



# ACTIVE TRAVEL & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY EVIDENCE REVIEW

Summary and Key Findings  
May 2019

# ACTIVE TRAVEL MEANS... WALKING OR CYCLING TO GET FROM PLACE TO PLACE, RATHER THAN SOLELY FOR LEISURE OR FITNESS.

## ABOUT THE REVIEW

### WHAT?

We commissioned a review of evidence on the link between active travel and physical activity. It examines the current and potential contribution of active travel to physical activity levels, and reviews the effectiveness of active travel interventions at increasing walking, cycling and physical activity.

### WHY?

Sport England supports a broad range of physical activity, including walking and cycling for travel. This review provides an authoritative account of how active travel interventions and investment can have the biggest impact on increasing and sustaining levels of physical activity in England. This will help us, and our partners, make better decisions about how we influence, invest in, plan, deliver and evaluate active travel schemes that support our vision of a more active nation.

### HOW?

The review on the effectiveness of active travel interventions identified the strongest available material by setting a high quality threshold and including only those studies with a control or comparison group. The review found 84 studies meeting the criteria within peer-reviewed and 'grey' literature drawn from wide-ranging and non-traditional sources in the UK and internationally.

### WHO?

An independent team led by Sustrans in partnership with Dr Nick Cavill and Prof. Adrian Davis conducted the review, with expert support from an advisory group comprising Dr Charlie Foster, Prof. Harry Rutter and Dr Karen Milton. The team also engaged with academics and practitioners to consider and sense-check the findings.

# ACTIVE TRAVEL'S CONTRIBUTION TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

**Our strategy Towards an Active Nation sets out our vision that everyone in England, regardless of age, background or ability, feels able to take part in sport or activity for the benefits it brings. Active Travel – walking or cycling to get from place to place – is widely recognised for its role in supporting this.**

“For most people, the easiest and most acceptable forms of physical activity are those that can be incorporated into everyday life. Examples include walking or cycling instead of travelling by car, bus or train.” (Start Active, Stay Active 2011)

Data from leading surveys shows the significant contribution active travel already makes to overall physical activity levels of children and adults.

There is clear consensus that active travel can make an even greater contribution to physical activity – through increasing both the amount and intensity of activity. This evidence review provides the platform for a direct and coordinated effort to realise this untapped potential.

Evidence is more limited about how and why active travel varies across different parts of society, and is an important area for further research.

## KEY STATISTICS

**37%**

**37% (16.5m) of adults 16+ travel actively at least twice a month – that's more than do any sporting activity at least twice a month (35%)**

**33%**

**Walking for Travel is the 2nd most common physical activity in England – done by 33% (14.9 million adults) at least twice a month**

**6.8%**

**Cycling for Travel is 7th – done by 6.8% (3.1m)**

**37%**

**37% of children aged 5-15 Walk for Travel at least once a week, and 10% Cycle for Travel**

**11%**

**Among the 'active' population, 11% are dependent upon Walking for Travel and 1.3% on Cycling for Travel, to achieve their 150+ minutes of physical activity**

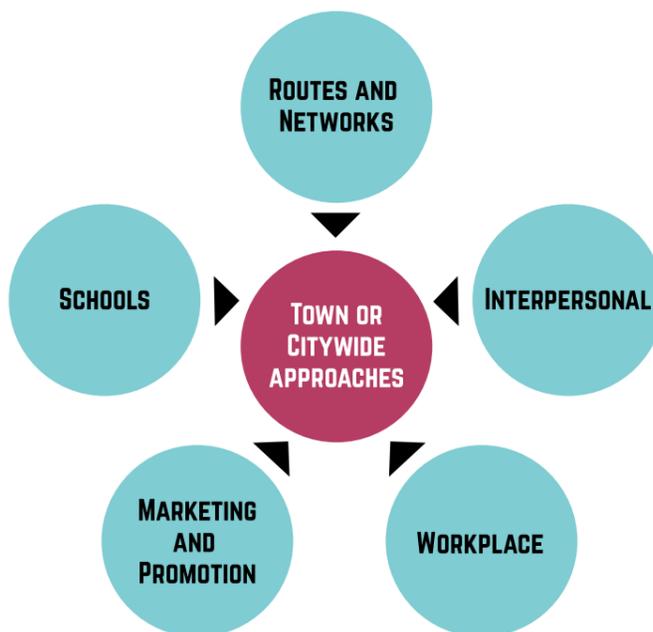
Source: Sport England. Figures refer to activity classed as moderate intensity or higher.

# ACTIVE TRAVEL WORKS

There is strong and substantial evidence that active travel interventions are effective at increasing walking, cycling and physical activity.

Our review found 61 out of 84 interventions were effective. This includes 36 out of 50 walking interventions, and 41 out of 60 cycling interventions (some covered both). The remainder showed mixed or uncertain results, with a very small number showing decreases.

Evidence is strongest for town or citywide approaches, typically made up of several interventions working together across a whole place.



TYPE	WHAT	EXAMPLE	RESULT
<b>TOWN OR CITYWIDE APPROACHES</b>	Many complementary interventions across whole towns or cities. Success can lead to population-level increase in active travel.	<b>Smarter Choices, Smarter Places</b> was a complex programme of new active travel infrastructure and promotion in seven towns in Scotland.	People in programme areas were 6% more likely to meet physical activity guidelines than those in comparable non-programme areas.
<b>ROUTES AND NETWORKS</b>	Interventions that build or improve specific routes, networks or environments for cycling and walking. Can range from a single path to a whole area.	The <b>Mini-Holland programme</b> in London is transforming local environments for walking and cycling in three boroughs.	In areas where Mini-Holland has commenced people achieved an average of 44 minutes extra active travel per week compared to people in control areas.
<b>SCHOOLS</b>	Interventions in school settings, typically based on safe routes, walking buses, active travel promotion, cycle training, competitions or active travel days.	A US <b>Safe Routes to School</b> programme combined education and encouragement activities with environmental changes to the route.	Active travel trips increased by 5% in schools receiving education and encouragement, and by up to 20% when combined with environmental changes to routes.
<b>INTERPERSONAL</b>	Interventions providing active travel advice tailored to individuals, households or specific groups.	<b>TravelSmart</b> in St Albans, Herts, provided lifestyle conversations with trained project staff, followed by personalised travel packs hand-delivered to participating households.	Walking trips increased by 6% and cycling trips increased by 36%.
<b>MARKETING AND PROMOTION</b>	Marketing initiatives or campaigns promoting active travel.	A promotional campaign in Australia encouraged use of the new <b>Rail Trail</b> – disused railways converted to paths.	Cyclists closer to the trail increased time spent cycling and daily bike counts increased significantly.
<b>WORKPLACE</b>	Interventions based within workplaces or similar institutions.	<b>Walk in to Work Out</b> in Glasgow offered active travel self-help packs that included maps, an activity diary, safety accessories and advice.	Rates of walking to work doubled, increasing walking by an average of 64 minutes per week.

# WHAT MAKES GREAT ACTIVE TRAVEL PROJECTS?

## PEOPLE AND PLACE

Design your project based on the needs of the people and place you are targeting. Consider existing culture, attitudes, behaviour and barriers.

## LOCAL FIT

Consider local circumstance and context: strategic priorities, political support, public transport, proximity of homes and services etc.

## THE RIGHT MIX

Combine revenue (behaviour change) and capital (physical change) approaches – look for the optimal balance and how they can add value.

## DELIVERY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Work in partnership if possible, e.g. across health, physical activity and transport. The benefits of active travel appeal across many sectors and teams.

## CONTINUITY

Aim for sustained, continuous and complementary programmes (rather than sporadic, short-term, unconnected ones).

## EVALUATION

Use robust outcome measures including a control group and sustained follow-up; evaluate project design and implementation; track and understand your beneficiary profile; assess value for money.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Promote active travel as a convenient way to be physically active. Acknowledge how increasing frequency and intensity can maximise the health benefit.

## CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

Design your project around recognised behaviour change principles.

## CONSULT

Speak to Sport England or other active travel partners for advice and guidance.

**THERE IS AN  
OVERWHELMING  
CASE FOR  
INVESTING IN  
ACTIVE TRAVEL TO  
SUPPORT PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY.**

## REALISING POTENTIAL

**TO REALISE THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL  
OF ACTIVE TRAVEL WE RECOMMEND:**

- 1. New investment into active travel prioritises town or citywide approaches,** comprising an integrated and coordinated mix of interventions designed to fit the needs of place and people. This can increase active travel at population level
- 2. Active Travel is promoted synonymously with physical activity.** This recognises active travel as a legitimate, accessible and enjoyable way to be active, and can lead to more effective local delivery
- 3. Consistent, long-term funding with cross-government support** can achieve greater continuity, coordination and effectiveness of active travel interventions, and would acknowledge the wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits of active travel.
- 4. Further research and evaluation** is carried out to strengthen the evidence base. This will lead to more effective and targeted interventions, and the strongest case for investment. This includes:
  - What works best for different people and different places
  - What makes interventions effective, such as specific elements, context or delivery
  - The characteristics and attitudes of people benefitting from active travel interventions
  - The interaction between interventions used in combination, such as in citywide approaches
  - Longer-term, sustained change in active travel and the link to overall physical activity
  - Cost-effectiveness and value for money of active travel interventions
  - More frequent use of a control mechanism to evaluate effectiveness

# YOU CAN USE THIS REPORT TO:

## 1. DELIVER ACTIVE TRAVEL

- Build the strongest case for your active travel projects and how they will support physical activity
- Identify, compare and consider the most appropriate interventions
- Inform your evaluation priorities and approach

## 2. FUND ACTIVE TRAVEL

- Strengthen your rationale for investing in active travel
- Consider how to package, release and support your funding streams
- Review how effective interventions have been delivered in the past
- Inform your evaluation requirements

## 3. RESEARCH ACTIVE TRAVEL

- Understand how active travel can and does support physical activity
- Understand the existing evidence on the effectiveness of active travel interventions
- Understand important gaps in the evidence that future research can address

# WE WILL USE THIS REPORT TO:

## 1. BUILD

- The strongest possible case for investing in active travel to support physical activity

## 2. SUPPORT

- New and existing active travel partnerships

## 3. INFORM

- How we plan, invest in and evaluate active travel programmes

## 4. GUIDE

- Guide our future research priorities

Active Travel can increase physical activity, improve health, and support a wide range of social, economic and environmental outcomes including the government's five outcomes for sport.

To speak to Sport England about this report, contact us on [research@sportengland.org](mailto:research@sportengland.org)

[READ THE FULL REPORT HERE...](#)

