

Cycling UK briefing – Scottish Parliament election 2026

Investment in Active Travel

To support a healthier, fairer and more sustainable Scotland the next Scottish Government must increase investment in schemes that enable people to walk, wheel and cycle – i.e. active travel. This investment should be delivered through sustained multi-year funding for both capital infrastructure (e.g. high-quality cycle paths) and revenue projects (e.g. community cycle training, bike access schemes, local travel planning).

Cycling UK's manifesto asks

The next Scottish Government should deliver:

- **At least 10% of the transport budget spent on walking, wheeling and cycling.**
- **Sustained multi-year budgets** for both capital projects, like high-quality cycle paths, and ongoing costs, such as community-based projects which enable more people to cycle.

Context

Funding for active travel schemes has increased over the course of the parliament but growth has stalled at approximately 6% of the transport budget for the past few years. The Scottish Government's [Cycling Framework for Active Travel](#) (2023) commits to making cycling a realistic, everyday choice by 2030 and aims to allocate 10% of the transport budget to active travel spending.

Active travel is central to achieving Scotland's wider governmental goals: reducing emissions, tackling health inequalities, and supporting inclusive economic growth.

Evidence and Impact

- **Level of investment:** [Research by IPPR](#) calculated that to create world-class cycling infrastructure governments need to spend at least 10% of transport budgets on active travel.
- **Increased cycling:** High-quality local networks in cities like Edinburgh and Glasgow have already shown positive outcomes, e.g. Glasgow's [South City Way](#) saw a 46% increase in cycling numbers in a year and now 15% of journeys along the route are cycled – way above the national average.
- **Economic return:** For every £1 spent on cycling and walking schemes in the UK, [£5.62 worth of benefits](#) are achieved on average.

- Health and wellbeing: Regular active travel can cut the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and depression. The annual health economic benefit just from people commuting to work in Scotland by foot or bike is £671 million
- Equity and inclusion: Active travel infrastructure improves access to education, jobs and services, particularly for low-income households where car ownership is limited.

Conclusion

Cities in Scotland are already demonstrating the transformative impact that well-planned, well-funded active travel investment can deliver - from rising cycling levels in cities to neighbourhood improvements and progress toward public health and climate goals. But current spending remains below what is needed to meet national ambitions, and momentum risks stalling without a step change in commitment.