

# BIKE *life*

2017

**Belfast**



Department for  
**Infrastructure**

An Roinn

**Bonneagair**

[www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)



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# Moving people

Our vision for cycling in Belfast



Over the past few years cycling has been enjoying a resurgence in Belfast. Greater numbers of people travelling around the city have discovered, or rediscovered, the benefits of using the bicycle to get about – easily, quickly and

healthily. Walking or cycling through the city centre at any time of day demonstrates that many people want to travel more actively. Belfast has wonderful potential for cycling – compact, friendly and reasonably flat (mostly) – but we can make it better. And we will!

The Programme for Government commits to increasing the number of people travelling by sustainable modes – active travel and public transport. The Department for Infrastructure is committed to encouraging more people to walk and cycle for those many short journeys that we all make every day – and to providing the infrastructure that will give them the freedom and confidence to do so.

Since the first ‘Belfast Bike Life’, a number of flagship bicycle infrastructure schemes have been built. These include city centre segregated routes like Alfred Street and the completion of the Connswater Community

Greenway, a 9km linear park in east Belfast. However, there are still gaps in our infrastructure which must be addressed for a bicycle friendly city to grow. The recent public consultation on the ‘Belfast Bicycle Network’ outlines the potential for around 130km of convenient, comfortable, continuous and coherent bicycle routes to bring good quality cycle facilities within the reach of most people in the city.

This second publication of ‘Belfast Bike Life’, gives us a better understanding of the state of cycling in our capital city. It sets out what we have improved. It identifies what matters to people who would like to cycle but have concerns about safety. Also it highlights the things we need to focus on so that we can encourage and help them to use the bicycle.

Infrastructure is very important but it is only part of what is needed to transform the cycling culture of Belfast. We also need to support people to make the change to sustainable and healthy ways of moving around our city. This ‘Bike Life’ report has gathered some key data that will help guide the ongoing development and operation of bicycle infrastructure and associated engagement programmes over the coming years.

**Peter May**  
**Permanent Secretary**  
**Department for Infrastructure**

# Introducing Bike Life

Sustrans, the charity making it easier to walk and cycle, is collaborating with seven cities in the UK – Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Greater Manchester and Newcastle – to report on progress towards making cycling an attractive and everyday means of travel.



Bike Life is inspired by the Copenhagen Bicycle Account, and is an assessment of city cycling development including infrastructure, travel behaviour, satisfaction, the impact of cycling, and new initiatives.

This is the second report from Belfast following on from the original report published in 2015. The information in this report comes from local cycling data, modelling and a representative survey of over 1,100 residents in Belfast conducted by ICM\*.

More details on all seven Bike Life city reports can be found at [www.sustrans.org.uk/bikelife](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/bikelife).

Our thanks to the people of Belfast who took part in the survey and who told us their stories in this report.

## There are substantial benefits to Belfast from people cycling

- 6.7 million trips** made by bike in Belfast in the past year
- Saving the NHS £392,000 annually**, equivalent to the average salary of **17 nurses**
- Bicycles take up to **6,939 cars** off Belfast's roads each day, equal to a **21-mile tailback**
- £16 million total annual benefit to Belfast** from people riding bikes for transport and leisure

## There is huge potential for more people to ride bikes...

- 5%** of Belfast residents **usually cycle to and from work**
- 29%** of people live within **125m of a cycle route**
- 54%** would like to **start riding a bike, or could ride their bike more**
- 30%** think **cycling safety in Belfast is good**

## ...and public support to make that happen

Residents in Belfast think investing in more street space for cycling, walking and public transport is the best way to keep the city moving, improve people's health, and reduce air pollution.

- 71%** of residents say Belfast **would be a better place to live and work** if more people cycled
- 74%** of people would like to see **more money spent** on cycling
- 65%** of people would find **protected roadside cycle lanes very useful** to help them cycle more
- 81%** of residents **support building more protected roadside cycle lanes**, even when this could mean **less space** for other road traffic

\* Survey conducted May-July 2017.



# Making progress

Provision and levels of cycling in Belfast



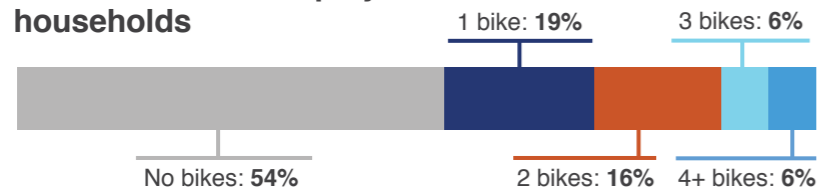
## Bike ownership in Belfast

A bike gives people more choice for getting around, helping them to reach jobs and services, and to see family and friends more often.

**45% in 2015** In Belfast, **46%** of households have access to at least one bike. Almost three quarters (**74%**) of households with children have at least one child's bike.

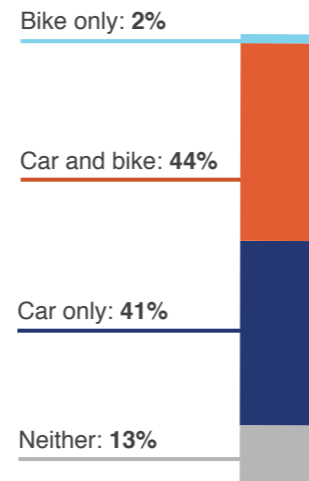
Over half of households with a car also own a bike. People use different modes for different journeys.

### Adult bike ownership by households



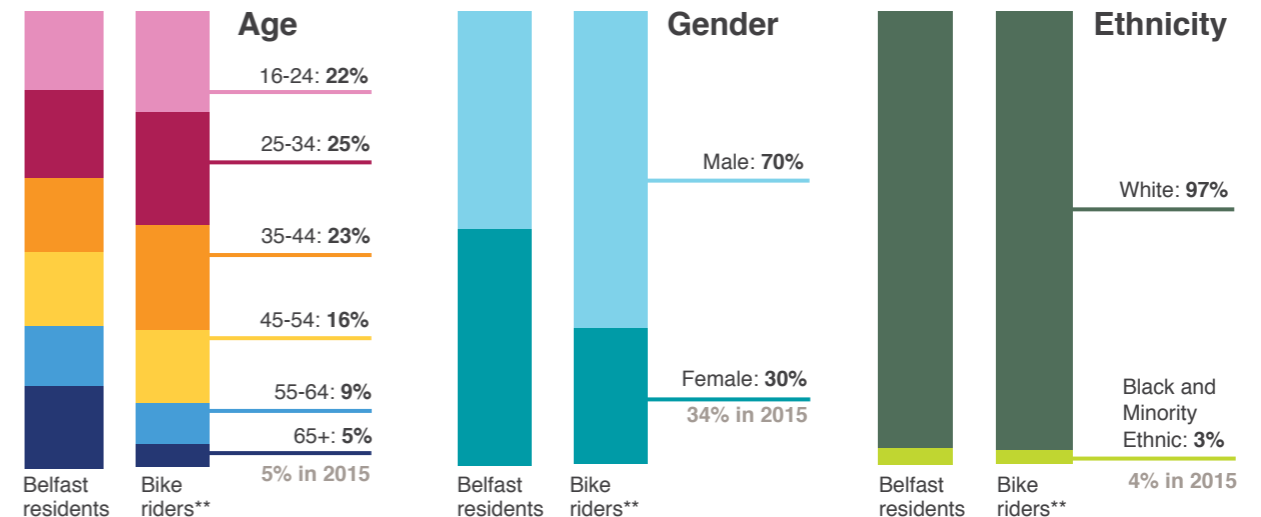
Car and bicycle ownership refers to the percentages of all people living in households that own cars/bikes. Note that census data is normally reported as the percentage of households with given numbers of cars.

### Car and adult bike ownership by households



## Who is cycling?

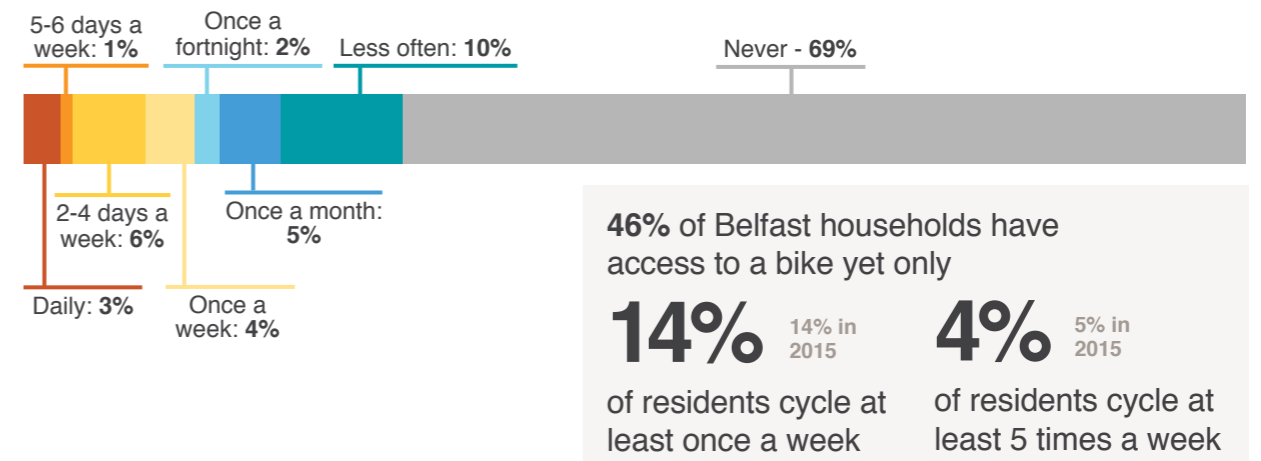
In Belfast, women and over 65s are under-represented when it comes to riding a bike.



For age and gender, the division of Belfast residents uses 2016 estimates. For ethnicity, it uses the 2011 census.



## How often are people riding a bike?



## What's available and who's aware?

**110 miles** of cycle routes including **102 miles in 2015**

**53 miles** of routes physically separated from vehicles **50 miles in 2015**

Includes protected bike lanes, shared footways and paths away from roads.

**38%** of people are familiar with the traffic-free routes in Belfast (37% in 2015)

**29%** of people live within 125 metres of a cycle route (27% in 2015)

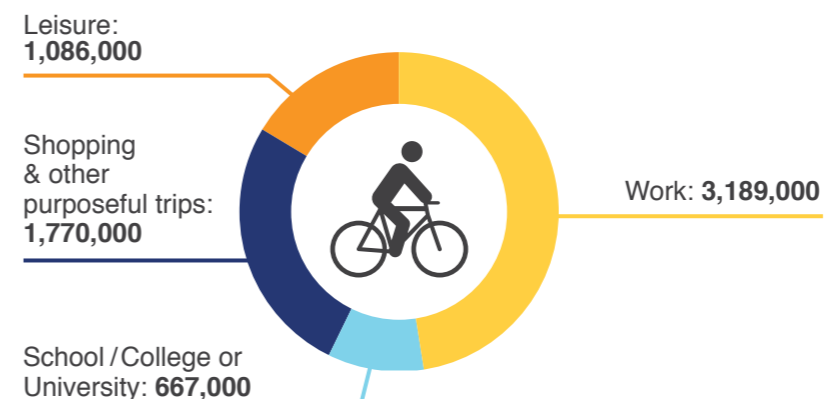
**769** public bike parking spaces in the city centre, equivalent to **64** bike riders per space **719 in 2015**

**56** railway station parking spaces for bikes, equivalent to one parking space for every **274** passengers per day



## Where are people cycling?

### Number of trips in the past year



**84%** of Belfast residents' cycle trips are for work or education or shopping and other purposeful trips

**5%** of Belfast residents usually cycle to and from work (5% in 2015)

\*\* Ridden a bike in the past four weeks when the survey was conducted in May – July 2017.

**KEY**  
 Actual change: **↑ from xx in 2015** / **↓ from xx in 2015**  
 Statistically significant increase: **↑ from xx in 2015**  
 No statistically significant change: **xx in 2015**  
 Statistically significant decrease: **↓ from xx in 2015**



## Developing Bike Life

What's happened in Belfast since 2015



Since the publication of the first Bike Life report in 2015, the Department for Infrastructure, Belfast City Council, Sustrans and other organisations have been delivering a widespread programme of activities to enable more people to get on their bikes in Belfast.

The government's Bicycle strategy follows a three pillar approach of Build, Support and Promote. This includes the delivery of new urban cycling infrastructure either using greenways or on-road bicycle routes physically separated from motor vehicles and pedestrians. These are complemented by programmes designed to work with local communities and businesses to encourage cycling and walking across the city.

Belfast retailers are cashing in on the city's growing bike culture by signing up to a new cyclist loyalty scheme to offer discounts and rewards to customers arriving on two wheels. In 2017, Sustrans launched **Pedal Perks** in east Belfast to encourage more people to cycle to local shops and cafes in the area. Participating businesses benefit from having their products and services promoted to around 10,000 people who live and work locally.

Pedal Perks is part of the EU funded **CHIPS** project with nine partners from four EU Member States to investigate innovative approaches to encourage more people to get out of their cars and on to bikes.

A new **Community Active Travel Programme** is being delivered by Sustrans in partnership with twelve disadvantaged communities across the city to encourage people to walk and cycle more. This has included organising led walks, cycle training for children and adults, bicycle maintenance and the development of community bike hubs. The programme is funded by the Public Health Agency, and is part of the Belfast Active Travel Action Plan and the Department of Health's 'Fitter Future for All' 10-year framework to tackle obesity.



### Creating dedicated cycling space in Belfast city centre

Three new and improved bicycle routes were opened in the centre of Belfast during 2016, including the new flagship segregated route on Alfred Street.

This high quality cycleway sets new standards in Northern Ireland, learning from best practice abroad.

It saw the removal of 19 on-street parking bays to create the space and the lane is continuously protected by bollards to help cyclists gain confidence to cycle in the city.

Two other city centre routes were completed, along Durham Street/College Square North and Queen Street. These link existing cycle tracks from the south west of the city to the city centre and further plans are being developed.



### Connswater Community Greenway

After a 10-year journey, the Connswater Community Greenway opened its final section in spring 2017, creating a continuous 9km linear park in east Belfast.

Since the 2015 Bike Life report, £22.2m has been invested in programmes to help cycling in Belfast, with around £18m of this being on the Connswater Community Greenway.

The Greenway enables residents and visitors to travel via car-free corridors as they walk, run or cycle for recreation or to access shops, businesses, schools and colleges.

It also passes through C.S. Lewis Square, a new magical civic space named after the former east Belfast resident and featuring sculptures from The Chronicles of Narnia.





# The impact

The health, economic, and environmental benefits to Belfast



Many people are cycling in Belfast

7.1 million in 2015

## 6.7 million trips

made by bike in Belfast in the past year which altogether adds up to

## 22 million miles



Benefiting individuals and the local economy

## 82p per mile

net benefit for each mile cycled instead of driven, which adds up to

## £11 million

annual benefit to Belfast from people with a car choosing to cycle for transport

## £16 million

annual benefit to Belfast from all trips made by bicycle\*

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



Unlocking significant health benefits in Belfast

In Belfast, the physical activity benefits of cycling

## prevent 7 early deaths annually\*

valued at

## £22 million\*

based on what people say they would pay to improve their chances of survival, and calculated using the method set by the World Health Organisation.

Cycling also averts **58** serious long term health conditions annually, saving the NHS in Belfast over

## £392,000 per year

equivalent to the average salary of

## 17 nurses

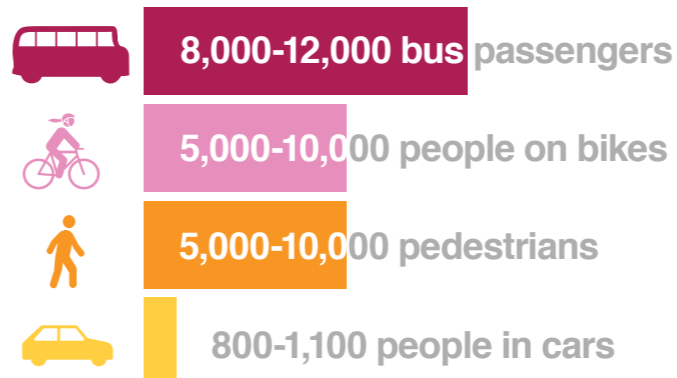


Based on Sport England MOVES tool which shows the return on investment for health of sport and physical activity.



Keeping your city moving

Transport capacity of a 4m wide lane per hour



Studies suggest riding a bicycle rather than driving frees up road space. This helps to keep Belfast moving.

Source: Litman, 2017. Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Based upon Eric Bruun and Vuchic, 1995. The Time-Area Concept.



If these cars were to be parked they would take up the space of almost **8 Belfast City Hall grounds.**

**6,939** return cycle 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 **21 miles**



More people riding bikes has environmental benefits

**4,128 tonnes** of greenhouse gas emissions saved annually

equivalent to the carbon footprint of **794 people.**

More people riding bikes improves air quality:

**8,108 kg of NOx** and **881 kg of particulates** saved annually.

In Belfast **141 early adult deaths** occur each year where long-term exposure to air pollution (PM2.5) is deemed to be a contributory factor.



Based upon Public Health England, 2014. Estimating Local Mortality Burdens associated with Particulate Air Pollution. Adults = 25 years+.

\* 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.

\* The value of £16 million is made up of £11m plus the value of purposeful trips cycled by people without access to a car, plus the value of leisure cycle trips made by everyone.





## Stories from our city

What cycling means to people



**Frances Redmond and Ken McInnes, Public Health Agency**

**Frances:** We work for the PHA where you get a half hour lunch but an extra 15 minutes twice a week as part of promoting health in the workplace. That gave us 45 minutes for a cycle. We hadn't ridden a bike in years but then Ken was diagnosed with diabetes and told to exercise more, just as the Belfast Bike Share Scheme commenced.

We hire the city bikes and mostly go on the Lagan towpath. I feel too nervous to cycle on the roads. We took a route on the Ravenhill Road one day because there is a cycle lane but when we got there it was full of parked cars, so we were forced on to the footpath but it was busy with buggies and pedestrians.

The main benefit of cycling is it improves your mood. You feel more free on a bike than you do walking. I can go at lunchtime and see swans on the river and really feel I'm away from my desk.

We were very pleased when Alfred Street cycle lane was built. The only downside is the junction at Cromac Street/Ormeau Avenue which we use to get on to the towpath. It is always packed at lunchtime.

**Ken:** I live near the Ormeau Road. I have now bought a small fold-away bike which I use to go to the local shops. I can get whatever I need, it is so much easier than taking the car and trying to find a place to park.

I would like to see more segregated cycle lanes like Alfred Street. I know that may restrict traffic but I'm a driver too. There must be better ways to build infrastructure for all road users.



**Colin Neill, CEO, Hospitality Ulster**

I am the CEO of Hospitality Ulster which represents the hospitality industry in Northern Ireland. There are still people who haven't realised the value of cyclists as a segment to cater for - every cycling club will stop for coffee or something to eat. There are huge opportunities for business from cyclists.

The Giro d'Italia in 2014 gave cycling a high profile, we should have added more value to that and developed more cycle-friendly businesses, with parking docks.

I think we are a bit behind when it comes to cycling in Northern Ireland. I'm an experienced cyclist but Belfast isn't my favourite place to cycle. We need more segregated cycle lanes.

The infrastructure isn't so bad in the city centre, outside it is worse. A cycle lane in London, for example is a cycle lane, here it is green paint squeezed into the corner of the road.



**Fiona McIver, Project Manager, Allstate**

Cycling at Allstate, an American insurance company, is cyclist-led and the company has been very supportive. We have a good role model as the Managing Director cycles in every day. He doesn't have a car parking space.

Our bicycle user group at Allstate has over 190 members and we have supplied over 1,000 bikes to employees in Northern Ireland via the Cycle to Work Scheme.

A large number of employees choose to cycle to work in part due to shower and changing facilities on each floor, as well as secure bike parking. Allstate supports bike parking as you can accommodate up to 14 bikes in a single car parking space. Cycling is that popular we have run out of space in our bicycle cage.

We will be moving offices beside Central Station by the end of the year. We should be getting 80 parking spaces for cyclists so we are looking at Dutch-style two-tier parking to accommodate everyone.





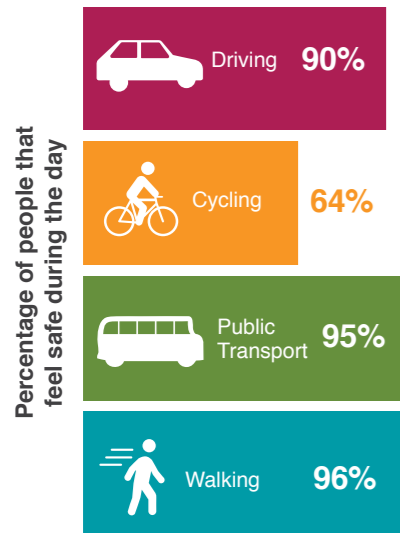
# Barriers and potential

What needs to change to make cycling commonplace



Safety and security continue to be a significant concern

Riding a bike feels less safe than other ways of travelling



A cycling injury occurs once every 244,000 miles pedalled around Belfast.



Whilst just under half (43%) of people think Belfast is a good place to ride a bike overall, when you dig deeper there are clear concerns about safety.

42% in 2015

only 30%



29% in 2015

of people think **cycling safety** in Belfast is good.

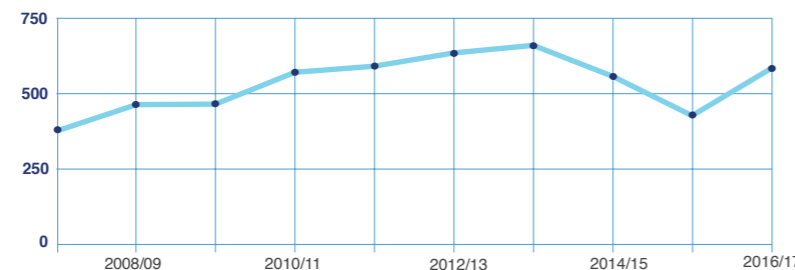
only 20%



23% in 2015

think **safety of children's cycling** is good.

## Reported bike thefts

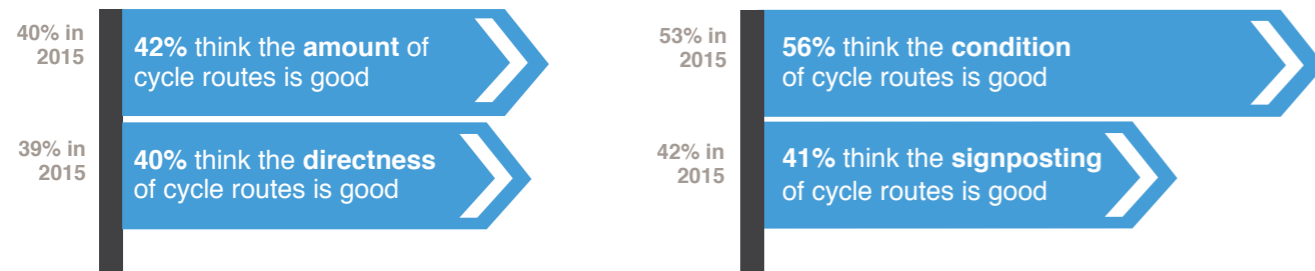


There were 587 reported bike thefts in Belfast in 2016/17.

This equates to a 1.2% chance of a bike rider in Belfast having their bicycle stolen in the past year. 24% of people think the security of bicycle parking is good.

29% in 2015

How do residents rate Belfast's cycle routes?



Shaun Henry, works at Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

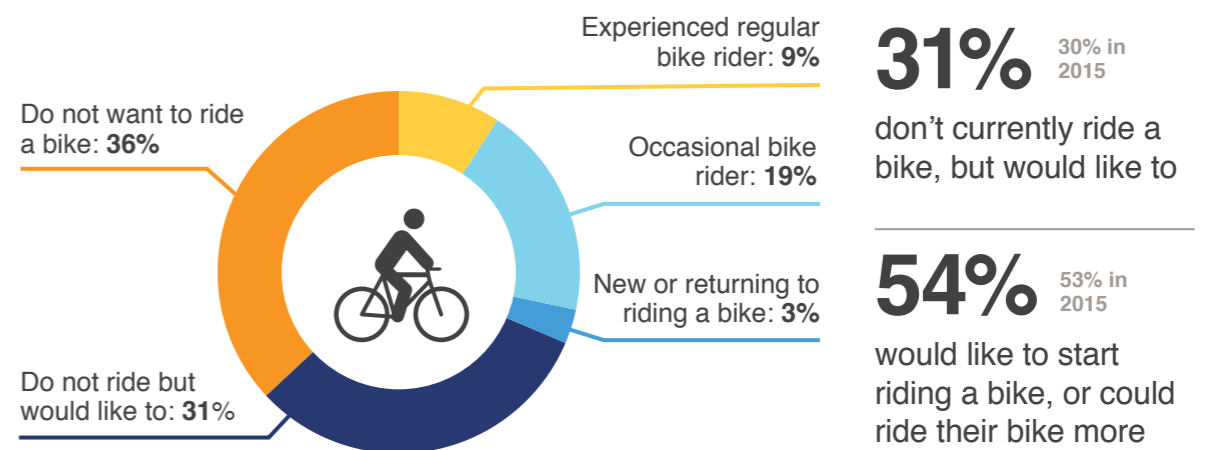
I'm fortunate that the majority of my journey to work is off-road or on segregated cycle routes. I'm very aware that this is not the case across Belfast. Recently I had to cross the city but there were no segregated cycle ways. It is absolutely essential to have segregated cycle ways to get more people on their bikes.

In other European cities, cycling is an integral part of moving around the city – it's nothing special. Our challenge is to see cycling as a normal mode of transport in Belfast.

The majority of cyclists are car drivers too. There is a tendency to look at the city through the eyes of a car driver. We have to look at the city differently — from a cyclist's perspective.



How do people see themselves when it comes to riding a bike?

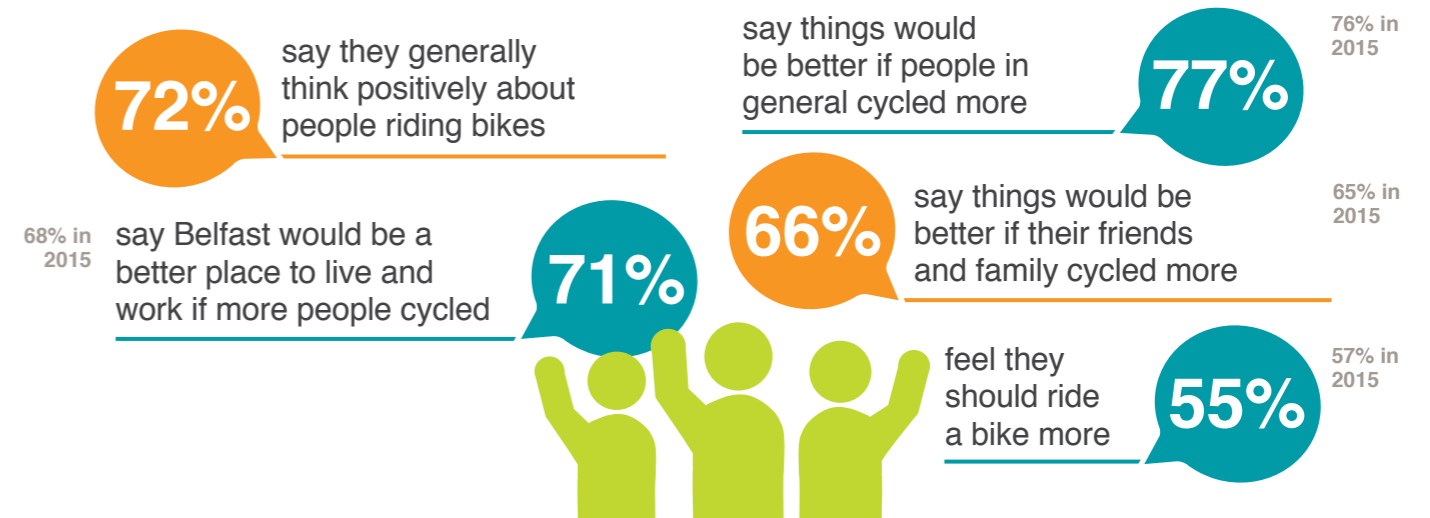


31% don't currently ride a bike, but would like to

54% would like to start riding a bike, or could ride their bike more



Perceptions of cycling are positive





# What the public want

Investment, safety and dedicated space



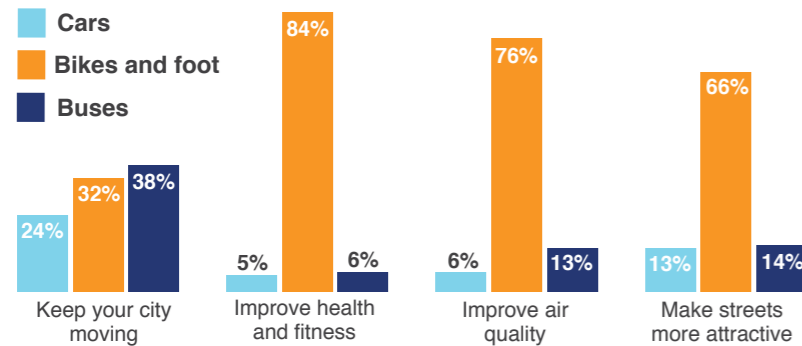
# Bike to the future

Our ambition and plans to make it happen



## Prioritising investment in cycling and walking

Overall, residents in Belfast think more space for cycling, walking and public transport as opposed to additional space for cars, is the best way to keep the city moving, improve people's health, reduce air pollution and make streets more attractive.



74%



of residents would like to see more investment in cycling in Belfast

78% in 2015

This includes 61% of those aged over 65, those least likely to ride a bike

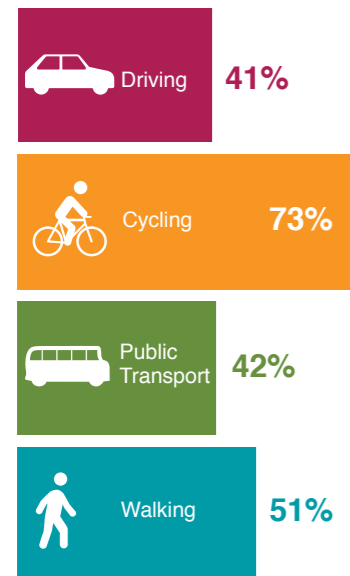
67% in 2015



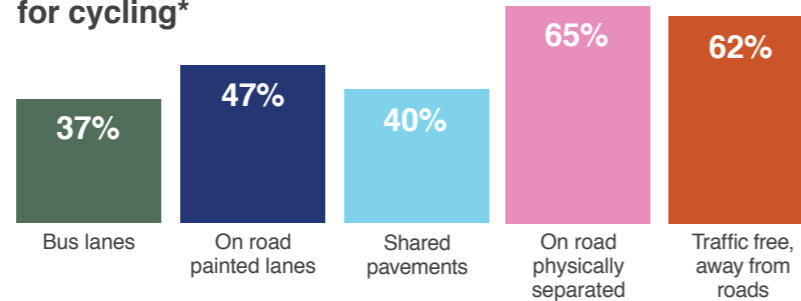
## Improved safety and space for cycling

### Residents think cycling safety needs to be improved

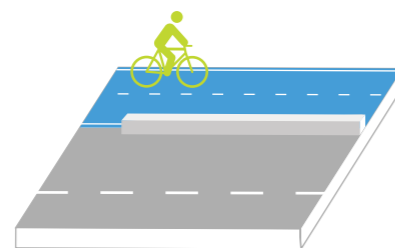
Percentage of people that think safety needs to be improved



### People want dedicated space for cycling\*



What people would find very useful to start cycling/cycle more



81%

of residents support building more protected cycle routes, even when this can mean less room for other road traffic

Northern Ireland's politicians are increasingly talking about moving people, not vehicles, around our towns and cities. This means making the most efficient use of limited space for transport in cities like Belfast by encouraging people out of cars to travel by public transport, bike or foot.

### Belfast Bike Share Scheme

The hugely popular Belfast Bike Share scheme was launched in April 2015 with 300 bikes at 30 docking stations. It has expanded to an additional 10 locations across the city, including the new iconic landmark at C.S. Lewis Square in east Belfast. New stations are planned for west Belfast and Carlisle Circus in the north. 'Belfast Bikes', together with the new bicycle routes in the city centre, have helped commuters, business people, shoppers, students and visitors to enjoy the freedom and confidence to cycle for their everyday journeys.

Many people now recognise the convenience and flexibility of the bicycle and 'Belfast Bikes' have become a normal part of city life. By autumn 2017 around half a million journeys had been made on Belfast Bikes with a total of 400,000km cycled (the distance to the moon!)

The city's investment in Belfast Bikes is part of a wider commitment to help encourage active healthy lifestyles. It is an important part of the Belfast Agenda, which aims to provide more cycle lanes and make Belfast a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally friendly city, where people want to live.

### Belfast Bicycle Network

*Northern Ireland Changing Gear* was published in 2015. This bicycle strategy sets out the need for urban bicycle network plans to guide the future development of bicycle infrastructure in towns and cities. The Department for Infrastructure consulted on its draft *Belfast Bicycle Network* in April 2017. The draft Network outlines the potential for around 130km of convenient, comfortable, continuous and interconnected bicycle routes for the city, with minimum delays, to encourage more people to choose to travel by bicycle rather than taking the car. The routes are, in the main, a combination of traffic-free and segregated routes, bringing safe and attractive cycling facilities within the reach of most people in Belfast.

They build on existing cycling routes enabling people to gain confidence to use the bicycle as an accessible, enjoyable and sustainable way to travel. Bike Life highlighted that the people of this city want more to be spent on bicycle infrastructure and that they believe that traffic-free routes and protected cycle infrastructure is how you increase cycling. The Belfast Bicycle Network is an important first step in delivering that objective and another building block for active travel, helping to create a city where people want to spend time, live, work and visit.

\* The equivalent graph in the 2015 report showed 'very useful' and 'fairly useful' responses combined.



## Notes on terminology and methodology:

The attitudinal survey was conducted May to July 2017.

Due to the rounding up or down of individual figures, the percentages on charts may not total 100% exactly.

Survey results have been tested for change between 2015 and 2017. The level of significance has been set at 0.01 but these should be seen to be indicative only, as they have not been corrected for multiple comparisons. Where a survey result is shown as a change from 2015 this was a statistically significant result at this level.

Note that some values published in 2015 have been recalculated using improved methodology in 2017.

Further details are available at [www.sustrans.org.uk/bikelife](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/bikelife)

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) SCO39263 (Scotland)

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Bike Life Belfast has been funded by The Freshfield Foundation and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI). The project is co-ordinated by Sustrans. The Bike Life Steering Group includes Belfast Strategic Partnership, DfI and the Public Health Agency.

