

# Campaigner briefing - How providing space for cycling and walking revives high streets

## Introduction

This briefing is intended to equip you with arguments that are likely to be persuasive to politicians that might otherwise be uninterested or unsympathetic to pro-cycling policies.

It is based on the findings of a report called Move Free written by the think-tank and urban consultancy, Create Streets, published in March 2024. Cycling UK commissioned the report from Create Streets in order to explore how making it easy to get around towns and cities in as many ways as possible has a positive impact on our lives.

This briefing provides evidence and arguments on how providing space for walking and cycling can revive our high streets.

## Key Points from the Move Free report

- **Giving people the freedom to choose how they move boosts local economies:** Contrary to common perceptions, reductions in parking spaces, coupled with investments in cycling infrastructure, have been associated with increased customer spending and foot traffic. Evidence suggests that walkable and cyclable high streets outperform car-centric counterparts in terms of commercial viability.
- **Safer and more walkable streets drive commercial success:** Studies indicate that pedestrian-oriented environments correlate with higher retail revenues. Pedestrianised streets often experience a 10-25% increase in turnover, while projects prioritising pedestrians, cycling, and public transport yield an average retail sales boost of 30%.
- **Pedestrians and cyclists spend more on their high streets:** Surveys indicate that people who walk or cycle to local shops tend to spend more per month than those who drive. Creating pedestrian and cyclist-friendly environments can attract more shoppers and boost local economies.

## Background

Traditionally, high streets served as vibrant hubs where people congregated to conduct business, socialise, and partake in cultural activities. However, the rise of car-centric urban development and online shopping has posed challenges to our traditional shopping destinations. From the emergence of out-of-town shopping centres to the surge in online retail, high streets are facing declining footfall and increasing vacancy rates.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these trends, prompting shifts in consumer behaviour and remote working arrangements, trends which seem to have persisted post-pandemic. Major city centres experienced a notable decline in footfall, exacerbating the prevalence of vacant retail spaces. However, local centres and high streets exhibited greater resilience, highlighting the potential for revitalisation through a recalibration in how we move around our urban areas.

## People need transport choice, rather than being forced to rely on using a car

In some situations, cars offer unparalleled convenience and flexibility, particularly for those living in rural communities. However, an overreliance on cars in urban areas has resulted in congestion, air pollution, and the erosion of pedestrian-friendly environments. All of which have contributed to the decline of many town centres around the UK.

As cycle campaigners we can challenge the status quo by calling for more choice in how people travel in towns, including by cycling. We need to convince decisionmakers that cars can be part of the whole transportation system but should not be dominant in many urban areas and town centres.

### Success stories

The pedestrianisation of Strøget in Copenhagen in 1962 was protested and derided – something that continues to happen today with similar schemes. It is now one of the longest shopping streets in Europe and continues to be a great success. From a heavily trafficked thoroughfare to a shopping space that is used by up to 80,000 people per day for shopping, dining, and leisure. This type of urban revival is well within the reach of towns and cities across the UK. The success of Strøget shows that by giving people more choice in transport and moving away from a car-centric model we can liberate our town centres and give our high streets a new lease of life.

Several other case studies illustrate the transformative impact of pedestrianisation and cycling infrastructure on local economies:

- **Brooklyn, New York:** The introduction of pedestrian plazas led to a 172% increase in retail sales for surrounding businesses.
- **Times Square, New York:** Temporary traffic closures resulted in a 71% increase in business revenue and a 180% rise in shop rents, cementing its status as a premier retail destination.
- **Toronto, Canada:** A study into the removal of 136 parking spaces to make way for a bike lane, found that average customer spend increased 32%, the number of customers increased 43% and customers were 50% more likely to spend more than \$100 after the removal of on street spaces and the installation of bike lanes.
- **Brighton, West Sussex:** Transformation of the busy New Road in the city centre into a pedestrian priority shared space led to restaurants and bars now providing outdoor seating. There was a 162% increase in footfall by 2011, 600% increase in people staying and sitting, and enjoying the new space, rather than just passing through. It is now the fourth most popular spots in the city to spend time.

### What you can campaign for locally

The revitalisation of Britain's high streets is totally intertwined with a rethink on how we move around them. **Ask your council or local decision makers to:**

- Make high streets and urban centres more people friendly rather than car centric.
- Give people more choice in how they travel into and through urban areas, rather than needing to use a car.
- Create safe space for cycling and walking as part of the solution to reviving our high streets.

If you would like to read the full Move Free report, please [click here](#)