



Best practice in engaging disabled people in cycling for active travel

RESEARCH SUMMARY REPORT

Funded by



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“ I thought it was gonna be the end of my cycling and it’s not. It’s opened up new opportunities for me.”

ICE participant



Foreword

Cycling has the power to transform lives, connecting people to their communities, supporting independence, improving health, and enabling low-cost, low-carbon journeys. Yet for too long, disabled people have been excluded from the full benefits of cycling due to systemic, social, and practical barriers.

This summary report presents insights and recommendations drawn from our Inclusive Cycling Experience (ICE) programme — developed by Cycling UK, delivered in conjunction with local delivery partners, and funded through the Motability Foundation.

The findings are clear: disabled people want to cycle. However, the infrastructure, services, and systems surrounding active travel have too often failed to reflect their needs and aspirations. There is a notable lack of active travel-focused provision and more must be done to support the transition from leisure to everyday transport cycling.

This summary report sets out a series of practical recommendations — from promoting inclusive imagery and offering adapted cycles, to training carers, working in partnership with local services and providing the correct storage solutions. Our aim is to inspire more inclusive, person-centred delivery that recognises the diversity of disabled people's experiences and choices.

James Scott

Director of Behaviour Change and Development, Cycling UK



Executive summary

This report explores how inclusive cycling initiatives can enable disabled people to adopt cycling as a form of everyday transport. It is based on research from Cycling UK which addresses a significant gap in existing knowledge and evidence around engaging disabled people in cycling for active travel.

Key findings

- While cycling is widely promoted as a sustainable and healthy mode of transport, disabled people continue to face unequal access to opportunities in this space.
- Data shows that disabled people are less likely to cycle, not due to lack of interest, but because of a range of barriers including limited provision. Much of the current inclusive cycling provision in the UK focuses on leisure rather than transport, leaving a critical gap in support for disabled individuals who may wish to cycle for daily travel.
- Infrastructure challenges are often cited as a major barrier. Whilst infrastructure is important, insights from a wide range of providers and organisations working with disabled people highlights additional gaps in opportunity, capacity-building, and the broader support needed to make active travel truly inclusive.

“ So basically, our objective is to enable them to be as independent and as empowered as possible.”

Inclusive cycling provider



Recommendations

- Normalise and promote cycling for transport through inclusive imagery, messaging and public engagement.
- Provide access to a variety of cycles, supported by flexible loan schemes and storage solutions.
- Offer tailored skills sessions, confidence-building programmes, route planning assistance, and purchasing advice.
- Train carers and support workers, and develop inclusive, person-centred programmes that focus on progression pathways from leisure to transport cycling.
- Strengthen infrastructure and local support to help disabled cyclists navigate their environments safely and independently.

Conclusion

Disabled people can and want to cycle for transport. By addressing the barriers they face and building on existing strengths within the inclusive cycling community, we can create a culture where cycling is a visible, viable, and empowering option for all.



The full literature review and research report on which this summary report is based can be found here.



Introduction

This report summarises research conducted by Cycling UK and funded by the Motability Foundation. It explores how inclusive cycling providers can enable disabled people to access cycling as a mode of transport.

Disabled people face significant transport inequalities, especially in cycling (Transport for All, 2023; Sustrans and Arup, 2020). In England, they are twice as likely to be inactive (Sport England, 2018) and over four times more likely to report feeling lonely 'often or always' (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

Cycling offers physical and mental health benefits and, when cycling for travel, can also promote independence, mobility and social inclusion. To unlock these benefits, it is crucial to address the barriers disabled people face in cycling for transport. This research aimed to understand how to overcome these barriers and support greater participation.

The Inclusive Cycling Experience

The research draws on learning from Cycling UK's Inclusive Cycling Experience (ICE) programme, which operates in Greater Manchester and Inverness. ICE provides free access to cycling through skills sessions, try-outs, cycle loans, and personalised support to help disabled individuals to feel more confident in the use of cycling for everyday travel. It was launched to address a gap in transport-focused cycling provision for disabled people.

“For me, [it was] getting that kind of confidence to cycle in different areas.”

ICE participant



Existing evidence

The first stage of the research involved a literature review to examine existing knowledge on engaging disabled people in cycling as a form of active travel.

There are huge disparities in access to cycling amongst disabled people in comparison to non-disabled people

In the UK, 9% of disabled people cycle at least once a week, in comparison to 17% of non-disabled people. 78% of disabled people said they never cycle (Sustrans and Arup, 2020). In another study, 41% of disabled respondents said they could not cycle at all (Transport for All, 2023).

Disabled people are interested in cycling for active travel

Previous Cycling UK (2021) research found that 62% of disabled people in Scotland were interested in cycle share or loan schemes because they would enable them to cycle more often. Almost half wanted to try a cycle before potentially buying one and felt it would help them get advice on the right cycle.

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Disabled people face a range of barriers to cycling

Insufficient or inaccessible infrastructure is a major barrier to disabled people cycling for transport (Wheels for Wellbeing, 2021; Sustrans, 2023). However, while infrastructure improvements are crucial, there are further barriers. These include:

- Perceptions of cycling, which mean that 23% of disabled people think cycling is not for people like them (Sustrans and Arup, 2020).
- A lack of opportunities to hire non-standard cycles (Transport for All, 2023).
- The cost of non-standard cycles and storage (Transport for All, 2023).
- A lack of adult sessions to help disabled people to improve their cycling skills and confidence (Transport for All, 2023).

There is a lack of evidence on how to effectively reduce the barriers for disabled people to enable them to cycle

Large scale academic reviews have consistently identified that disability and the experiences of disabled people have not been considered enough when research about walking, wheeling and cycling is conducted (Roaf et al., 2024; Clayton et al., 2017).

“ I covered more miles than I have in years, and it’s given me back my independence. ”

ICE participant



Our findings

The second part of the research involved interviews and focus groups with disabled people, inclusive cycling providers, active travel, cycling and disability organisations, and academics.

There is an unmet need in provision for active travel

Despite excellent provision of leisure cycling opportunities in a range of providers across the UK, we found a gap in the existing offer for targeted support and initiatives focused on cycling for transport.

- Most inclusive cycling opportunities offer sessions in traffic-free or low-traffic areas using non-standard cycles. These initiatives provide immensely valuable health, wellbeing, and social benefits.
- However, few providers include off-site cycle loans, explicit encouragement of skills relevant for building confidence on roads, route mapping, or support around storage and practicalities of cycles as modes of transport for disabled people.
- This gap in provision may stem from project aims, funding limitations, or lack of awareness.

Some providers reported interest from participants in cycling for transport. However, meeting this request was challenging due to a wide range of barriers.

“This gap in terms of transition to transport or cycling independently... this is the hardest transition to make, this is an unmet need.” Cycling organisation

While not all disabled people want to or are able to cycle for travel, many would benefit from better opportunities, guidance, and support to do so.

“When people want to go wider than the park, that is when the barriers kick in. But our role is to help them navigate the barriers.” Inclusive cycling provider



Recommendations for delivering cycling for active travel

Whilst there is a gap in the existing provision, there are important ways in which some providers, including Cycling UK's ICE programme, are enabling disabled people to access cycling for everyday travel.

The following best practice recommendations have been generated from the research.

1: Inspiring and encouraging people to consider cycling for active travel

Raising the profile of cycling as an active travel option for disabled people will help to change perceptions around disabled people cycling for transport.

Raising awareness of the positive outcomes of active travel interventions and how these can work in practice will demonstrate the opportunities that are possible.

Marketing materials should contain images of different people cycling; different types of non-standard cycles; and people cycling for transport in different locations, showing the variety of options.

“ People need to be able to see others like them doing this, to think ‘I might be able to do that too’. It is inspirational.”
Inclusive cycling provider

“ It was the first spark in my husband's eyes that I had seen for years when this was spoken about.”
ICE participant's family member





2: Appropriate cycle availability and flexibility

It is important that disabled people have opportunities to explore cycles and adaptations that may be more comfortable and flexible to use on infrastructure, easier to store or less expensive to purchase, as an important element in making active travel viable for them.

“ I think just getting people to know that there are different kinds of bikes available and different adaptations. Not many people know that there's so many different trikes and adapted bikes that are available.”
Inclusive cycling provider

3: Building skills and confidence to take a loan

Offering skills and confidence sessions tailored to individual needs is important, with steps to enable progression to active travel, for example from sessions held indoors to develop an individual's confidence to move outdoors to a traffic-free environment, and eventually to transition to areas with traffic.

Group sessions and led rides also enable people to learn from their peers in an informal way. This could include talking about and gaining advice on purchasing cycles (types of cycles and where to buy them), how to maintain cycles, and to learn about local routes.

4: Providing loans to use out and about

Providing opportunities for people to try out cycles on the roads and cycle paths in which they would be using them is crucial to ensure the cycle is practical, comfortable and easy to use.

“ It was really valuable for me being able to bring it home on loan for a couple of weeks because then, you know, that enabled me to be sure that it could cope with the terrain that I wanted to take it on.” ICE participant



5: Supporting with local routes and infrastructure

Helping people with route planning, creating routes, and working with them to identify routes that work for them are key to helping people to be able to identify ways in which they could cycle for everyday journeys.

“ We can also give some advice on local routes. Infrastructure is a barrier, although progression is being made, and we can advise on what some of the local infrastructure barriers are and suggest routes.” Inclusive cycling provider

Offering buddy rides and travel support on a one-to-one basis, as well as through led rides as a group in new locations can give greater confidence in cycling in a range of different places.

6: Providing knowledge and advice on purchasing cycles

Having links and / or knowledge about local providers enables deliverers to offer advice on the purchase of cycles or to point people in the right direction for more information.

This does not overcome the issue of the cost of non-standard cycles. However, for those who are in a position to consider purchase then having trusted sources of information on how to take the next steps is valuable.

7: Training for those supporting disabled people

Offering training or support for carers, support workers or the families of disabled people would help them to more confidently support the people that they care for, particularly in terms of helping with adjustments and being able to assist with some basic maintenance skills where needed.

8: Finding storage solutions

Supporting disabled people and their carers to learn how to move, fold down and lift cycles is important to address the barriers disabled people may face in manoeuvring large and heavy cycles.

“ I could check whether I could actually lift it. Just simple things like that because it’s very easy to get into. It’s like ‘alright, but if you can’t actually manoeuvre it when you’re not cycling, there’s no point’. So it was really great to be able to try all those aspects of it.” ICE participant

Providing advice on the purchase of storage solutions may help to overcome storage barriers for some disabled people.

Considering shorter term day loans for those that cannot store overnight can be a further solution to the storage barriers that some people face. Offering loans for periods measured in hours means that someone could collect a cycle and use it for a half or full day to undertake local journeys.

“ I’m a wheelchair user, and I don’t have a place to store a bike that size. So having those sessions that I can just, local sessions that are not far away from where I stay for me, works brilliantly because I can just let you guys know, come in, use the bikes how long as I want and just go back home.” ICE participant

Further recommendations for delivering inclusive cycling interventions

The research also uncovered further valuable insights into the effective delivery of cycling interventions for disabled people – insights that are highly relevant for creating inclusive leisure opportunities, as well as for those supporting active travel initiatives. More detail on these can be found in the full research report.



Next steps

Across the UK, there is already outstanding practice underway. As a sector, we have a strong foundation to learn from, grow upon, and use to share knowledge and drive continued improvement.

- The findings from this research will support the planning and implementation of future inclusive cycling initiatives and will continue to inform the delivery of the ICE programme.
- Ongoing research and evaluation by Cycling UK will also further examine effective delivery methods and the broader impacts of inclusive cycling opportunities.
- Cycling UK is collaborating with key stakeholders and sector experts to build on this research and continue to develop best practice for delivering both the ICE programme and inclusive active travel initiatives more widely.

“Come down, try out the bikes and you will be surprised what you are able to do.”

Inclusive cycling provider



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Definitions

Throughout this report, the term 'disabled' is used to refer to anyone who faces access barriers due to a physical or mental impairment. The terms 'cycling' and 'cycle' are used to refer to journeys made on all types of cycle including two-wheeled pedal bikes, e-bikes, trikes, handcycles, cargo-bikes, recumbents, and tandems.

Inclusive and preferred language

This report aims to use inclusive writing and preferred language around disability. However, there are some examples of quotations used which do not use preferred language. When discussing and summarising the research findings, preferred language has been used, however all quotations have been written as verbatim in their original format.

The Motability Foundation is an independent charity that invests in support, transport programmes and research which are critical to giving disabled people in the UK the ability to get around. It oversees the delivery of the Motability Scheme and helps those most in need to access it. It awards grants to charities and organisations that provide different types of transport, or work towards making transport accessible. The Motability Foundation also works with the public and private sectors, and disabled people and groups to create and advocate for inclusive mobility.

Cycling UK enables and inspires people from all backgrounds and abilities to experience cycling's joys and benefits. We speak up for all who cycle to make sure it's a safe and easy choice for everyone to travel, explore and have fun. Ride with us for happier, healthier and greener lives.



The full literature review and research report on which this summary report is based can be found here.



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