Bikeability Health Policy Report

January 2026

The Bikeability Trust

BEFORE BIKEABILITY TRAINING, 4% OF CHILDREN CYCLED TO SCHOOL 1–3 TIMES A WEEK

AFTER BIKEABILITY LEVEL 2, 23% OF CHILDREN INTENDED TO CYCLE TO SCHOOL 1–3 TIMES A WEEK

Introduction

Bikeability is the national flagship cycle training programme for adults and children, delivered to almost 6 million children in England since 2007. Beyond teaching cycling skills, Bikeability plays a vital role in promoting health and well-being.

Bikeability training supports children's physical fitness and mental well-being, helping them feel more confident and improving overall quality of life. This contribution to healthier daily routines reflects the aims of the Government's 10 Year Health Plan to prioritise prevention and reduce pressure on the NHS.

Data in this paper (unless stated otherwise) is taken from

The Bikeability Trust's 2025 Monitoring and Evaluation Report: https://www.bikeability.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/250610_ME-Report_June-PDF-Final-1.pdf

24/25 Impact Report: https://www.bikeability.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Bikeability_Impact_report_2025-accessible.pdf

Cycling Activity

Training with The Bikeability Trust significantly increases children's intention to cycle, demonstrating the programme's success in building lasting, healthy habits. Following training, children reported a stronger intention to cycle across all uses. The proportion who said they planned to cycle to school increased from 4% to 23%, and intentions to cycle for leisure rose from 21% to 42%. Intentions to cycle more frequently also increased across school travel, leisure, and exercise. Overall, the findings show that Bikeability increases children's likelihood of cycling as part of everyday life.

For more than a quarter of Level 2 riders (27%), the course was their first experience of cycling on the road – a milestone that gave many their first taste of real-world riding. This early exposure builds confidence and encourages children to see cycling as part of everyday travel. By embedding physical activity into daily routines, Bikeability supports prevention-led healthcare and helps ease future NHS demand.

22.2% OF YEAR 6 CHILDREN ARE LIVING WITH OBESITY. (NHS DIGITAL, 2024/25)

678 TONNES OF CO_2E* SAVED ON BIKEABILITY TRAINING DAYS (2024/25)

Tackling Obesity and Inactivity

Researchers found that children who actively commuted to school had lower body fat, and therefore were less likely to be overweight or obese. Children who switched to walking and cycling to school between the ages of 7 and 14 had healthier body weights than those who continued to travel by car.[1]

Before Bikeability training, just 3% of children cycled to school four or more times per week. After training, 11% said they intended to do so, a shift that research links to better exam performance, improvements in self-esteem and emotional well-being[2], as well as reducing the risk of adolescent depression.[3]

Frequent cycling in childhood is strongly associated with better long-term health. Children who cycle four or more times a week are around 48% less likely to be overweight in adulthood[4]. Following the Bikeability training, the proportion of children who intend to cycle this frequently for school travel increased by 8%. That's an additional 26,007 children each year reaching a level of cycling linked to lower long-term health risk.

1 Lander S.M.M., Bosch J.A. et al. (2019). BMC Public Health. Study on physical activity patterns and childhood body composition.
2 Public Health England (2019). Physical activity and mental wellbeing in children and adolenence
3 Booth JN et al. (2014). Associations between physical activity and academic attainment in adolescents. BMJ Open.
4 Menschik D., Ahmed S., Alexander M.H., Blum R.W. (2008). Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. Study on adolescent physical activity as a predictor of young adult weight.
* The equivelent of 678 tonnes of CO_2 saved on Bikeability training days (2024/25)

Tackling Poor Air Quality

Increased cycling following Bikeability training can reduce car journeys and improves air quality, lessening children's exposure to pollutants such as NO2 and PM2.5, which are linked to respiratory diseases.

Evidence from London also shows how complementary initiatives can strengthen this impact. School Street schemes create environments that are supportive of cycling and walking. They have been shown to reduce nitrogen dioxide by up to 23% during morning drop-off.

In 2024/25, an estimated 678 metric tonnes of CO_2 equivalent were saved, based on calculations assuming children and parents chose to walk or cycle to school instead of using their normal mode of transport on training days.

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Cycling's Potential to Transform Public Health

Following Bikeability training, more children reported that they intended to cycle to school more frequently. If these intentions were put into practice, the share of children who would achieve at least half of the recommended daily 60 minutes of physical activity through cycling to school four or more days a week could nearly quadruple.

The Government aims to prevent 1 million GP appointments a year by 2030 through increased cycling and walking. Bikeability directly supports this goal by helping more children build active travel habits that carry into later life and reduce long-term health risks.

Inclusivity

Every child should have the chance to experience the benefits of cycling, yet many face barriers that limit their participation. For children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), these barriers can be even more significant.

Bikeability's SEND funding has widened access: participation by children with special educational needs and disabilities jumped from 1.3% to 9% in just five years.

You can view a case study on this here: https://www.bikeability.org.uk/your-stories/alazar-and-his-road-to-independence/.

Road Safety and Health Costs

Traffic collisions are the leading cause of fatal and life-changing injuries, killing or seriously injuring over 30,000 people a year and costing the economy almost £42 billion. TRL analysis[5] makes the relationship evident. The research found that local authorities with more Bikeability cycle training consistently see lower levels of KSIs.

5 Modelling the impacts of Bikeability training on KSIs: Final project deliverable N Harpham, I Marino, L Smith, G Beard, 2024

INVESTMENT IN BIKEABILITY SAVES LIVES AND MONEY

ROAD COLLISIONS CURRENTLY COST THE NHS £42BN ANNUALLY

AREAS WITH BIKEABILITY TRAINING EXPERIENCE FEWER ROAD DEATHS AND INJURIES

Policy and Funding

Continued investment, with dedicated funding for children with SEND and low-income families, will support The Bikeability Trust in promoting lifelong active travel habits across all communities and helping to reduce long-term healthcare costs while tackling health inequalities. Making Bikeability part of the national curriculum would ensure cycling education is a standard part of every child's learning.

At present, the funding landscape for adult Bikeability cycle training is fragmented, creating a postcode lottery of access. Bringing this funding together under a clear national model would support consistent delivery in every area. There is growing interest in the role cycling, walking and wheeling can play in social prescribing by healthcare professionals. Cycle training could become a valuable tool within this approach.

Will you help make Bikeability part of the national curriculum to ensure cycling education is a standard part of every child's learning?

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