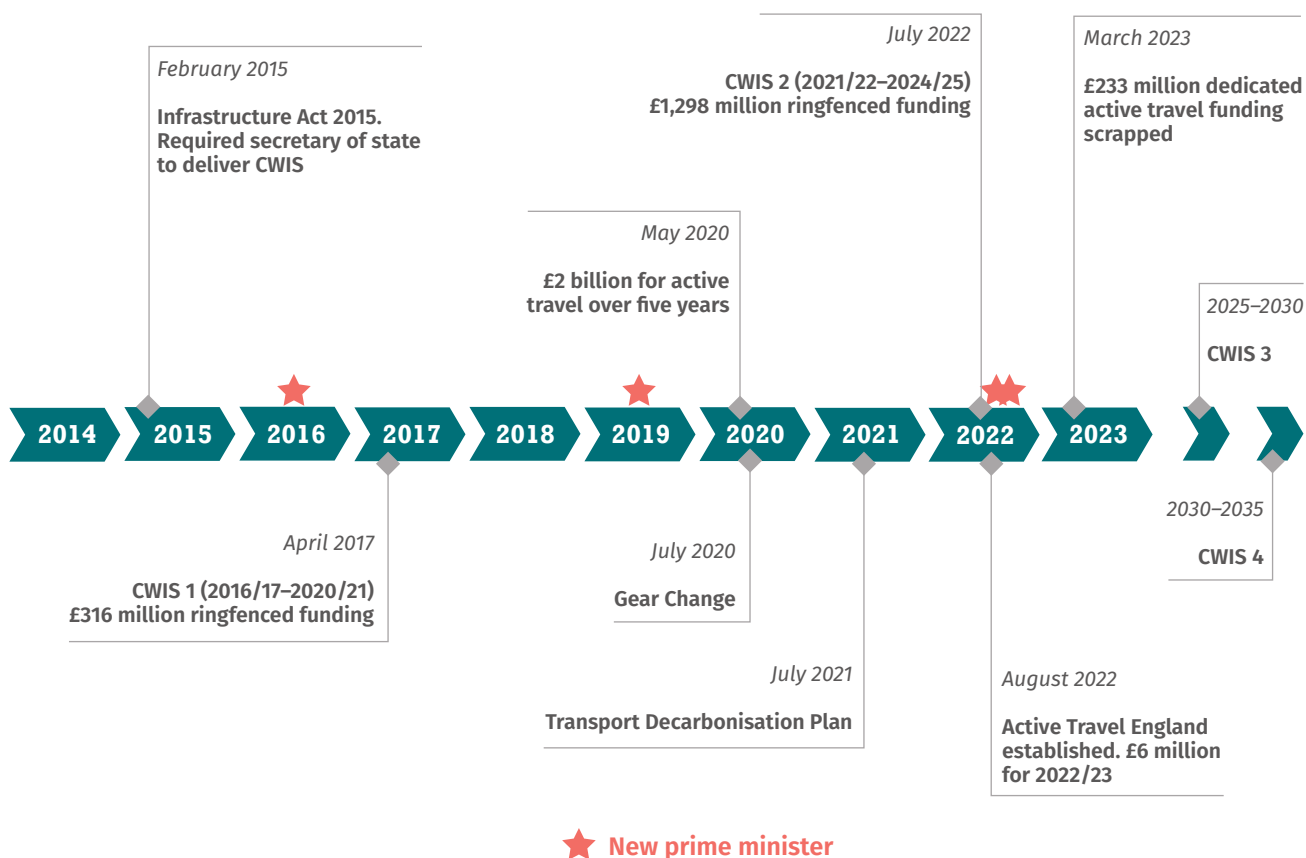
Successive prime ministers, each with their own priorities, have brought differing commitments and funding for active travel (figure 1.3). In March 2023, the already low level of active travel funding was cut by £233 million (Committee of Public Accounts 2023) and the rhetoric surrounding the new ‘plan for drivers’ has provided a clear signal that promoting active travel is no longer considered the priority it once was.

BOX 1: CYCLING AND WALKING INVESTMENT STRATEGY 1 AND 2

Under the Infrastructure Act 2015, the transport secretary was instructed to produce a cycling and walking investment strategy (CWIS) (HM Government 2015). The first strategy, CWIS1, covered the period 2016–2021. It outlined the government targets to make cycling and walking the “natural choice for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey”. The CWIS described the ambition, aims, funding associated with the target, and indicators or interim measures. CWIS2, covering 2021–25, was intended to capitalise on the increase in active travel observed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

FIGURE 1.3: THERE HAS BEEN A LACK OF CONSISTENCY IN FUNDING FOR ACTIVE TRAVEL, COMBINED WITH CHANGING GOVERNMENTAL PRIORITIES

Timeline of government activity on active travel, including new strategies, funding announcements and relevant transport-wide announcements



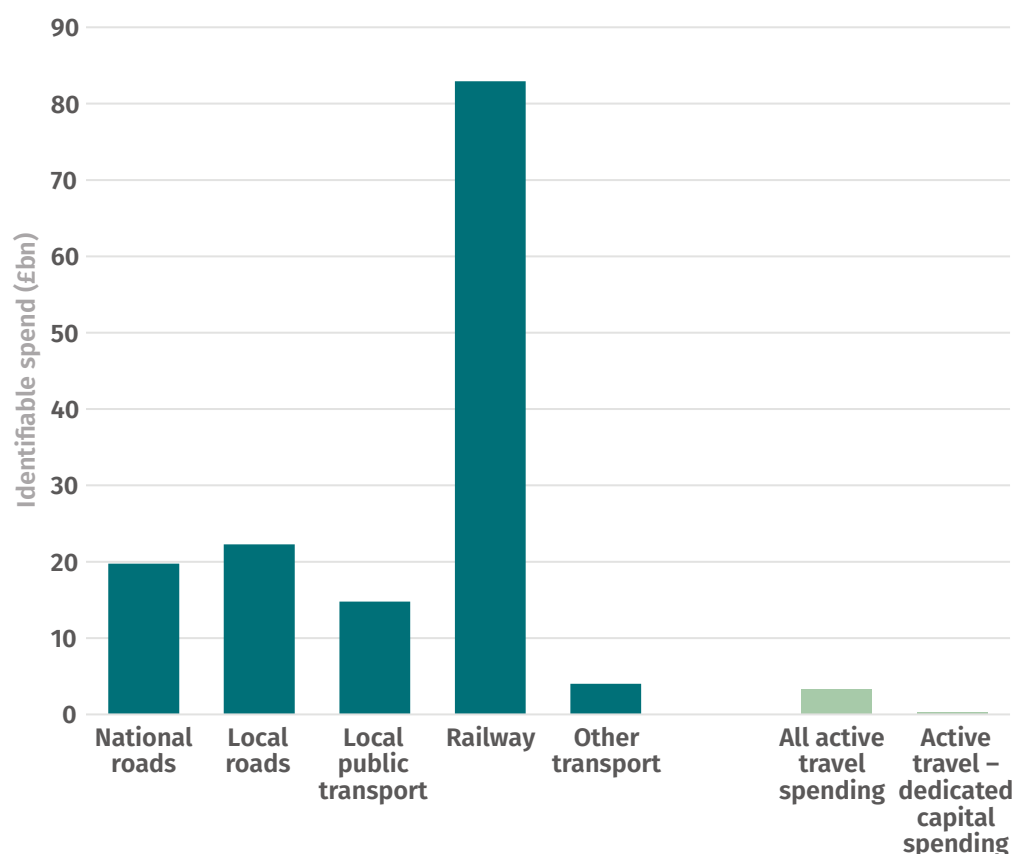
Source: National Audit Office (2023)

INVESTMENT IN ACTIVE TRAVEL HAS BEEN INSUFFICIENT, SHORT-TERM AND UNCOORDINATED

Despite the spending commitments made in CWIS1 and CWIS2, the funding allocated to active travel is still insignificant compared to other modes. **During CWIS1, between April 2016 and March 2021, £42 billion was spent on either national or local roads (figure 1.2).**⁴ In this same period, just two per cent of the total transport budget is estimated to have been spent on active travel (£3.3 billion of a total £143 billion). Of this, only £0.3 billion was spent on capital projects from dedicated active travel funding⁵ (0.2 per cent). Although some spending on national and local roads will have benefits for pedestrians and cyclists, dedicated investment in active travel “pales in comparison” to that spent on other modes (Transport Select Committee 2019).

FIGURE 1.4: INVESTMENT IN ACTIVE TRAVEL IN ENGLAND IS NEGLIGIBLE COMPARED TO THAT SPENT ON OTHER TRANSPORT MODES

Total identifiable spend (£bn) on transport services in England, April 2016–March 2021 (CWIS1)



Source: IPPR analysis of HMT (2022) and National Audit Office (2023)

Funding for active travel schemes is not only insufficient but also highly uncertain and challenging to access. In 2021, the year with the highest capital investment from DfT’s dedicated funding for active travel, spending on infrastructure was £205 million. Recent cuts to the active travel budget mean that this capital funding from DfT will be just £50 million in 2024. Funding is provided to local authorities through 36 different

⁴ This is equivalent to £148 per person per year over the five-year period (HMT 2022, ONS 2022).

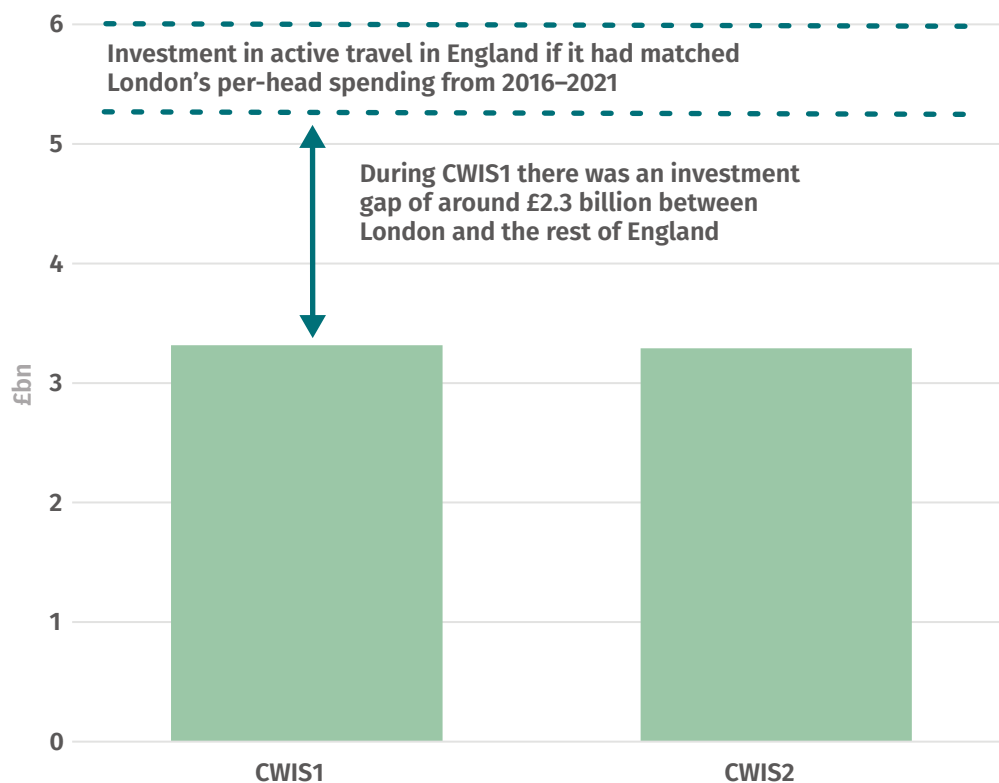
⁵ Other capital funding was sourced from budgets that are not earmarked for active travel – for example the Clean Air Fund (£220 million) or the Transforming Cities Fund (£1.7 billion).

funding streams (Committee of Public Accounts 2023)⁶, each of which will have different requirements, deadlines, and timelines, and will usually be competitive. Funding is generally short-term, which limits the ability of local authorities to deliver ambitious, large-scale schemes.

Current approaches to allocating active travel funding also undermine ambitions to ‘level up’ the country and have created an investment gap between London and the rest of England. London spent an average of £24 per head each year between 2016–2021 on its Healthy Streets programme (GLA 2021). If investment in England had matched this level of commitment per capita, more than £5.6 billion would have been spent on active travel in England outside London over this period.

FIGURE 1.5: THE GOVERNMENT HAS FAILED TO ENSURE THAT SPENDING IN ENGLAND ON ACTIVE TRAVEL KEPT PACE WITH LONDON

Spend on active travel (£bn) during CWIS1 and CWIS2 compared to estimated investment if England had matched London’s per head spending on its Healthy Streets programme between 2016–21



Note: Investment gap is based on multiplying the average population of England (outside London) between 2016-21 by the per capita spending on active travel in London.

Source: IPPR analysis of National Audit Office (2023), GLA (2021) and NOMIS (2023)

Looking ahead, if we are to deliver an active travel network worthy of a walking, wheeling, and cycling nation, it is clear that the UK government must match warm words and targets with greater and longer-term funding that meets the existing ambition within England to get more people travelling actively.

⁶ These funding sources might include different government departments such as DfT, DHSC, PHE, Defra, or bodies like National Highways.

2. DEFINING THE FUTURE OF ENGLAND'S ACTIVE TRAVEL NETWORK

A 'world class' walking, wheeling and cycling network cannot be defined solely by route miles. Successive governments have made commitments to deliver a “world class cycling and walking network” (DfT 2021). A ‘world class’ network is more than physical infrastructure. It also includes social infrastructure such as cycling lessons or interventions to change behaviour.⁷ Increasing numbers of people walking, wheeling, and cycling must be part of a wider strategy to provide more equitable access to goods and services, improve public transport provision, create a more inclusive public realm, and reduce the need for car use.

National government knows what good walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure looks like, and knows broadly how much it costs (Taylor and Hiblin 2017). Government guidance on good cycling infrastructure states that the “ultimate aim” should be a high-density network where routes are joined up and coherent (DfT 2020b). The newly established Active Travel England will be key in delivering government ambitions for increasing active travel.

BOX 2: ACTIVE TRAVEL ENGLAND'S ROLE

The creation of Active Travel England (ATE) in the summer of 2022 was welcomed by the sector. The National Audit Office said that ATE “has the potential to be a catalyst for increasing walking, wheeling and cycling” (NAO 2023a), and the Committee of Public Accounts called the creation of ATE a “positive development” that has made “good early progress” (Committee of Public Accounts 2023).

ATE's remit is to deliver the government's ambitions to increase active travel. It holds the budget for active travel (rather than DfT) and has the power to approve and inspect schemes. It also has the power to review planning applications and a capacity building function for local authorities. Together, these remits should lead to the delivery of high- quality active travel infrastructure.

The most ambitious countries, regions and cities in Europe have invested upwards of £35 per head on walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure per year. Copenhagen, considered one of the most cycle-friendly cities in the world, has spent £35 per head establishing its separated cycling network (Sustrans 2019a). In Belgium, the region of Flanders is estimated to be spending the equivalent of £39 per head on new cycle paths (Küster 2022). Ireland is estimated to be spending above £31 per head (ibid).

⁷ Note that calculating these costs is beyond the scope of this project, but these measures are central to ensuring that a diverse range of people have the skills to ride and can find good quality infrastructure that is comfortable, attractive and safe to use.

In the UK, England is lagging. Wales spends £22 per head (Welsh Government 2023), Scotland is heading towards £58 (equivalent to 10 per cent of the transport budget, Transport Scotland 2022) and Northern Ireland has a legal commitment to achieve a minimum spend of 10 per cent of overall transport budgets on active travel (DAERA 2022).

Despite this wealth of information about what a high-quality active travel network comprises, and understanding of the level of investment required to deliver it, far too many communities remain unable to access safe space to walk, wheel and cycle. But ambitions are high and there are a growing number of plans in place across England to change this.

AMBITIONS TO CREATE MORE SPACE TO WALK, WHEEL, AND CYCLE IN ENGLAND

As part of the first Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS1), the UK government established Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) to identify the infrastructure improvements required to support active travel at the local level. They were designed to provide a long-term vision of the future of local active travel networks. There is no publicly available list of LCWIPs but the creation of an LCWIP is a key funding principle for Active Travel England (2023).

LCWIPs are meant to be live documents⁸ and the approach taken to prioritising and estimating the investment required differs across England. Some areas detail the most ambitious possible network within their region or city, while others focus on a small number of strategic routes. Some of these plans are described in case studies below.

The National Cycle Network (NCN) is a network of paths for walking, wheeling and cycling managed by Sustrans, which spans the whole of the UK. It is well-used and loved but in need of greater investment. Growing from 500 miles in 1995 to over 12,000 miles in 2020, it passes within one mile of around half the UK population (Sustrans 2022). A strategic plan for the future of the NCN was developed in 2018. It details what Sustrans and multiple governmental and non-governmental stakeholders see as the priority for making it a 'path for everyone'. The key points from this vision are also included as a case study below.

CASE STUDY: Greater Manchester's Bee Network

Greater Manchester has one of the most ambitious local transport plans in the country, aiming to deliver 1,800 miles of walking and cycling routes over 10 years at an estimated cost of £1.5 billion. The public benefit for this is estimated to be £6 billion. Under the branding of the 'Bee Network' it is seeking to create a world class, integrated transport system – encompassing active travel, bus, Metrolink and rail. In 'Change a region to change a nation' (GMCA 2020) and recent progress reports, the region sets out its plans for putting walking, wheeling and cycling at the heart of the Bee Network and its role as the "glue cementing together the separate elements of public transport" (GMCA 2023).

The approach to the network comprises three key interventions: protected space (on main roads and town centre streets); removal of points of severance (connecting quieter streets by improving crossings at busy roads); and filtered neighbourhoods, where active travel is prioritised.

8 They will be updated as schemes are delivered and are subject to review.

CASE STUDY: Nottingham and the D2N2 region

The D2N2 region (Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, and Nottinghamshire) has produced an LCWIP that draws on the individual city and country LCWIPs to deliver a joined-up approach to active travel across the whole region. Each authority prioritised its proposed schemes, but identification of mutual benefits, particularly where proposed routes cross boundaries, was considered when writing the overarching LCWIP.

The funding required for the whole region is estimated to be £707 million over a 15-year period (2020–2034) (Nottinghamshire County Council 2021). The four authorities have capability rankings from ATE⁹ that vary from one to three, so the region offers an insight into sharing resources or best practice between administrative boundaries.

CASE STUDY: London

In 2022, 62.3 per cent of all trips in London were made by sustainable modes, which include active travel and public transport (TfL 2023). **Across London, 24 per cent of people live within 400 metres of the cycle network, an increase from 5 per cent in 2016** (TfL 2023). Investment in active travel in London has been three or four times that of the rest of England - £17 per head in 2021-22 but as high as £28 per head in 2016-17 (GLA 2021). This has paid off: in inner London, 18 per cent of people report cycling at least once a week, which is double the rate of the rest of the country (DfT 2023b).

There are pockets of excellence in London, including the mini-Holland¹⁰ scheme in Waltham Forest. Here, analysis over one year found that people were 24 per cent more likely to have cycled in the previous week compared to those not living in mini-Holland areas (Marmot et al 2020).

CASE STUDY: Paths for Everyone – the National Cycle Network

Sustrans reviewed the National Cycle Network in its 2018 report *Paths for Everyone*, which states its aim to deliver traffic-free paths that connect all towns and cities of over 10,000 people across the whole of the UK. It has two strategic priorities: to make it accessible and safer for everyone (Sustrans 2018). The route should allow a 12-year-old to travel safely alone and should not have barriers which could prevent people using wheelchairs, tandems or pushchairs from using the path.

To meet these priorities, Sustrans has identified specific actions. These include expanding the current NCN, which currently has 5,000 traffic-free miles, by creating a further 5000 traffic-free miles by 2040 (ibid). The strategy also highlights the need to work alongside local authorities, private and charitable landowners, national governments, communities and users.

9 Active Travel England (ATE) ranks each English local authority based on their delivery capability on a scale from zero to four, where four represents the most established delivery capability.

10 The mini-Holland programme supported outer London boroughs to build 'Dutch-style' cycling infrastructure such as segregated bike lanes, limiting through-traffic access on residential streets, changes to some junctions, and other traffic calming measures.

3.

THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ACTIVE TRAVEL

Increased walking, wheeling and cycling brings health, climate and wellbeing benefits and offers a way to create green jobs, boost the economy and deliver safer streets. These are not just the arguments of active travel advocates. They are also reflected in recent government policy:

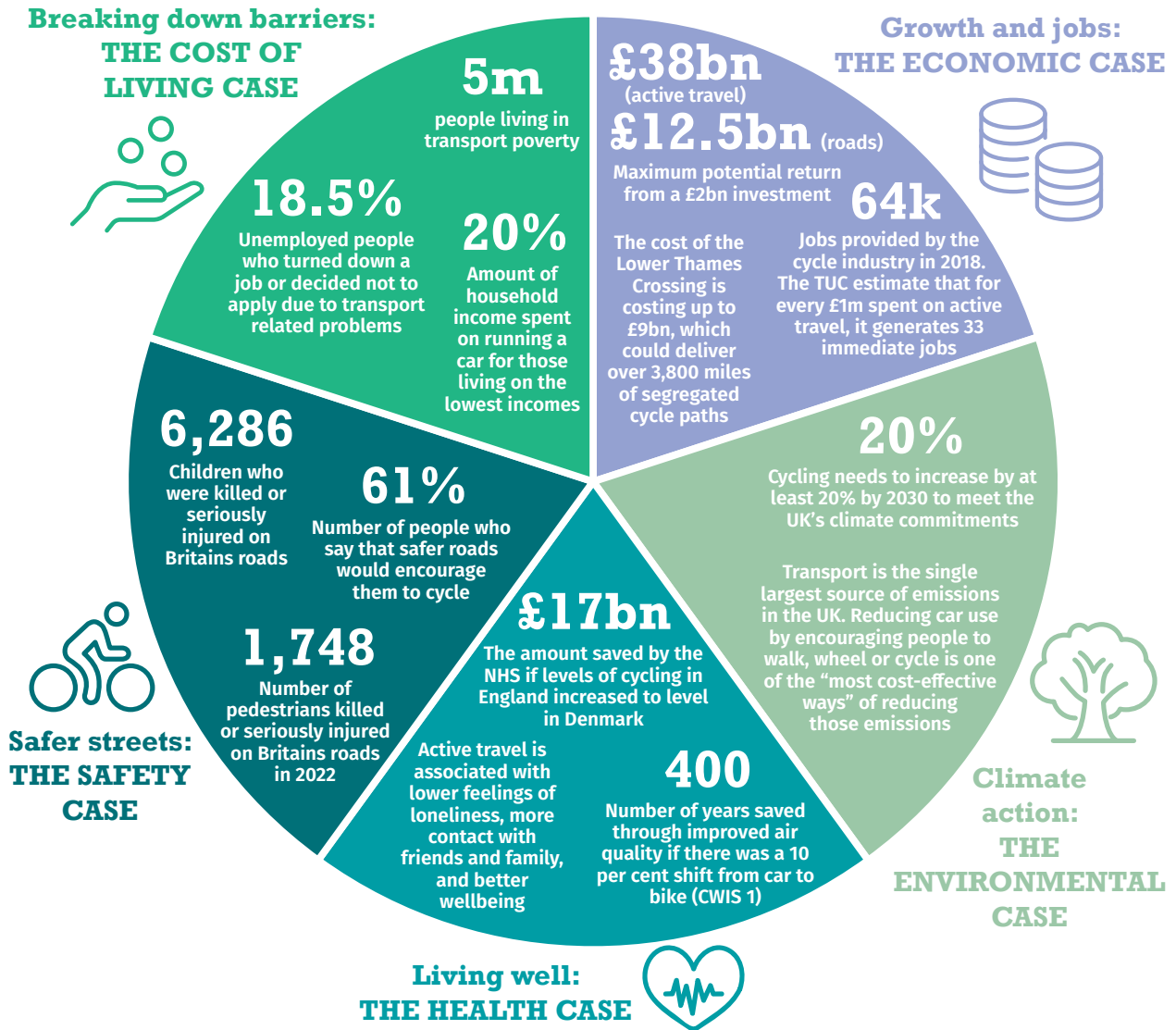
“Increasing cycling and walking can help tackle some of the most challenging issues we face as a society – improving air quality, combatting climate change, improving health and wellbeing, addressing inequalities and tackling congestion on our roads.”

DfT (2020)

Improving the transport system is a social justice issue. Transport works for the most affluent but at the expense of those living on the lowest incomes, who rely more heavily on active travel and are most likely to experience negative impacts of high traffic: poor air quality, noise pollution and reduced social interaction (Campaign for Better Transport 2012; Teuton et al 2022). People living in lower-income neighbourhoods are also more likely to be killed or seriously injured on the roads, despite being the least likely to use a car (Aldred and Verlinghieri 2020).

Currently, where people live in the country determines their chances of having an integrated walking, wheeling and cycling network, and means the benefits are limited to a handful of areas. While some councils spend £34 per head on active travel, others spend just 20 pence (Kingston 2021). The competitive nature of funding means that less well-resourced or experienced local authorities are disadvantaged, since they are less likely to be successful at the grant stage. **Investing in the active travel network offers an opportunity to ‘level up’ the whole country** so everybody can experience its benefits.

FIGURE 3.1: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ACTIVE TRAVEL INFRASTRUCTURE CAN BE BROKEN DOWN INTO FIVE CATEGORIES



Source: Authors' analysis of Mihaylova (2021), Salutin (2023), Frost (2023), Newson and Sloman (2018), Minio-Paluello and Markova (2020), NAO (2023b), Allen et al (2023), DfT (2021), Jarrett et al (2012), Lim (2019), Kingham (2020), Avila-Palencia et al 2018), DfT (2023d), DfT (2024)

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: THE COST OF LIVING CASE

Transport is the means by which people access the things they need, and the things that help them live healthy and fulfilled lives (UN 2016).

- In the UK, five million people are in transport poverty, meaning they are pushed into poverty due to transport costs¹¹ (Salutin 2023), and those already in poverty¹² have been pushed into deeper poverty due to rising transport costs. Those living on the lowest incomes can spend up to 20 per cent of their household income on running a car, and lack the savings to maintain or repair it (Frost 2023).

11 There is no single definition of transport poverty but it broadly relates to people struggling or being unable to make necessary journeys (Gates et al 2019).

12 The cost of living crisis has pushed more into poverty (McRae et al 2023).

- **High quality walking and cycling infrastructure can help keep those on low incomes out of transport poverty.** When compared to other modes, driving is more expensive (£6.20 for an average journey, compared to £2.40 for a single bus fare) (Salutin 2023).
- **Existing transport options constrain rather than enable people to access employment,** with 18.5 per cent of unemployed people in England “turning down a job or deciding not to apply for a job due to transport-related problems” (Mihaylova 2021). This is even more pronounced in low-income neighbourhoods (Crisp et al 2018).

Existing approaches to support people with transport costs, such as freezing fuel duty, are tinkering at the edges of the problem and do much less to reduce their annual transport costs than the provision of sustainable alternatives (Salutin 2023). Instead, **making active travel easier and more pleasant can benefit those on low incomes the most.** It can make it easier to access jobs or services. It also helps avoid car dependence,¹³ which can place significant pressure on household finances and create higher risks of social exclusion (Sustrans 2016).

GROWTH AND JOBS: THE ECONOMIC CASE

Alongside a high return on investment (see box 3), active travel investment delivers secondary economic benefits, job creation and regional development opportunities, including:

- **The cycling industry:** In 2018 it was estimated that the cycling industry contributed over £1 billion through goods, services and cycle tourism, and provided 64,000 full-time equivalent jobs across the UK (Newson and Sloman 2018). The Trade Union Congress (TUC) found that active travel infrastructure created 32.6 immediate jobs¹⁴ per £1 million spent, more than any other transport investment (Minio-Paluello and Markova 2020).
- **Increased footfall on high streets:** Pedestrianisation of high streets leads to higher footfall, and those who arrive by sustainable transport spend more overall per month than those who drive (Sustrans 2017).
- **Reduced absenteeism:** People who cycle to work take fewer sick days. Indeed, one study found that they take roughly half the average number of days off, which boosts the economy by £13.7 billion (Sustrans 2017).
- **Reduced congestion:** In 2019 it was estimated that the cost of congestion in the UK was £6.9 billion per year (INRIX 2019).¹⁵

13 “Car dependence” is where access to key services is determined by the ability to afford to own and run a car.

14 Defined as those in construction and the supply chain.

15 Some calculate the cost of ‘congestion relief’ at £0.22 per km not driven in urban areas (Newson and Sloman 2018).

BOX 3: THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR ACTIVE TRAVEL OUTPERFORMS ROADS

Cycle infrastructure has a strong return on investment, with an average of £5.62 for every £1 spent (Davis 2014) **and a best-case return of up to £19 in some instances** (Sustrans 2019b). This means that a £2 billion investment would deliver £11 billion in public benefit on average, although this could be as high as £38 billion. The health benefits associated with increased physical activity are a large contributor to these returns.

On the other hand, **investments in the strategic road network have an average return of £2.50** (Transport Select Committee 2023). The best-case return can be up to £5 (Sustrans 2019b), but Post-Opening Project Evaluation (POPE) reports and other analysis of road-building schemes find that economic benefits tend to be smaller than proposed, or non-existent (ibid). Appraisals for road schemes regularly underestimate induced traffic (Goodwin and Hopkinson 2023), resulting in an overestimation of the economic benefit and an underestimation of the emissions associated with the road.

The most expensive cycle infrastructure is a cycle superhighway, which can cost up to £1.45 million per kilometre (Taylor and Hiblin 2017). In contrast, the overspend on road enhancement projects between 2020-2025 totalled £3.3 billion (equivalent to the entire active travel budget) and the forecast costs of projects approved in 2020 have risen by more than £5.5 billion (NAO 2023b). Since September 2022, National Highways has been monitoring two of its largest projects due to their low value for money - the Lower Thames Crossing (costing up to £9 billion) and the A303 Stonehenge Tunnel (estimated to cost up to £2.4 billion).

Investing in roads instead of active travel not only delivers a worse return on investment, but also has a direct negative impact on local communities. Research suggests that the costs of road traffic to local communities in Great Britain are £31.9 billion per year (£631 per person). This is due to lower spending on local high streets, negative impacts of motorised transport (for example noise and air pollution or collisions), social exclusion, neighbourhood social capital¹⁶, and health and wellbeing (Anciaes et al 2022).

LIVING WELL: THE HEALTH CASE

The most significant economic benefit from active travel infrastructure is improved health¹⁷. If cycling in England were to increase to the levels seen in Denmark, it would be worth as much as £17 billion to the NHS (Jarrett et al 2012). Alongside the economic perspective, there are equality and quality of life benefits.

- **Air pollution:** In CWIS1, government claimed that a modal shift of 10 per cent from car to bike would save 400 productive life years through improving air pollution alone. It is also worth noting that those who are most exposed to air pollution are drivers, and taxi drivers are most at risk (Lim 2019).
- **Wellbeing and social connection:** Reduced traffic volumes increase social connection within neighbourhoods and positively affect how pleasant residents find walking (Kingham 2020). Active travel is associated with lower feelings of loneliness, better self-perceived health, and more contact with friends and

16 This is a measure of social interactions within a neighbourhood. It can be reduced due to high traffic volumes or speeds.

17 Health typically represents 50 per cent of the overall economic benefits from an active travel scheme (DfT 2022b).

family (Avila-Palencia et al 2018). People who commute to work using active travel report improved wellbeing compared to those who drive (Martin et al 2014).

Active travel provision can help reduce health inequalities (Marmot et al 2020), and the 2023 Chief Medical Officer's annual report states clearly that there is a role for active travel in ageing well.

"...making active transport, including walking and cycling, safe and attractive for people as they head towards and enter old age would be a major win."

Whitty (2023)

CLIMATE ACTION: THE ENVIRONMENTAL CASE

Transport is the single largest source of emissions in the UK, and reductions have plateaued in recent years. Faster action on climate change will improve people's lives and help limit its impacts. Even with the roll-out of electric vehicles (EVs), a reduction in car miles and increase in active travel are required (Allen et al 2023).

Modal shift to active travel is one of the "most cost-effective ways of reducing transport emissions" (DfT 2021). The Green Alliance's 'balanced model' for reducing car miles by 25 per cent, a requirement for meeting the UK's 2030 climate commitments, relies on cycling levels increasing by at least 20 per cent within the decade (Allen et al 2023).

SAFER STREETS: THE SAFETY CASE

Pedestrians are at considerable risk on British roads. In 2022, 6,435 children were involved in collisions while walking, wheeling or cycling, of whom 1,748 were killed or seriously injured (DfT 2023d). In total, more than 80 people per day¹⁸ were killed or seriously injured on UK roads, 21 per cent of whom were pedestrians (ibid). These deaths were not inevitable. Academics have coined the term "motonormativity" to describe the unconscious bias that plays into the acceptance of risks associated with the use of cars, including deaths on UK roads (Walker et al 2023).

The perception of a lack of safety is a key barrier to people cycling (Committee of Public Accounts 2023) but cycling itself is not unsafe. Cyclists benefit from 'safety in numbers': the more people who cycle, the safer it becomes. As cycling in London increased by 24 per cent between 2012 and 2017, the risk of being killed or seriously injured as a cyclist decreased. This has been partly attributed to the doubling of protected cycling infrastructure across the city (Sustrans 2019b).

18 29,742 people across Great Britain: 6,286 of these were pedestrians and 4,147 were cyclists.

4.

OUR INVESTMENT PLAN FOR ENGLAND'S ACTIVE TRAVEL NETWORK

There are many ways to think about the level of investment required in providing a comprehensive, high-quality walking, wheeling and cycling network for England. For this analysis we have considered the following questions.

- How much funding do local and regional leaders say they need to deliver an active travel network for their areas?
- What level of spending per head, or as a proportion of a total transport budget, do the most ambitious countries, regions or cities allocate to active travel infrastructure?
- How much needs to be spent on improving the National Cycle Network?

For this project we reviewed 12 LCWIPs that are either complete or in development¹⁹, selected from a range of urban and rural areas, and run by both Conservative and Labour administrations. Where required, we consulted relevant officers in local authorities to confirm cost estimates. We have treated LCWIPs as indicative of the scale of ambition that local areas currently have for developing their active travel networks.

On average, delivering the active travel infrastructure schemes identified²⁰ by local and regional authorities in England outside London would require areas to invest at least £35 per head per year for 10 years. These range from the Liverpool City Region's £16 per head, up to the £46 per head in the D2N2 region or £53 per head to deliver Greater Manchester's plans. Leicester City Council estimates that delivering a level of service equivalent to that seen in Walthamstow's mini-Holland across the whole city would require around £91 per head, whereas the first phase of this (for an area equivalent to one fifth of the city) would be around £33 per head per year. As we set out in the previous chapter, this range of funding for active travel matches that committed elsewhere in the UK and Europe.

Sustrans provides an indicative investment figure for achieving the 'Paths for Everyone' vision for the future of the NCN (see case study in previous chapter). It has estimated that at least £2.8 billion is required between 2019 and 2040 to deliver this vision (2018 prices). Across the UK the investment needed in the National Cycle Network is less than £3 per head per year.

19 West of England Combined Authority, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Transport North East, Tees Valley Combined Authority, West Midlands Combined Authority, Leicester City Council, D2N2 LEP (including Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, Derby City Council and Derbyshire County Council), Devon County Council, Suffolk County Council and Oxfordshire County Council.

20 In this assessment we included every scheme with a cost estimate provided within LCWIPs or associated consultation documents to give the most complete account of the scale of new infrastructure needed within each area. As noted elsewhere, the methods used to develop LCWIPs, and the depth of analysis underpinning them vary. However, by focusing our analysis on areas with higher capability for active travel (as per ATE's assessment), we demonstrate the level of ambition other authorities who are supported to develop their capacity for active travel infrastructure planning and delivery might reach.

The development of the NCN is distinct from, but interwoven with, the delivery of LCWIPs. As a national network, the NCN is key to delivering integrated active travel infrastructure that provides coherent routes between and within urban and rural areas, and that span the whole country. Some of the routes identified within LCWIPs will already form part of the NCN, which relies on local routes providing safe, convenient connections to its national paths.

Based on our analysis of the LCWIPs and the NCN, we see three possible scenarios for the future of active travel investment between 2025 and 2035 (the CWIS3 and CWIS4 periods):

- **Status quo:** a continuation of current investment levels, with the equivalent of two per cent of the transport budget being spent each year on active travel.
- **Matching local demand:** the UK government shows it has learnt what works internationally and puts *at least* £35 per head to support local leaders' visions for their walking, wheeling, and cycling networks and the future of the NCN.
- **Delivering a 'world class' network:** the UK government makes the same commitment as the Scottish government in ensuring that at least 10 per cent of all transport spend is aligned behind active travel goals (which would be around £50 per head).

Based on our review of local ambition in England, the level of investment required for the National Cycle Network, and international comparisons, we know that **making a tangible difference to how easy it is to walk, wheel and cycle around England would require spending at least £35 per head per year on infrastructure alone, equivalent to around £2 billion a year.**

The status quo is untenable for delivering the scale of infrastructure required, achieving existing active travel targets, or fairly achieving the minimum of 20 per cent car usage reduction we need to see by 2030 (Allen et al 2023).

Matching local demand for infrastructure investment will not deliver a 'world class' network on its own. This will require wider interventions such as integration with public transport systems, bike storage, public engagement, behaviour change schemes and a large-scale subsidy system to access cycle, e-bikes, and cargo bikes. Sustrans (2016) suggests that 75 per cent of spending should be capital, with an additional 25 per cent on revenue spending. To meet this would require £50 per head, or the equivalent of at least 10 per cent of the transport budget.

Commitments for 10 per cent of transport spending to be invested in active travel have been made elsewhere in the UK and have been called for in England (Dossett et al 2023). We support this in principle, not least because it matches the scale of investment per head in England that we have shown is needed. But we are also aware that reprofiling spend in this way can take time to implement – particularly as the next government will inherit significant spending commitments.

IDENTIFYING FUNDING SOURCES AMID A CONSTRAINED FISCAL REMIT FOR TRANSPORT

The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) works within a fiscal remit provided by the UK Government. The figures provided alongside the Second National Infrastructure Assessment suggest that **the total investment in transport between 2025 and 2034 could be £280 billion, equivalent to £28 billion each year.** Although these forecasts do not take account of the Government's recent decision to scrap some of the planned investment in HS2 and reallocate the estimated savings to other schemes – including road enhancements and renewals – they do provide an indicative sense of priorities. Within this assessment the bulk of spending is still associated with rail (40 per cent) but the NIC suggests that 29 per cent be devolved to local authorities. Active travel investment would come from this devolved funding.

The ideal position is for the **whole transport budget** to be aligned behind delivering an integrated, multi-modal, inclusive and green transport system. This can only be achieved if England adopts a national transport strategy to guide all public sector investment. As it stands, the full scale of investment needed in public transport and active travel is unlikely to be delivered simply by reallocating funding within the existing transport budgets.

Given the widespread benefits of active travel, investment in the infrastructure that supports it should never be seen as solely the responsibility of DfT or as purely a 'transport' issue. **Alongside the realignment of the transport budget, other funding sources should be used to support active travel.** During CWIS1 and 2, just under a fifth of investment in active travel came from outside DfT (NAO 2023a), and this should continue in CWIS3 and 4. Active travel funding should also be provided by the private sector (particularly developers and major employers).

New green investment should be used to speed up the rollout of active travel infrastructure. Green Alliance's (2023) recent assessment of the Labour party's Green Prosperity Plan identifies the potential for new annual investment of £225 million dedicated to walking, wheeling, and cycling.²¹

There is scope to implement new revenue raising schemes locally or redirect central government expenditure from less progressive transport interventions. Local authorities should seek to emulate the success of Nottingham's workplace parking levy and London's congestion charge by implementing schemes which ringfence the money raised for local transport projects. The UK government's approach to freezing fuel duty is estimated to have cost £80 billion between 2010-2023 (OBR 2023), been shown to increase CO₂ emissions (Carbon Brief 2023), and to be less effective at reducing the cost of living than targeting investment at breaking dependency on private cars (Salutin 2023). A new funding settlement for sustainable transport, including active travel, could see fuel duty rise alongside a commitment to helping people cut their overall transport costs by making alternatives more accessible.

IPPR'S INVESTMENT PLAN FOR ENGLAND'S ACTIVE TRAVEL NETWORK

Our investment plan calls on the UK government to put in place a 10-year funding guarantee for active travel. This matches the length of the funding settlement recently announced for road maintenance (DfT 2023c) and aligns with the timeframes that local government and Sustrans have been working to in their infrastructure plans.

This funding guarantee should include three key commitments:

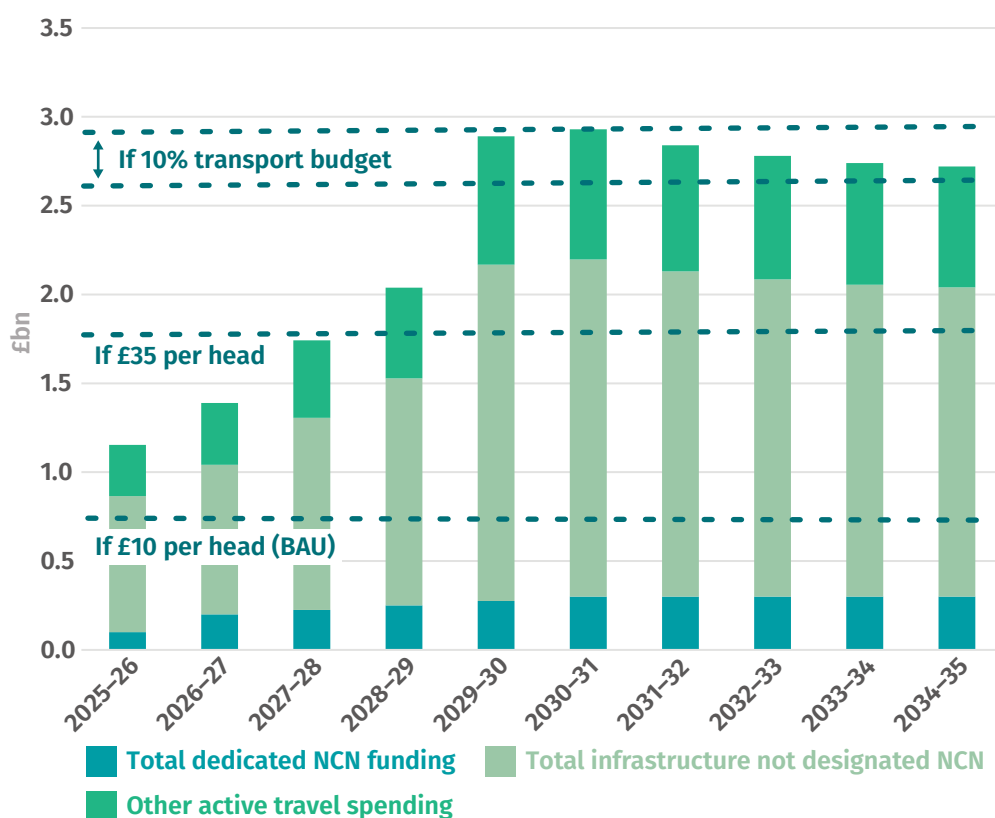
- 1. By the final year of CWIS3 in 2029, investment in active travel in England will be the equivalent of at least 10 per cent of total transport spending.**
Our pathway to achieve this is detailed in figure 4.2 and is based on:
 - A phased increase in spending to £20 per head in 2025 (double current levels of investment), £24 per head in 2026 (matching historic investment in London), reach £30 per head in 2027, £35 per head in 2028 and are the equivalent of 10 per cent of the transport budget (around £50 per head) by 2029. This funding commitment should be maintained through to 2035.
 - Infrastructure spending should account for at least 75 per cent of all active travel spend during this period. This would start at £15 per head, reach at least £35 per head in 2030, and be maintained at that level through to 2035.

²¹ This is based on an incoming government meeting the level of ambition on active travel funding that was in place before recent cuts.

- This funding guarantee would deliver a total investment of at least £23.2 billion in active travel over 10 years, of which infrastructure would account for approximately £17.4 billion.
- Funding will be sourced from DfT, other government departments, the private sector, and green investment. At least £225 million should be ringfenced within Labour’s Green Prosperity Plan, or equivalent green investments proposed by other parties, for active travel. This would be equivalent to around 20 per cent of overall spend on active travel in 2025 but make up only eight per cent from 2029.

FIGURE 4.1: LEVEL OF OVERALL ACTIVE TRAVEL INVESTMENT SHOULD BE EQUIVALENT TO 10 PER CENT OF THE TRANSPORT BUDGET BY 2029, WITH INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT HITTING £35 PER HEAD IN THE SAME YEAR

IPPR’s indicative scenario for future active travel investment in England

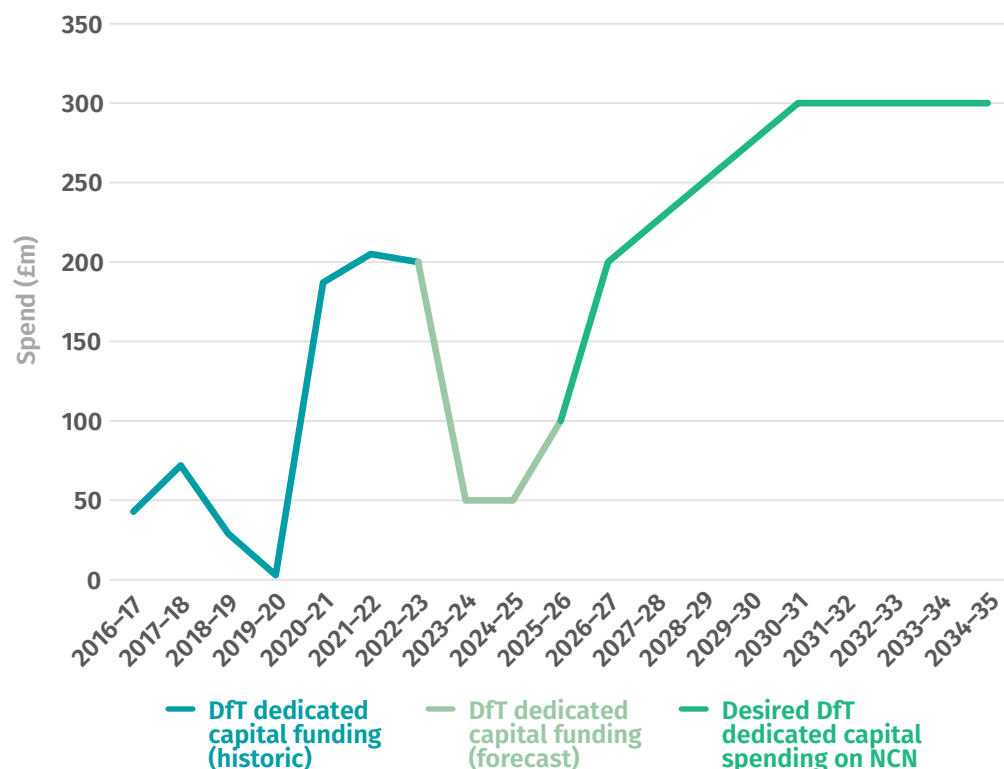


Source: Authors’ analysis

2. **The National Cycle Network will be renewed and made more accessible in-line with the ‘Path for Everyone’ vision through dedicated capital funding from DfT.** Our 10-year plan would see dedicated capital funding for the NCN start at £100 million in 2025 and rise to £300 million by 2030 (see figure 2.3). This would account for roughly 10 per cent of the proposed investment in active travel.

FIGURE 4.2: DFT'S CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN THE NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK SHOULD AIM TO REACH £300 MILLION A YEAR BY THE END OF CWIS3

Historic and forecast dedicated spending by DfT on active travel infrastructure (£m, 2016-2026) including spending on the NCN. Also shown is potential future dedicated funding for the NCN (2026-2035) under IPPR's proposals



Source: Authors' analysis of NAO (2023) and assessment of investment needed based on Sustrans (2022)

3. Local leaders will be provided with the funding they need to deliver a step change in walking and cycling in their areas.

- This would be allocated through single-pot, long-term funding settlements to local and regional authorities, with clear outcome-based requirements that are assessed and supported by Active Travel England. This may be linked to existing city region sustainable transport settlements or through new agreements with local authorities modelled on them. Active Travel England should continue in its role of preventing the funding of anything that does not meet DfT design guidance.

As outlined in figure 4.1, **there will be a scale-up of funding and delivery.** In local authorities with the highest capacity and capability for delivery, there will be scope to move quickly from funding announcement to shovels in the ground. Others will use the £35 per head spend on active travel as a longer-term ambition and will work with ATE to develop their LCWIPs. ATE will help avoid bottlenecks in delivery by playing an active role in identifying supply chain challenges and ensuring high standards of infrastructure building.

There are many ways to achieve higher cycling and walking rates. The Netherlands uses separated cycle lanes (it has 35,000 kilometres of them, equivalent to a quarter of the total road network (Fietserbond 2013)) but also low speed limits and shared space on most other roads. To achieve an equivalent level of bike path coverage in England, which has 190,000 miles of roads (DfT 2022a), we would need

to deliver 47,500 miles of protected cycle paths. Our recommendation of at least £2 billion per year for 10 years could deliver up to 27,000 miles of these routes²². Most of the LCWIPs we analysed expect to use a similar combination of interventions to the Netherlands.²³ Which interventions are deployed, and how many, will determine how much the funding will deliver.

Within this analysis we do not make a distinction between urban and rural investment needs. Although modal shift is more achievable in major urban areas, this does not mean those living in rural locations don't deserve access to safe, pleasant and convenient walking, wheeling and cycle routes – which, as well as benefiting residents, can deliver significant tourism benefits for rural communities (Sustrans 2017). More rural investment may well need to focus initially on improving and connecting with the National Cycle Network, but it should not be entirely limited to this.

22 The range of costs for 'strategic cycle routes', which are a mixture of protected paths and quiet routes, is between £0.46 and £0.88 million/km, while delivering a 20mph zone could cost under £10,000 (Taylor and Hiblin 2017).

23 Most use a combination of strategic bike paths, crossings and junction alterations, and filtered neighbourhoods with 20mph speed limits.

5.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is overwhelming evidence that investment in active travel infrastructure brings significant benefits, including large returns on investment, addressing emissions from road transport, reducing regional inequalities, and improving health. Despite this, investment has remained low, and walking, wheeling, and cycling rates in the UK lag behind much of Europe.

The Transport Select Committee states that DfT's guidance on appraising transport projects (Transport Appraisal Guidance, TAG) prioritises motorists over pedestrians and cyclists, making it harder to build a strong business case for active travel investment (Transport Select Committee 2019). In fact, the issue starts before the appraisal process with a lack of consistent funding from national government. This leads to a level of uncertainty from politicians about the effectiveness or value for money of such investment. When coupled with a highly politicised environment surrounding cycling infrastructure in particular, there is a lack of bold action from national politicians.

To deliver truly world class active travel infrastructure, government must learn from previous successes in the UK and further afield to ramp up its spending on active travel and provide longer-term certainty to local authorities. DfT should allocate funding for active travel that would otherwise have been invested in road schemes, increasing the overall percentage of the transport budget spent on active travel over several years.

Provision of physical infrastructure on its own will not be enough to see the significant modal shift required to reach government targets. This will need behaviour change interventions, which might include skills training, incentives or grants to support access to cycles, as well as policies that more directly limit car use.

The process through which the National Cycle Network and local authorities receive funding must be simplified and streamlined, alongside providing longer-term funding certainty to allow councils to plan and deliver ambitious interventions, as has been called for by the Committee of Public Accounts (2023).

IPPR'S INVESTMENT PLAN FOR ACTIVE TRAVEL

Recommendation one: The UK government must put in place a 10-year funding guarantee for active travel. It should commit to spending at least £50 per head on active travel in England by 2029-30, at least £35 of which should be on physical infrastructure. For the entire CWIS4 period (2030-2035) spending should be equivalent to at least 10 per cent of the total transport budget, or roughly £2 billion per year. The return on investment of £2 billion per year could be expected to be between £8-38 billion annually.

Recommendation two: Funding for active travel should be drawn from multiple sources. This should include new green investment of at least £225 million a year, reallocation of a proportion of transport funding currently earmarked for road expansion during this period, and local revenue raising schemes. It should also

be drawn from multiple government departments and/or public bodies. Private sector funding, particularly through developer contributions, should also continue to be used to support local and regional active travel investment goals.

Recommendation three: The National Cycle Network should be supported with a 10-year investment plan. This funding would be administered via Active Travel England, which should play an active role in prioritising schemes, monitoring progress, and evaluating impact to ensure appropriate scrutiny.

Recommendation four: Wherever feasible, active travel funds should be allocated as part of single-pot, long-term funding settlements to local and regional authorities. These settlements should ensure a minimum level of investment in active travel and have clear outcome-based requirements assessed and supported by Active Travel England. ATE should continue in its role of preventing the funding of anything that does not meet DfT design guidance. Those with the highest capability ratings are likely to receive higher levels of initial investment. Others will receive support to develop their LCWIPS and increase their ability to deliver infrastructure in their regions over the 10 years.

Recommendation five: The next UK government should urgently produce an integrated national transport strategy that can guide all investment and decision making over the coming decades.

Active travel policy and funding does not sit in isolation from other modes. Decades of experience tell us that warm words and tokenistic investment in walking, wheeling and cycling do little to change behaviours if most government policy and investment locks in car dependency. It is only by clearly setting out the long-term goals for transport, and how multiple modes can contribute to achieving them, that we will meet our climate commitments and provide the opportunity for people to live healthier, happier and more fulfilling lives.

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