

## Cycling UK briefing – Scottish Parliament election 2026

### Safer roads for everyone

People of all ages and abilities should be able to walk, wheel and cycle safely and confidently along Scotland’s streets and rural roads. Traffic speeds are often too high, and too few drivers understand rules designed to prevent collisions and keep people safe. Fear of traffic is one of the most significant barriers preventing people in Scotland from travelling actively.

#### Cycling UK’s manifesto asks

The next Scottish Government should deliver:

- **Appropriate speed limits for rural roads** that reflect local context and prioritise the safety of people walking, cycling, and wheeling – including provision of statutory guidance and requiring councils to **review rural speed limits**.
- A dedicated **public awareness campaign explaining changes to the Highway Code** from 2022, especially the principle that those most at risk on the road should be given the most protection.

#### Context

The Scottish Government is aiming to have the best road safety performance in the world by 2030. Data shows that numbers of people killed on Scotland’s roads has improved over the long-term, but progress has flatlined in recent years.

Concern about safety is consistently the main barrier to cycling in Scotland, with 70% of Scots surveyed agreeing to ‘Not feeling safe enough on the roads’. Women are half as likely to cycle compared to men, and women, disabled people, and older people are often more affected by safety concerns, such as driver behaviour, high speeds on rural roads, and lack of protected space.

Changes to the Highway Code in 2022 aimed to increase safety of vulnerable road users. Included for the first time was a “Hierarchy of Road Users”, placing greater responsibility on those who can cause the most harm. However, public awareness remains poor, and many drivers are still unclear about their obligations—particularly in relation to overtaking cyclists, giving priority to pedestrians at junctions, and safe passing distances.

#### Evidence and Impact

- High speed kills and deters cycling: One in five deaths on Scottish roads are caused by speeding. High speeds discourage cycling – 71% of people in Scotland would be motivated to cycle if there was less / slower traffic on the roads.

- Cutting rural speed limits: A higher proportion of cyclists are killed or seriously injured on rural roads than on urban roads. In a survey a majority of people thought driving at 60mph is unsafe where there may be cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders, and half of people agreed that the default speed limit on single-carriageway rural roads should be reduced from 60mph – only 19% disagreed.
- Speed reduction saves lives: Evidence shows that reducing vehicle speeds, especially on rural roads, significantly cuts the number and severity of collisions.
- Health and inclusion benefits: Safer roads encourage physically active travel, supporting public health objectives and reducing transport inequalities.
- Economic benefit: Improving road safety reduces long-term costs to the NHS, emergency services and local authorities. Annual costs to society and the UK economy have been valued at £42bn.

## Conclusion

Safer roads are a prerequisite for achieving Scotland's ambitions on road safety, health and transport equality. By updating rural speed limits and ensuring that the 2022 Highway Code is understood and applied, Scotland can create streets where people feel protected, empowered and able to choose greener, healthier modes of travel.