

More cycling in Edinburgh could prevent life-threatening illnesses

New evidence shows 34,000 potentially fatal illnesses could be prevented by more cycling in seven major UK cities, including Edinburgh, by 2040

In the [Sustrans report](#), cycling is provided as a key solution to public health threats, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. The charity has warned governments of the consequences of taking no action to increase cycling rates as Scotland and the UK faces a deepening health crisis.

An estimated 34,000 incidences of eight life-threatening conditions, including Type 2 diabetes, stroke, breast cancer and depression, would be prevented in seven major cities between 2017 and 2040, if cycling increased at rates like those since the millennium in London.



Pedal on Parliament takes place each year in Scotland to encourage more spending on cycling infrastructure. Sustrans, the walking and cycling charity, published its report which looks at the health, economic and environmental benefits of cycling by 2040 in Edinburgh and several other UK cities.

[“Transforming Cities: The potential of everyday cycling”](#) is based on data from Bike Life, the largest assessment of cycling in UK cities, and highlights the impact of doubling cycling trips every eight years between 2017 and 2040. The modelling follows the UK Government’s Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy which seeks to double cycling in England over eight years by 2025.



Just Eat Cycles

The Chief Medical Officers of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland recommend adults get 150 minutes of physical activity each week. However in 2017, 29% of men and 40% of women in Scotland reported that they did not meet UK guidelines on physical activity. The research reckons that physical inactivity currently costs the NHS around £1bn each year, and when including costs to wider society, this rises to around £7.4bn each year.

It has estimated that more than one billion cycling trips would take place in 2040 in those major cities, which is an eight-fold increase from 123 million trips. This would prevent 628 early deaths and generate £21 billion of savings to the economy, including 319 million of savings to the NHS over the 23-year period.

Currently, the Scottish Government invests nearly £16 per head on walking and cycling. Scotland's capital therefore enjoys a relatively high mode share for cycling, with nearly 8% of commuter journeys now being made by bike.

In the UK, the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) issued a proposal earlier this month, which recommends city planners should develop connected travel

routes which prioritise pedestrians and cyclists¹. Sustrans warns that the substantial health benefits from increased cycling are only possible if long term political commitment and investment across government exist.



NICE recommends city planners prioritise cyclists
A new [report](#) from the World Health Organisation claims that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer are one of the key global health threats, and recommends that governments meet physical activity targets to tackle the growing epidemic of NCDs.

John Lauder, National Director at Sustrans Scotland, said:
“Our report provides 34,000 reasons why governments across the UK should follow Scotland’s example and prioritise investment in walking and cycling.

“Everywhere in Scotland, and right across the rest of the UK, is facing a physical inactivity and obesity crisis, which is why decision-makers need to get on the front foot and tackle

these problems head on.

“Prevention is better than cure is an often repeated mantra of health ministers across the UK, but tackling the deepening health crisis shouldn’t be left to the NHS alone.

“We call on communities in Edinburgh, and right across Scotland to embrace every day walking and cycling as a cheap and easy way to get regular physical activity.”



Cllr Lesley Macinnes Convener of Transport and Environment
Lesley Macinnes, Transport and Environment Convener at the City of Edinburgh Council, said: “Here in Edinburgh we’ve demonstrated that it is possible to increase the number of people cycling, with more than 15 million trips made by bike in the last year, but we need to continue this momentum to ensure we meet future goals, not least improving air quality and encouraging more active travel.

“Our vision for Edinburgh is a better connected, sustainable Capital, and by investing in walking, cycling and public transport we are determined to achieve this – and to realise the immense health benefits that will result.

Lesley MacInnes

“The ambitious City Centre Transformation encapsulates these aspirations by putting people at the heart of designs, while schemes underway across the city, including major cycling, walking and public realm improvements between the Meadows and George Street and as part of the City Centre West to East Link project, will spread the positive effects.

“By continuing to commit 10% of our Transport budget toward cycling we have recognised the social, environmental and health benefits on offer which, as this report shows, will only increase as infrastructure is improved and developed.”



Daisy Narayanan who is in charge of the City Centre Transformation Project. Daisy is on secondment to the council from Sustrans.

Daisy Narayanan, Deputy Director of Sustrans Scotland, who is on secondment to the Council leading the City Centre Transformation project, said: “Through City Centre Transformation we have a real opportunity to create an environment which actively encourages and enables walking and cycling, and Sustrans’ Bike Life Report findings prove just how beneficial this will be to all those who live, work and visit the city.

“As Edinburgh’s population grows, so too does the pressure on the city’s streets, with increased congestion leading to poorer air quality.”

Daisy Narayanan

“We want to work towards reducing the dominance of cars on our roads, while recognising the needs of those who rely on them.

“By enhancing the city centre to make it easier to get around by foot, bike or public transport, not only will we produce a more welcoming, pleasant environment for those who live, work and visit, but we will realise the positive impact of improved air quality and active travel on the public for generations to come.”