

Executive summary

In May 2022, Transport Scotland commissioned Cycling UK to explore what is currently known about children cycling and the impact on parents and carers. The present research offers a literature review and qualitative research (14 semi-structured interviews) with parents in Scotland who all had children that cycled.

The literature review identified some existing data on the amount that children in Scotland are cycling, but none that focus on benefits for parents or families from children cycling. Existing research from elsewhere, while scarce, indicated potential benefits including enjoyment for the parent, fulfilment of a desire to teach children to cycle well, cycling more for leisure, and in some cases enabling quicker journey times.

The school run has been the focus on monitoring children's cycling in Scotland. However, more attention could be paid to monitoring of the other journeys that children make by bike as they are likely to be significant for families and children.

Parents prioritise benefits to the child from cycling

Parents put benefits to their child above their own in priorities and thought about benefits to their child both in the present and for the child's future. These included improving the **child's independence, health, wellbeing, connection to nature, reducing screen time and cycling skills**. As one parent put it, *"You don't need a password to operate your bike."* Parents perceived cycling as a **life skill** that would enable transport, improved opportunities and freedom in adulthood.

Children cycling independently helped families juggle activities and time pressures

Parents felt the benefit of saving time and stress on the school run but also for **extracurricular journeys** after school, on weekends and during holidays. Independent cycling improved access to non-school activities and gave parents fewer pressures when working. This particularly benefited parents of multiple children and single parent households.

Concerns for safety were the biggest barriers to children cycling

Reflecting findings in the literature review, safety was the main concern. **Other barriers were present**, including lack of school support, cycling skills, motivation of the child and whether existing forms of transport (e.g., walking or free bus travel) were satisfactory enough to not warrant a change.

Parents found benefits from both accompanied and independent cycling

Cycling – together or independently – saved money on fuel and car expenses, bus fares and as an alternative to more expensive days out. **Parents had a range of reasons to reduce car use**, including avoiding traffic and reducing the number of cars at school gates as well as environmental and financial motivations. Parents enjoyed spending quality time with their children cycling together as a family, and considered it saved them **money, time and reduced car use for short trips**. Cycling together could be **inclusive** for different ages and abilities within the family, including disabilities, with **mental and physical health benefits** for the parents as well as children.

Further factors in children's cycling included the price and quality of children's bikes, the impact of starting early with regular cycling and bike storage issues.