

# BIKE *life*

BELFAST  
2015



Department for  
**Regional  
Development**  
[www.drndni.gov.uk](http://www.drndni.gov.uk)

  
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# Stepping up a gear

Our vision for cycling in Belfast

Cycling is a simple, straightforward, healthy, cost effective and, in many ways, enjoyable means of transport. But like any way of travelling, it is not an end in itself. The advantage cycling has over other forms of transport is in the far wider benefits it brings to people and communities. Cycling also makes a valuable contribution to dynamic, lively, attractive and safe public spaces – for everyone.

This is why we need to transform Belfast and Northern Ireland into a ‘bicycle society’.

To do this we need information on where we are now and what we need to do to improve cycling. So, it is with great pleasure that I introduce this inaugural Belfast Bike Life report.

‘Bike Life’ has been prepared by Sustrans in partnership with the Department for Regional Development. It presents information on cycling infrastructure in Belfast, and cycling behaviour and attitudes to cycling expressed by Belfast residents. It is the first time that such comprehensive information has been provided for Belfast.

This report will be a source of information for the public, businesses and policy-makers alike to help us shape the future of our capital city.

**Peter May**  
**Permanent Secretary**  
**Department for Regional Development**

# Introducing Bike Life

Sustrans 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 cycling development including cycling conditions, new initiatives and satisfaction with various aspects of cycling.

This is the first of two reports, with the second being published in 2017. The information in this report comes from local data, including a representative survey of over 1,100 residents in Belfast. More details on the report findings and methodology 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 volunteered to have their photos taken for this report.

## KEY FACTS FOR BELFAST AT A GLANCE

Nearly **7 million** bike trips in Belfast in a year

**21%** of people ride a bike once a month or more

**8 in 10 people** support increasing the safety of cycling

**78%** of people in Belfast want to see more spent on cycling

Nearly **£12 million** is the benefit to health in the city, in a single year, from the current level of people riding bikes

**4,457 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>** saved by people making trips by bike rather than driving – equivalent to the annual emissions of over 1,700 cars

**67p per mile** is the saving to individuals and to the local economy, for every mile biked instead of driven – which works out at nearly **£10 million** a year for Belfast at current levels of cycling



# OVERVIEW

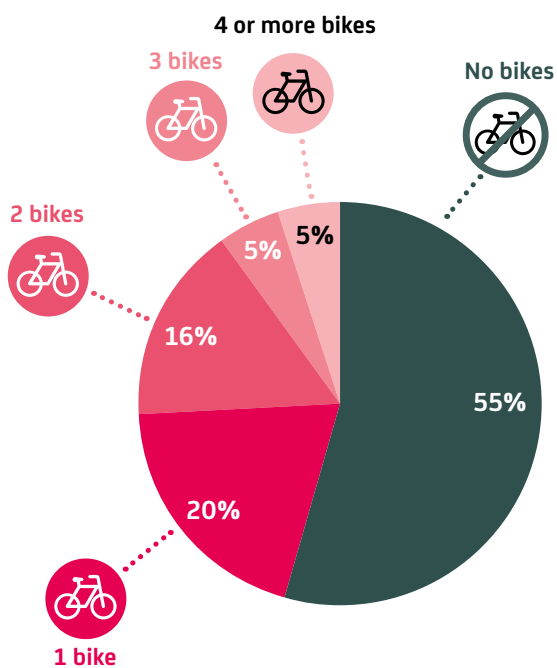
Taking the pulse of bike life in Belfast



## BIKE OWNERSHIP IS A BIG PART OF BELFAST LIFE

Nearly half (**45%**) of people in Belfast live in households that own at least one bike.\*

HOW MANY ADULT BICYCLES DO YOU OWN IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD?

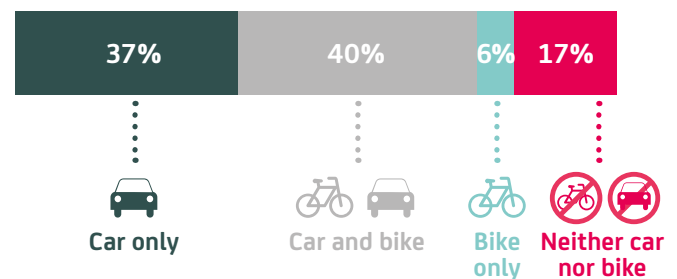


Bike ownership varies with age, with **three in five** of those between 16-24 and 35-44 living in a household with an adult bike, compared to one in ten (**11%**) of those over 75.

There's a big crossover between owning a bike and owning a car – about half of car owners also own a bike.

In Belfast one in six (**17%**) people live in households with neither a car nor a bike, and **6%** have access to at least one bike but no car. Having the choice to ride a bike safely could help many people get to jobs, services, family and friends.

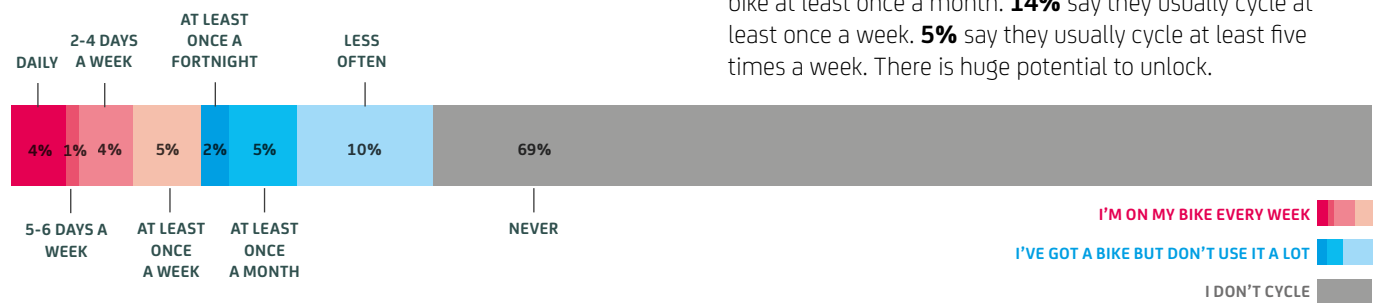
IS A CAR OR BIKE OWNED OR AVAILABLE FOR USE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD?



\*Car and bicycle ownership figures refer to percentages of people living in households that own them. This is different from how census data is usually reported.

# HOW OFTEN ARE PEOPLE RIDING A BIKE?

THINKING OF HOW YOU USUALLY TRAVEL AROUND, HOW OFTEN DO YOU CYCLE?



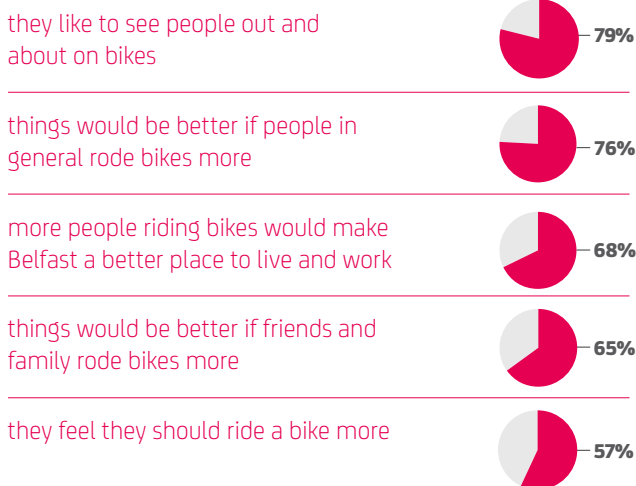
While nearly half of all people live in a household that owns at least one bike, they are not all being used.

One in five (**21%**) people in Belfast say they usually ride a bike at least once a month. **14%** say they usually cycle at least once a week. **5%** say they usually cycle at least five times a week. There is huge potential to unlock.

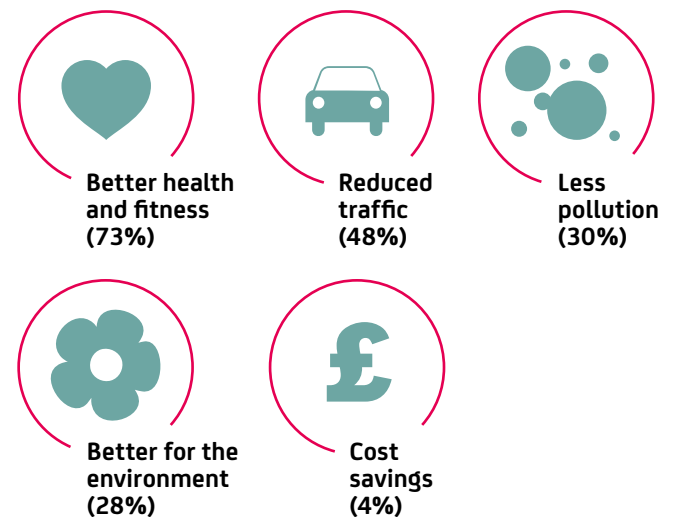
## PERCEPTIONS OF BIKES ARE VERY POSITIVE

The people of Belfast love what bike life can offer them.

### They agree that:

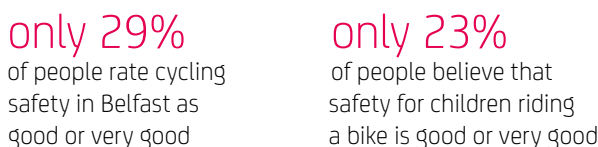


There are lots of reasons why the people of Belfast think more people riding bikes would make the city a better place:



## SAFETY IS A CONCERN AND PEOPLE WANT MORE INVESTMENT

Whilst four in ten (**42%**) people think Belfast is a good place to ride a bike overall, when you dig deeper there are clear concerns about safety.



But it's worth remembering that a serious injury or worse is rare at about **once every 1.8 million** miles pedalled around Belfast.

**Over 8 in 10** residents support improving safety for people riding bikes. Better safety will require more investment.

Across the seven cities involved in Bike Life, the average that people want national governments to be spending on cycling is **£26 per person** per year. In Belfast people want **£25 per head** invested.



\*The question was 'Central and local governments in the UK spend around £300 per person on transport every year. Of this about £3 per person is spent on cycling, rising to £10 per person in some cities. How much do you think should be spent on cycling per person in the UK?'

# VIEWS

from the saddle

"I've been cycling around Belfast for more than five years now and it's been phenomenal. The one thing that would most improve cycling in Belfast would be availability of secure storage."

Andrew Graham



"Cycling is the closest thing to flying. It is a beautiful way to travel, to exercise, to be part of our surroundings."

Hannah Armstrong

"Biking is invigorating and fun and faster than cars through dense traffic. It is healthy, cheap, green and quiet."

Catherine Browne





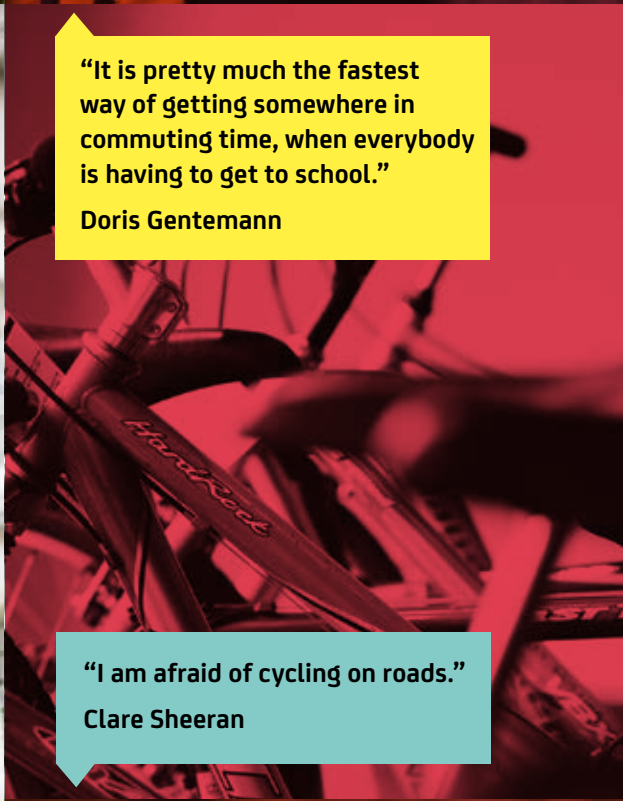
**“I enjoy getting out, keeping fit, the fresh air. There are not enough cycle paths.”**  
**Liam McIlwaine**



**“It is pretty much the fastest way of getting somewhere in commuting time, when everybody is having to get to school.”**  
**Doris Gentemann**



**“I ride a bike because it makes me fall in love with Belfast in new ways every day.”**  
**Ellen Murray**



**“I am afraid of cycling on roads.”**  
**Clare Sheeran**



# IN DEPTH

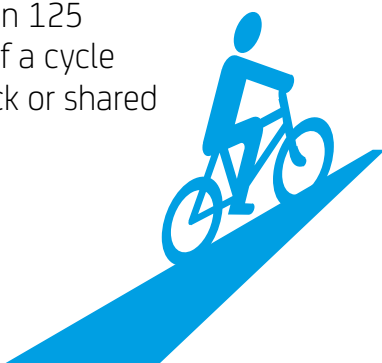
Facts and figures  
for Belfast



## WHAT'S AVAILABLE AND WHO'S IN THE KNOW?

82 miles  
of bike routes  
INCLUDING  
24 miles  
of traffic-free routes  
AND  
12 miles  
of shared-use footpaths

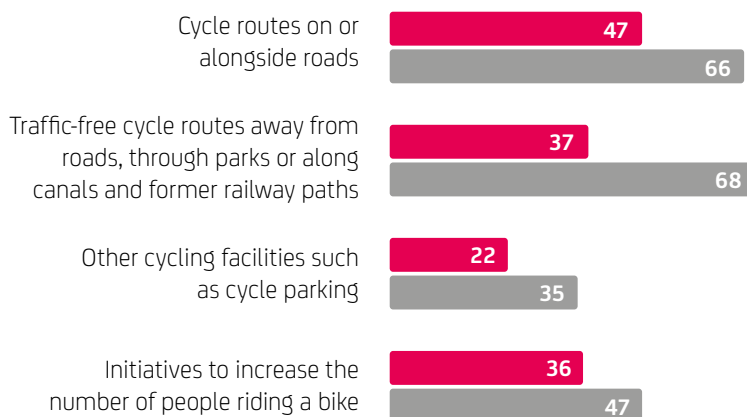
24% of residents  
live within 125  
metres of a cycle  
lane, track or shared  
use path



719  
bike parking spaces  
in the city centre

Awareness of bike routes, bike parking and initiatives to increase levels of bike use are variable amongst residents generally, although those who ride bikes regularly have better knowledge.

### HOW MUCH, IF ANYTHING, WOULD YOU SAY YOU KNOW ABOUT THE FOLLOWING?



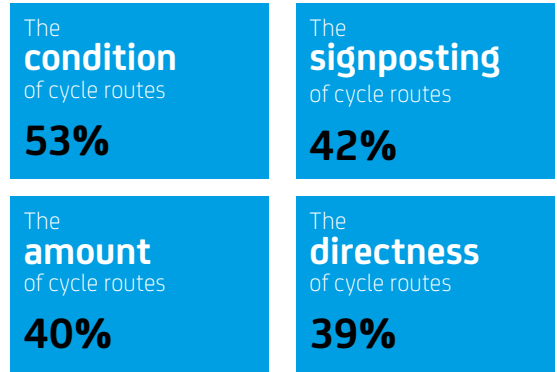
- Residents – % great or fair amount of knowledge
- Regular bike riders\* – % great or fair amount of knowledge

\*Regular bike riders are people who had ridden a bike within four weeks of being surveyed.



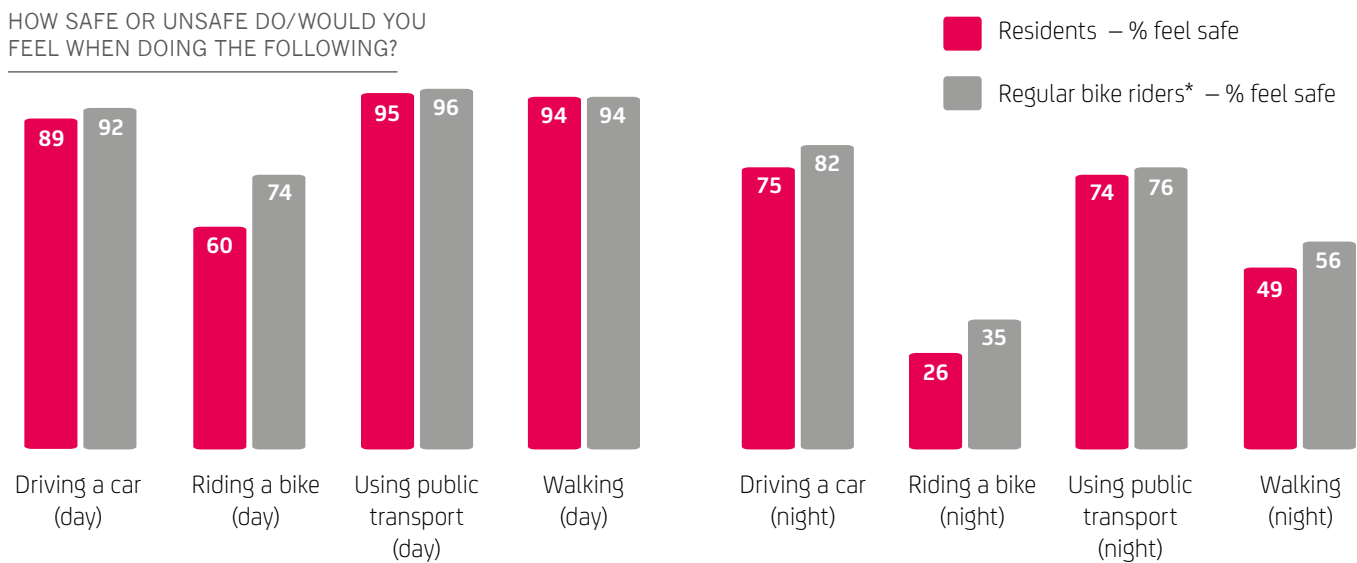
# HOW DO PEOPLE RATE BELFAST'S CYCLE ROUTES?

Four in ten (**42%**) residents think Belfast is a good place to ride a bike overall, with people rating the following as 'very good' or 'good'. ▶



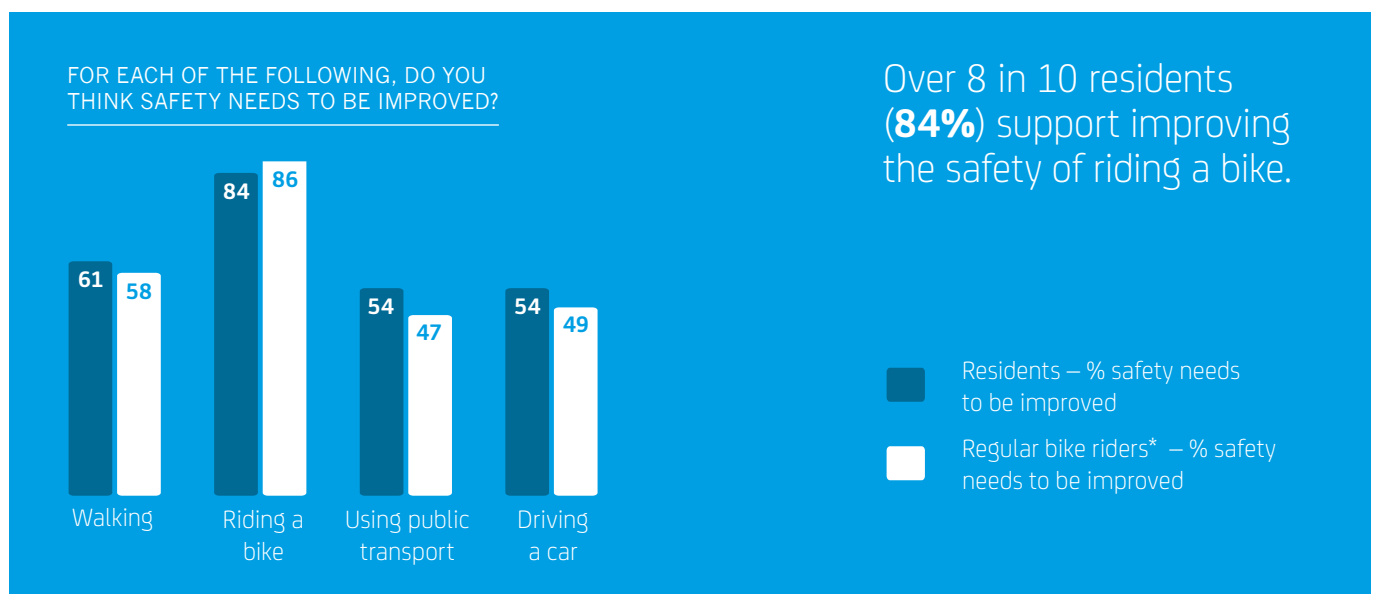
## RIDING A BIKE FEELS LESS SAFE THAN OTHER WAYS OF TRAVELLING

HOW SAFE OR UNSAFE DO/WOULD YOU FEEL WHEN DOING THE FOLLOWING?



## PEOPLE WANT IMPROVED SAFETY FOR CYCLING

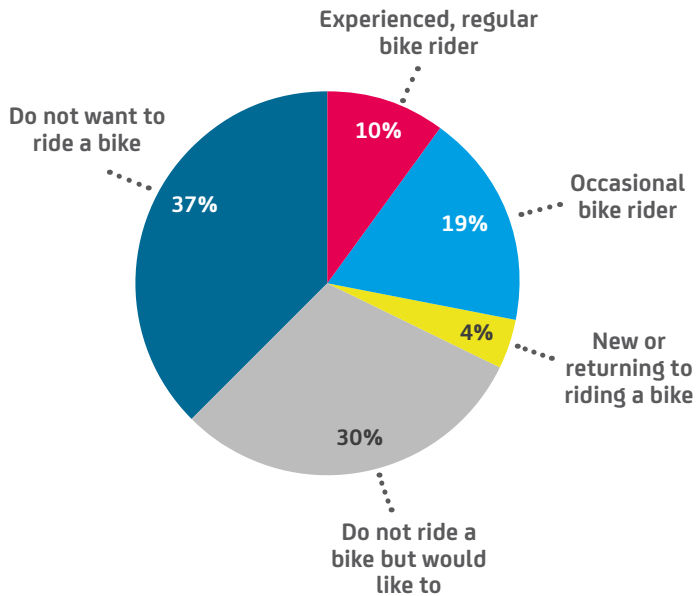
FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING, DO YOU THINK SAFETY NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED?



Over 8 in 10 residents (**84%**) support improving the safety of riding a bike.

# HOW DO PEOPLE SEE THEMSELVES WHEN IT COMES TO RIDING A BIKE?

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BEST DESCRIBES YOU?



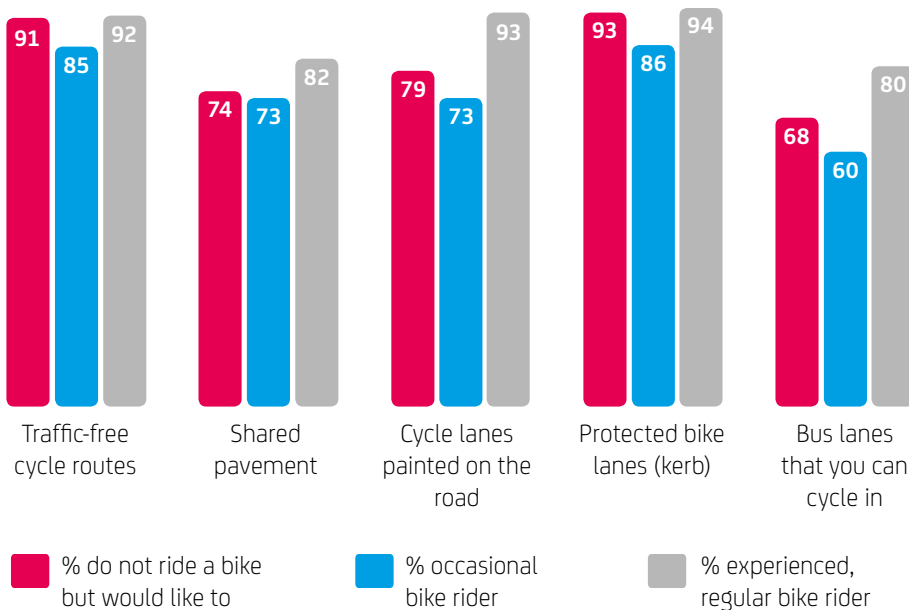
Whilst over a third of people (**37%**) do not want to ride a bike, nearly a third (**30%**) of people say that whilst they don't currently ride a bike, they'd like to.

Combined with new, returning, and occasional bike riders, over half (**53%**) of people in Belfast could potentially begin to ride a bike or ride their bike more.

# WHAT KIND OF BIKE ROUTES COULD GET MORE PEOPLE CYCLING?

Protected bike lanes are the kinds of routes most people want to help them start cycling or to cycle more – **93%** of people who do not ride a bike but would like to, and **86%** of occasional bike riders say this.

WOULD ANY OF THE FOLLOWING HELP YOU START CYCLING/CYCLE MORE?



A large majority

(**78%**) of residents would like to see more investment in cycling.



Support is high

across all sections of the population, including **63%** of people aged over 75, those least likely to cycle.

# WHO'S RIDING A BIKE AND WHERE?

Over 36 million miles are pedalled by people in Belfast every year



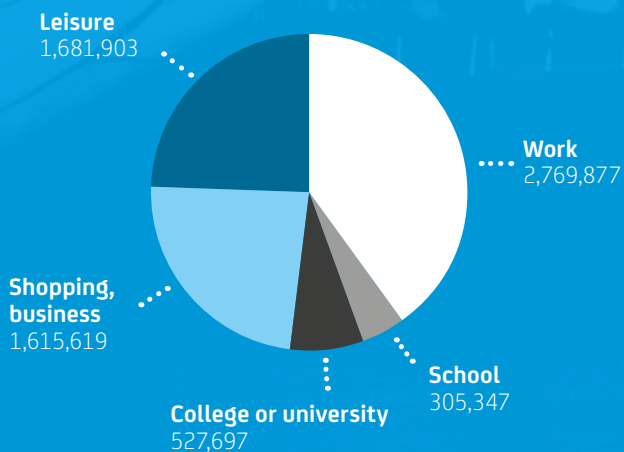
Nearly 7 million trips\* are made by bike in Belfast in a year which, averaged out over the population, means 20 trips per person per year

Men are nearly twice as likely to ride bikes as women – **66%** compared to **34%**

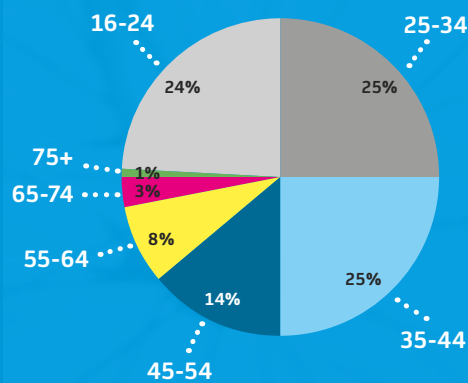


4% of people riding bikes in Belfast identify as black or minority ethnic, compared to 3% of the population of Belfast

## Number of bike trips by purpose



## When it comes to the age of people riding bikes in Belfast, usage decreases with age



\*Levels of cycling in this report are estimated from data generated by a survey of Belfast residents. This differs from other methodology used in Belfast, but ensures a baseline for comparison with other Bike Life cities, and levels of change to be reported in 2017. Based on the annual Travel Survey for Northern Ireland, DRD currently estimates around 5 million bike journeys per year in Belfast.



# HOW WE'RE DEVELOPING BIKE LIFE IN BELFAST



In recent years there has been a heightened interest in cycling in the city and more widely in Northern Ireland. Two documents which have provided focus for this interest are: 'Belfast Active Travel Action Plan' (November 2014) and 'Northern Ireland Changing Gear – a Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland' (August 2015). Both documents identify the following three key elements of a 'cycling revolution'

and the Bicycle Strategy identifies the need for a focused approach to the provision of bicycle facilities. Key partners throughout the city are already involved in the promotion of cycling and in funding projects to make Belfast a bicycle friendly city. Some of the projects featured on these pages are examples of this partnership work.

## Build a comprehensive network for the bike

### Belfast City Centre Bicycle Schemes

New routes in Belfast city centre are being rolled out to provide safe and direct cycling and to help more people to choose to travel by bike. These schemes will create the start of a network of high quality, joined up radial routes connecting the city centre and providing links to shops, community destinations, schools, colleges and work. It is planned to deliver a number of these routes early in 2016.

### Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge

Plans to build a bridge connecting the Gasworks site to Ormeau Park are progressing. The bridge will be part of a continuous cycle link from south east Belfast to the city centre and will also improve access to leisure facilities and parks for local communities, commuters and those working in the city centre.

## Support people who travel by bike

### Active School Travel

The Active School Travel programme aims to provide school children with the skills needed to cycle or walk to school safely, and also works with parents and teachers to develop a culture of active travel.

Between September 2013 and June 2016 it is expected that over 180 schools will take part, with primary schools making up the majority. When asked how they usually travel to school, 7% of pupils at schools in Belfast reported cycling to school and this increased to 9% after one year of engagement.

### Belfast Bikes

The Belfast Bike Share scheme was launched in April 2015, providing 300 public bikes, and 30 bike docking stations in Belfast city centre. The bikes are being used widely by residents, tourists, students and commuters for various types of journey. There have been over 100,000 journeys on the bikes in the first six months of operation.



## Promote the bike for everyday journeys

### Active Belfast Challenge

May 2015 saw the first year of the Active Belfast Challenge – a highlight of the Leading the Way with Active Travel programme.

The initiative attracted hundreds of registrations, and over 40 workplaces and organisations in Belfast took part. Participants logged active and sustainable journeys to be in with a chance of winning prizes. Individual and workplace leader boards tallied up the number of journeys made, creating healthy competition within and between workplaces.

It is intended that the challenge will run for the month of May each year to encourage Belfast workplaces to get more active.

### Ciclovia

Belfast's first Ciclovia took place on Sunday 4th October 2015. Ciclovia involved the morning closure of a number of roads to motorised traffic between Botanic Gardens and City Hall. The aim was to give residents free access to city streets for cycling and other community activities to encourage family participation, healthier lifestyles and community spirit.



# BIKE TO THE FUTURE



**There's big potential to change things** and to make riding a bike in Belfast part of everyday life. With the **majority of residents thinking positively about people riding bikes**, and having a clear desire to make riding bikes safer and to see much higher levels of investment in achieving this, there's a clear call for change across the city.

In the short-term we'll be making everyone more aware of what we've already got – if even those riding bikes don't know where bike racks are, we need to be telling them.

And we'll be working harder to meet expectations, because the survey also showed that **over half of the residents of Belfast have higher expectations** than last year when it comes to a city fit for bikes.

There's a clear need for us to focus on safety to ensure more people who would like to ride a bike have that choice, since over half of residents would like to ride, or ride more.

It will require a wide range of partners to work together to increase the levels of cycling in Belfast. Given there are benefits to the economy, health, environment, transport and education sectors there are a wide range of organisations that can play their part both individually and working together. This includes government, business and voluntary organisations across the city.

We'll be using this report to measure progress, and to help us prioritise what we need to do to ensure far more of those who don't ride, but want to, can.

And we are listening to what people say – we know that to make it safe for people of all ages and all abilities we need to be doing more to protect people on bikes. That means doing the hard things like creating protected bike lanes, and addressing safety.

The cycling revolution is underway. We have already been working with partner organisations including the health sector and the council who have already invested significant funding in some of the initiatives referred to in this document. One of our goals is to increase how much we invest in cycling in the city, to work towards achieving big change and to report on progress every couple of years.



**A note on terminology and methodology:**

We refer to people and residents rather than respondents when reporting findings of the attitudinal surveys.

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

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



Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable. We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.



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

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**For further information please contact** [cycling.unit@drdni.gov.uk](mailto:cycling.unit@drdni.gov.uk)

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