

Cycling UK briefing – Scottish Parliament election 2026

More children cycling

Every day in Scotland, countless children are dropped off at school by car, yet there is growing evidence that many would much rather travel under their own steam, by bike. The emergence of organised 'Bike Buses' (groups of supervised children cycling to school together) demonstrates both the desire of young people to cycle and the importance of creating safe, supportive conditions for that to happen. To meet goals on child health, clean air and road safety, ensuring that every child can cycle safely must be a priority for the next Scottish Government.

Cycling UK's manifesto asks

The next Scottish Government should deliver:

- **Access to Bikeability training for every child**, so that they have the skills to cycle.
- Statutory guidance and a requirement for councils to review all roads around schools with a view to **introduce 'school streets' wherever possible**.

Context

There is a huge variation in the percentage of primary schools in each local authority area delivering Level 2 Bikeability Scotland training for pupils. In some council areas 100% of schools offer Bikeability, whereas the lowest was 8% of schools in 2023/24. 64% of children report having done Bikeability training but only 6.6% of primary school children and 1.4% of secondary school pupils cycle to school.

In 2021 the Scottish Government committed to 'encourage more Safe to School initiatives, with the aim of ensuring every child who lives within two miles of school is able to walk or wheel safely'. The number of safe school streets in Scotland is not recorded consistently.

Evidence and Impact

- Children want to cycle: 48% of children want to cycle more - 84% support more traffic-free paths and quiet routes; 77% support more cycle paths along roads separated from cars; 66% support closing streets outside schools to cars during school drop-off and pick-up.
- Cycling to school: A systematic review found that personal (skill, confidence), social (parental attitudes) and environmental (infrastructure, distance, traffic) barriers all impede children's cycling to school.

- Perception of safety: In a survey, 70% of parents were concerned about the safety of children cycling on roads. Regular cycling by children has reduced in recent years.
- Bikeability benefits: Bikeability provides structured cycle training for children in traffic-free and on-road environments. Evidence shows that children who have been through the training have better wellbeing and are more likely to cycle or walk to school as a result.
- School Streets benefits: The School Streets model - restricting motor-traffic outside schools at drop-off/pick-up times - has shown measurable benefits. In London, School Streets led to reductions in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) of up to 23 % and an 18 % reduction in parent-reported school-car use. School Street schemes increase active travel, are supported by parents, reduce overall traffic and do not appear to cause significant safety issues through traffic displacement.
- Child independence: research conducted by Cycling UK shows that when children cycle, it brings a variety of benefits to their parents and families as well as to the children themselves

Conclusion

Children clearly want to cycle, and they will if given the chance. However, many young people still feel unable to cycle independently due to concerns about traffic, unsafe junctions and the absence of dedicated routes or road-space changes around schools. Action to enable children to cycle will ensure healthier, happier children, fewer short car trips, cleaner air and stronger communities.

ⁱ Bikeability Level 2 is a cycling training program designed for children, typically aged 9 to 11, that focuses on developing confidence and skills for cycling on quiet roads.