

# Moving Up

Promoting active, healthy travel choices into young adulthood

## Active, independent travel is vital for young people

Young people's freedom to move around their local area on their own is an important part of growing up, for their health and personal development. However as they move into their teenage years, social pressures, communities built around car-use and other barriers have a negative impact on walking and cycling for local journeys.

It is recommended that young people do at least an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day<sup>1</sup>. Yet as they progress to secondary school and college there is a notable decline in activity levels, with serious implications for their health and wellbeing.

### The challenge

- **decreases in physical activity are often associated with significant life transitions**, such as moving from primary to secondary school, the onset of adolescence and leaving school<sup>2</sup>
- **the most notable drop in activity occurs during the teenage years**, where levels of active travel and participation in organised sport and physical education reduce considerably: 50% of primary-aged children travel to school actively compared with 41% of those in secondary school<sup>3</sup>, whilst 95% of 11- to 15-year-olds participate in sport compared with 73% of 16- to 24-year-olds<sup>4</sup>
- **the decline in physical activity starts earlier and is more dramatic in girls**, with reductions in physical activity starting from age 10. At age 15, half as many girls as boys meet the recommended level of physical activity<sup>5</sup>.

However, we know that with the right tools and ideas, teachers, parents, community and youth workers can enthuse, engage and inspire young people to walk and cycle as everyday travel choices, helping to reverse these worrying trends.





## Key themes

Encouraging walking and cycling amongst students at secondary school and college requires a different approach to working with younger children. Ensure you take the following factors into account:

**Listening to young people** – it is essential to consult with young people about how active travel is relevant to them, what barriers exist and what they want to do with the time and resources being offered to support them. Engagement will be most successful when it addresses young people's needs directly, so give them ownership of the process and offer opportunities to take responsibility within projects and activities.

**Peer work and young advocates** – young people are often strongly influenced by their peers. If young people are themselves advocates of active travel, the message has more credibility. Allowing young people to plan, deliver and evaluate activities will also help develop important social and employment skills.

Explore opportunities for young people to train as coaches and mentor pupils in feeder primary schools, through Sports Leadership programmes and GCSE Physical Education (or Scottish Qualifications Authority equivalent). However, choose advocates carefully. Consider their qualities and the standing they have with their peers. They may not be those who excel academically.

**Active travel champions** – the size of secondary schools, colleges and communities means promoting walking and cycling is rarely a one-person job. In addition to young advocates, having a strong champion is key to the success of your work, so think carefully about who this should be. Members of senior management have more decision-making clout, but also other priorities. You may need more than one champion, so find other enthusiastic individuals, whether teaching or non-teaching staff (who may have more time).



**Inclusivity** – some groups may appear hard to reach whilst others are under-represented in physical activity and sustainable travel. These include: girls and young women; young people with special educational needs or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties; those from deprived backgrounds or who have not had the opportunity to develop their skills and abilities.

Targeting your work on specific groups can help ensure limited resources are used where they will have the biggest impact. Practical projects can also showcase talents which are not apparent in the classroom.

**Transition times** – the transition from primary to secondary school or leaving school and moving through to post-compulsory education, training or work, are key opportunities to influence behaviour. Young people find themselves in a new situation with new choices.

Working with young people at these key phases has been shown to establish positive routines and travel patterns in the future. For example, interventions with young adults who are considering driving lessons can raise awareness and use of alternative options – especially when financial considerations are examined.



# Working with secondary schools

**Large schools are complex settings.** Internal communication can be challenging and the large, diverse audience means you need to have a structured approach.

You may wish to focus your time by targeting specific groups, eg extra-curricular clubs, year groups, or students taking particular exam subjects.

Consider developing peer work and young advocates who can help promote your work throughout the school. This not only maximises your time, but has significant benefits for the students and increases the likelihood of success.

Effective communication is key to ensuring the whole school is aware of the opportunities you are providing. Look for the chance to speak to large groups of staff and students at meetings or assemblies. Use existing internal communications systems such as newsletters, or messaging via the school's email or text lists to students, their parents and staff.

**Tightly-focused curriculum time and targets mean it may be difficult to access students during class time, especially in examination years.**

Consider delivering very targeted curriculum work, with schemes of work closely linked to curriculum or syllabus requirements in: exam subjects such as GCSE Physical Education, Geography and Design Technology; non-exam subjects like Citizenship or PSHE; vocational qualifications such as BTEC Sports or Engineering, SVQ Sport and Leisure; or Open College Network (OCN) cycle maintenance.

There may be people in departments who can help to champion active travel, particularly in Physical Education.

Extra-curricular activities exist that also link well, so seek out relevant contacts. The Duke of Edinburgh Award is a good example. For more information about promoting sustainable travel through this scheme go to [www.dofe.org](http://www.dofe.org).

There may also be opportunities for linking up with other schools to provide inter-school cycle competitions, or with community cycling clubs which can help students to develop their sports skills and interests.

## GCSE work

Sustrans is working with the Welsh Joint Education Council (WJEC) to develop decision-making exercises that can be undertaken as part of GCSE Geography coursework.

Schools can investigate how their carbon footprint can be reduced by looking at more sustainable transport options. Local fieldwork is undertaken to assess different walking and cycling routes to school. Further options are being developed for future years related to the theme of Urban Planning.

On Merseyside, Sustrans officers have piloted a project with Year 10 students leading activities for primary school children. This is based on Edexcel's PE, Cycling and Leadership modules, with a view to becoming an assessed course in the future.



Catchment areas of secondary schools are usually much bigger than primary schools, so young people travel longer distances. Generally car use decreases and bus use rises.

**In 2011:**

- 49% of primary school pupils travelled to school on foot, compared to 38% of secondary school students
- 43% of primary school pupils were driven to school, compared to 22% of secondary school students
- 6% of primary school pupils went to school by local or private bus or coach, compared with 33% of secondary school students<sup>5</sup>.

It is important to understand the existing travel behaviour of students. See if any data is available on how they get to school and how far they travel. This will help you identify key groups to work with and focus on those most likely to benefit. **Is there a travel survey?** Some schools have access to maps showing catchment areas. A school travel plan may also provide an idea of journey habits, whilst a travel policy may include advice, eg bus timetables and cycle routes, and how students are encouraged to travel.

You may find that your work and project interests compete with the school's priorities and **timetabling**. Consider how your work fits in with the school's mission statement, the curriculum, and complementary agendas such as Eco-Schools and Healthy Schools.

**Clearly communicate and sell your project's aims, objectives and benefits**, particularly to senior management, to ensure that key staff are fully committed from the beginning.



Young people may be disengaged with their school or the education process. They can also be under enormous pressure to fit in with their peers and this can affect their attitude.

Offer opportunities that have relevancy to young people's lives especially outside of class time, where their attendance is voluntary.

Make use of lunchtime and after-school clubs, as young people attend by choice and have some control over what activities they pursue. These may often be very practical outdoor activities. Link up with cycling clubs in the community to develop young people's leisure and sports interests.

### Lunchtime and after-school clubs

Tower Hamlets in London is an area with high levels of deprivation, crime and social problems. Schools have little or no playground space. One successful approach has been to engage children in very practical activities, avoiding most classroom activities in preference of getting out and about, especially on the new BMX tracks built around east London as a legacy of the 2012 games.

One example is Bow Boys School, where gang culture is a problem. The Sustrans officer set up an after-school BMX club which keeps boys away from negative influences and helps to develop alternative positive group identity and achievement.

### Transition activities

By working specifically on transition activities with young people between primary and secondary schools, the Sustrans I Bike project in Scotland has successfully reversed the drop in physical activity amongst girls. In the schools where the project had run, 58% of girls used bikes in leisure time, compared to 17% previously<sup>6</sup>.

#### Activities included:

- providing parents with information on walking, cycling and public transport options
- classroom activities and assemblies during a transition week
- planning and mapping new routes
- guided rides to schools.



# Working in alternative education



## Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)

In Wales, PRUs are often attached to secondary schools. Sustrans officers are working with a PRU to offer young people Bicycle Maintenance as the skill element of The Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. They will go on to run peer education and Dr Bike sessions with younger students.

This will boost the confidence of the young people and be a step towards an Open College Network qualification in cycle maintenance.

There may be alternative education provision in your area, such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools and Free Schools, where there may be opportunities to work with 11- to 16-year-olds.

Be aware of how students in these different contexts can access activities. For example, in PRUs there may be irregular attendance, a higher turnover of young people and behavioural considerations which will affect how activities are delivered.

In SEN schools you may need to look at adjusted targets and alternative active travel solutions for some individuals, to increase skills and confidence.



## Bike maintenance sessions

Providing a skilled bike mechanic impacts directly on levels of cycling and empowers young people to look after their bikes independently.

Maintenance sessions provide opportunities for practical skills development which open up the possibility of enterprise and work experience projects, such as bike recycling initiatives or maintenance of a pool of bikes for a school or youth club.



# Working in post-compulsory education

Colleges vary in size and may be split across multiple sites. Sixth forms are usually linked to a secondary school, are generally smaller, and students often have established relationships with peers and tutors. Larger colleges may serve thousands of students attending a wide variety of courses, some part-time, others full-time.

## Make key contacts with staff:

- co-ordinate work with the staff who deal with pastoral, enrichment and extra-curricular activities. They will know the specific operational aspects of college life and how to work successfully within them. They are in regular contact with students and have existing working relationships with many different departments
- tutors and tutor teams can promote activities with their students
- the site/estate team can make the practicalities of organising on campus much easier.

Use the college's internal staff and student portals, such as the intranet or the college's email/text system. Promote events in advance but not so far that people will forget – send reminders the day before.



## Information stalls

Meet as many students face-to-face as possible, starting at the beginning of term with launch events and fresher fairs. Run information stalls with local cycling or walking maps, leaflets on cycle loan schemes, useful giveaways and any special offers from local cycle shops. Identify and recruit enthusiastic individuals who will volunteer their time, and consult students about travel behaviour and barriers.





## The academic calendar

Be aware of exams and other busy periods. Engage students at quieter times, but encourage them to maintain routine exercise such as walking and cycling, as these can reduce stress and anxiety.

The target audience is diverse in terms of its age and study programmes. Fitting things around a busy and more varied academic timetable can be challenging, with students coming on and off the site at different times.

Try to target particular groups, which could be extra-curricular rather than academic. Communal areas are productive places to promote your project, rather than the classroom.

Look for opportunities to engage during free time. Be flexible in terms of what is delivered and when. Run events and activities at times when students are available.

The level of guidance required to keep college students on track in terms of their activities and self-organisation may differ depending on their age, which could vary from school leavers to mature students.

Students need to be offered immediate actions or opportunities or they can lose interest. Be aware of why students may be attracted to cycling, eg its appeal in terms of freedom and exercise.

## Welsh baccalaureate

Tutor groups at one sixth form college in Wales are going to adopt Sustrans as a charity and study it for a year. During the year they will learn about how it is funded, what it does and why, and also raise money for its work. All of this work will contribute directly to meeting the baccalaureate syllabus.



# Working in community settings



There are many different opportunities to engage with young people within youth and community settings. These settings are often more conducive to young people having involvement in decision-making and ownership.

**Youth clubs or adventure play schemes** – it is useful to organise a briefing session with youth workers before beginning work with young people, so that they understand your aims and how they can support young people during sessions.

**Cycling clubs outside of schools** – signposting young people from the curriculum, after-school activities or youth clubs into a more organised cycling club's framework is an excellent way to develop their leisure or sports interests.

Look out for local clubs where they can benefit from more advanced coaching and facilities. These could be for road cycling, BMX, mountain biking, cycle speedway or triathlon.

Clubs are generally not-for-profit, run by enthusiasts who are usually volunteers and often involve parents who want to develop their children's skills. Check that the clubs have a youth section, safeguarding policies and use qualified coaches. Many clubs are affiliated with British Cycling or British Cycling Go Ride and so will have this level of quality assurance.

**Uniformed youth groups** – this could include Scouts, Guides and Woodcraft Folk. Assess whether the particular organisation you are reaching out to has a target group in terms of low levels of active travel. This is an opportunity to incorporate active travel as part of their badge schemes.

**Youth employment, advice or training centres** – it may be possible to develop links with job centres or current youth employment schemes to find ways of developing skills for employment (accredited where possible), as well as offering practical help to access jobs and training by foot and bike.

**Award schemes** such as Duke of Edinburgh, National Citizenship Service, John Muir and The Prince's Trust – there may be potential to include cycling or other activities into different sections of award schemes.





#### East Belfast's 4th Scout Group

Young people aged 11-14 have used a seven-mile traffic-free section of the National Cycle Network to gain their Cyclist Activity Badge, through activities such as basic bike checks and longer rides to sites of local historical interest.

#### Youth Offending Service

Young offenders in North Birmingham came to a bike project once a week and if they attended a certain number of times they got a bike. City council staff donated 30-40 old or unused bikes, whilst Sustrans supported the project through bike maintenance sessions and cycle training for young people and staff.

#### Youth Council

A Sustrans project officer in Nottingham used creative facilitation methods, such as a Dragon's Den activity, to get youth feedback and solutions to current travel issues. This has led to further peer work and opportunities to influence local councillors.



# Engaging girls

Young women and girls are under-represented in terms of participation in physical activity and active travel, particularly as they move into their teenage years. However, it is not difficult to address this imbalance with suitable interventions.

Consult girls and young women on the specific barriers they face, do not assume that this is always about appearance. Barriers may include compulsory wearing of skirts for school uniform or parental concerns – cycle training for parents has often helped address the latter.

Be aware that girls may require separate sessions from male peers in order to excel in sport and physical activity.

Explore why girls who don't currently walk and cycle might want to – independence, health and fun are often cited as incentives.



## Lush Hour

As part of the Lush Hour project in Wales, a group of young women developed a walking and cycling action week programme based on their own needs – they identified these as spending time with their friends and being able to look at fashion and cycling. Lush Hour was successful because it addressed their aspirations directly.



## Fashion to Ride

Sustrans officers worked with London College of Fashion students and local authority partners using fashion to encourage girls to take an interest in cycling. In the first year the scheme was delivered in Westminster Academy, culminating in students showcasing their garments at the Pret-a-Rouler cycle fashion show.

In the second year of the project, 20 girls attended a series of focused after-school sessions aimed at encouraging more young women in London to cycle. These sessions challenged their perceptions of cyclists and fostered the sense that cycling is 'cool', desirable and the thing to be seen doing.

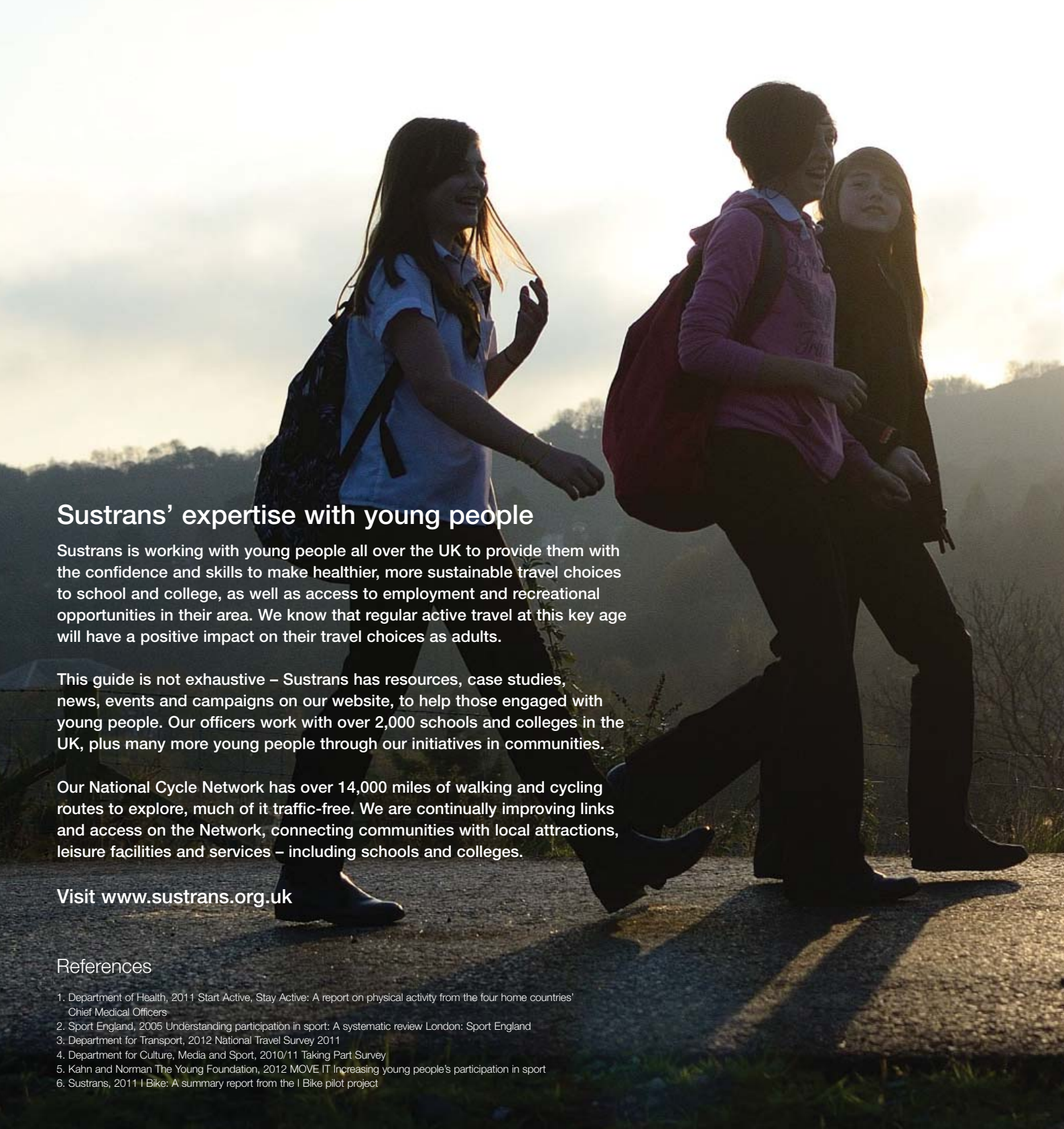
To spread the cycling message, each group of girls arranged a fashion show at their school. They came up with creative ways to show off their work which included modelling their outfits and riding their bikes in front of their peers. All girls who attended the course received on-road cycle training.



## Cycle training, trips and clubs

At the Central Foundation School For Girls, Tower Hamlets, the key school contact is a fully-qualified Bikeability instructor. They delivered a lunchtime cycling club so that girls could learn to ride a bike. The fact that the school is on one of the busiest roads in London has not prevented girls taking to cycling as enthusiastically as their male peers. BMX and Herne Hill Velodrome trips have been organised, and a school cycling club established.





## Sustrans' expertise with young people

Sustrans is working with young people all over the UK to provide them with the confidence and skills to make healthier, more sustainable travel choices to school and college, as well as access to employment and recreational opportunities in their area. We know that regular active travel at this key age will have a positive impact on their travel choices as adults.

This guide is not exhaustive – Sustrans has resources, case studies, news, events and campaigns on our website, to help those engaged with young people. Our officers work with over 2,000 schools and colleges in the UK, plus many more young people through our initiatives in communities.

Our National Cycle Network has over 14,000 miles of walking and cycling routes to explore, much of it traffic-free. We are continually improving links and access on the Network, connecting communities with local attractions, leisure facilities and services – including schools and colleges.

Visit [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

### References

1. Department of Health, 2011 Start Active, Stay Active: A report on physical activity from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers
2. Sport England, 2006 Understanding participation in sport: A systematic review London: Sport England
3. Department for Transport, 2012 National Travel Survey 2011
4. Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010/11 Taking Part Survey
5. Kahn and Norman The Young Foundation, 2012 MOVE IT Increasing young people's participation in sport
6. Sustrans, 2011 I Bike: A summary report from the I Bike pilot project

## About Sustrans

Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable. We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day.

We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices.