



The Bikeability Trust

Re-engaging a Lost Generation:

The Role of Confidence and Training in Adult Cycling Participation

Author: Dr Dawn Rahman (Associate, Nota Bene Consulting and Member of the Active Travel Academy, University of Westminster)
Contributor: Evan Ingold (Transport Planner, Nota Bene Consulting) Prepared for The Bikeability Trust May 2026
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A Foreword from Forest

At Forest, we believe cycling should be a safe, affordable and accessible part of everyday life in our cities.

E-bikes are already helping to open up cycling to more people. They make longer journeys simpler and help remove some of the physical barriers that can put people off cycling, and offer a sustainable alternative to short car trips. But access to bikes is only one part of the answer. If people do not feel confident cycling on the road, navigating junctions or interacting with traffic they are much less likely to make cycling a regular part of their lives.

That is why this Bikeability report is so important. It highlights a “lost generation” of adults who may not have received formal cycle training when they were younger, or who have not cycled for many years and now face a very different road environment. For many people, dockless e-bikes have helped bring cycling back into their lives. The challenge is not necessarily whether they can ride a bike, but whether they feel safe and confident enough to ride in real-world conditions.

As a dockless e-bike operator, Forest has a responsibility to ensure as many people as possible are able to feel safe when cycling. Earlier this year, we

invested in Islington Council’s Adult Cycle Training programme, helping fund free sessions for people who live, work or study in the borough. The programme supports everyone from complete beginners to experienced riders who want to build confidence on busier roads, with practical guidance on positioning, signalling, speed control and safer decision-making.

We have also launched our Common Sense Club, a rider safety initiative backed by Transport for London and the London Cycling Campaign. Through a simple safety quiz in the Forest app and online, it encourages riders to refresh their knowledge of the Highway Code and everyday cycling best practice, including safe overtaking, considerate riding, responsible parking and interactions with other road and footway users.

Together, these initiatives reflect that encouraging more people to cycle involves more than just putting more bikes on our streets. Infrastructure, training and rider behaviour must all work together if we are serious about building a cycling environment and culture that is safe and inclusive.

Forest is proud to support this research and the wider effort to help more adults rediscover cycling with confidence.

Agustin Guilisasti, CEO





Introduction

At the Bikeability Trust, we are proud that children across England benefit from some of the highest quality cycle training in the world. Our programme is trusted, evidence-led and rigorously quality assured, ensuring that every child who participates receives consistent, professional instruction that equips them with the skills and confidence to ride safely on today’s roads. This level of scrutiny and standard is not accidental – it is the result of years of development, continuous improvement, and a clear commitment to excellence.

Yet this timely report highlights a stark contrast: while children’s cycle training is structured, regulated and underpinned by a recognised qualification framework, the adult cycle training market remains largely unregulated. At present, the Level 2 Award in Instructing Cycle Training (L2AICT) is the only national recognised cycling qualification for adults – also written and quality assured by The Bikeability Trust. However, outside of this, adult training provision can be established by anyone, with no requirement for formal qualifications or consistent oversight. This creates an uneven landscape and introduces potential risks for participants.

As the national body for cycle training standards, we believe there is a better way. Bikeability represents a gold standard – one that combines robust instructor qualification, ongoing quality assurance, and a commitment to safety and consistency. Through tools such as the Bikeability ‘Find a Course’ service, we already provide something akin to a ‘Trusted Trader’ scheme for cycle training: a means for the public to identify qualified, reputable providers. We believe this model offers a strong foundation for developing a more transparent and reliable adult training market.

The case for investment in recognised, high-quality adult training is also compelling. We know from research that there is a statistical association between Level 2 Bikeability training and fewer people killed and seriously injured on the roads. By equipping riders with the skills to manage real-world traffic environments, we are not only building confidence but actively improving safety outcomes. Adults deserve access to the same level of training, expertise and protection. Extending these standards into the adult market is not simply a matter of consistency – it is an opportunity to save lives and enable more people to travel safely by cycle.

I have seen the impact of this training first-hand. Before joining The Bikeability Trust, I was not a

confident urban cyclist. The idea of cycling 10 miles in traffic felt entirely out of reach. Through training, my mindset shifted – from “I can’t” to “I can”. Today, I regularly choose to travel by train and cycle, thinking nothing of hopping on a cycle for meetings within a 10-mile radius. That change has not only expanded my mobility but has had a positive impact on my health and wellbeing.

This is the transformation and liberation we should want for everyone. With the right training – and supported by good infrastructure – cycling becomes not just possible, but practical, enjoyable and empowering.

The challenge before us is to deliver this shift at scale. By strengthening standards, improving visibility of quality provision, and aligning the adult market with the principles that underpin Bikeability for children, we can unlock that opportunity.

This report is an important step in that journey.

Emily Cherry, Chief Executive



WE ARE NOT ONLY BUILDING CONFIDENCE BUT ACTIVELY IMPROVING SAFETY OUTCOMES.



1. Executive Summary

Cycling delivers well-established benefits for health, wellbeing, the environment and the economy, yet participation among adults in England remains low. A YouGov survey of over 2,000 UK adults found that 75% had not cycled at all in the past year, with only a small minority cycling regularly. Among those who do cycle, activity is largely concentrated in leisure rather than everyday travel, indicating that cycling is not yet embedded as a routine mode of transport.

This research identifies confidence as a critical factor shaping whether adults cycle, acting as a key link between infrastructure and behaviour. While investment in cycling infrastructure has improved conditions in some areas, participation remains constrained where individuals do not feel confident using these environments. Confidence is often limited to lower-stress settings such as traffic free environments and declines significantly in more complex traffic conditions, even among existing people who cycle. The findings also highlight the

importance of interactions with other road users, particularly driver behaviour, in shaping perceptions of safety and willingness to cycle.

Adult cycle training has an important role to play in addressing these barriers by building both skills and confidence. However, training remains strongly associated with childhood, and most adults report that any training they have received took place many years ago. Participation in adult training is therefore extremely limited, highlighting a clear gap in provision.

The findings suggest that training is most effective when delivered as part of a wider system of support. Rather than acting as a stand-alone intervention, it helps to convert willingness to cycle into actual participation, particularly among those facing confidence-related barriers. However, training alone is unlikely to overcome wider structural challenges such as perceived safety risks and road conditions.

Key recommendations

- **Embed confidence as a core objective:** Recognise confidence as a primary barrier and integrate capability-building interventions, including cycle training, alongside infrastructure investment.
- **Position cycle training as core provision:** Treat training as an essential component of the cycling system, aligning funding and delivery with infrastructure and wider active travel programmes.
- **Expand and normalise adult cycle training:** Develop accessible, lifecyclebased offers and reposition training as an ongoing form of support.
- **Increase awareness and target underrepresented groups:** Improve visibility of training and deliver tailored programmes for those facing the greatest barriers to participation.
- **Support wider behaviour change initiatives:** Improve interactions between drivers and people who cycle through driver awareness and road-sharing initiatives alongside infrastructure and training interventions.

A YOUNG SURVEY OF OVER 2,000 UK ADULTS FOUND THAT 75% HAD NOT CYCLED AT ALL IN THE PAST YEAR



2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Purpose of the Research

This research was commissioned by the Bikeability Trust to support its strategic ambition to expand and strengthen the provision of adult cycle training across England¹. The Bikeability Trust is a UK-based charitable organisation responsible for administering and promoting the national cycle training programme, Bikeability, in England. While it is well established as the national provider of cycle training for children and families, it is increasingly seeking to play a broader role as a national authority on cycle training across all ages and diverse groups, including underserved groups and those facing greater barriers to participation.

Evidence from recent Bikeability research on child cycle training demonstrates positive value for money and longer-term impacts on confidence and cycling behaviour. While this evidence is derived from younger cohorts, it provides a useful indication that similar benefits could be realised through adult cycle training, particularly where programmes are designed to address confidence barriers and are delivered alongside supportive infrastructure and wider behaviour change measures^{2,3,4}.

The study responds to a recognised gap in the current adult cycle training landscape, which is characterised by fragmented provision, inconsistent funding arrangements, an absence of a national quality assurance system for adult cycle training and limited national data collection on training outcomes and adult cycling proficiency. This lack of coordination presents challenges for local authorities and constrains efforts to increase cycling participation and meet wider active travel, health and environmental objectives.

In this context, the purpose of the research is to explore evidence on the role of adult cycle training in supporting cycling uptake, with a particular focus on how training can address barriers to participation and improve confidence among adult riders. The findings are intended to inform the development of a more coherent, quality-assured approach to adult cycle training, and to support the Bikeability Trust's ambition to expand its role in this area.

2.2 Cycling Confidence and Participation

Confidence is a critical factor influencing whether adults choose to cycle, particularly in on-road environments. While many adults may own a cycle or recognise the potential benefits of cycling for health, cost savings and environmental sustainability, a lack of confidence can prevent them from cycling regularly or at all.

This research explores the potential existence of a “lost generation” of adults who did not receive formal cycle training when they were younger and may lack the technical skills and confidence needed to ride safely in contemporary traffic conditions. This may include individuals returning to cycling later in life, for example for commuting, fitness, leisure or e-bike use, who remain hesitant to cycle on roads due to safety concerns.

This lack of confidence has wider implications. It can limit the effectiveness of investment in cycling infrastructure if individuals do not feel able to make use of it. Previous research has shown that improvements in infrastructure have reduced perceived barriers for men, but have had little impact on women, with gender gaps in cycling continuing to be an issue⁵. Other studies also highlight that many individuals particularly women and those from ethnic minority groups continue to be deterred by concerns about safety and intimidation from other road users and that infrastructure alone is unlikely to increase the numbers from these groups without addressing underlying issues of confidence and capability⁶.

Adult cycle training has the potential to address some of these barriers by equipping individuals with the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to navigate real-world cycling environments. In doing so, it can play a key role in enabling more people to cycle safely

and regularly, supporting broader policy goals related to public health, carbon reduction and equitable access to transport.

2.3 Cycle Training in the UK

Cycle training in the UK has evolved significantly over time, reflecting wider changes in transport policy and levels of cycling. Early provision was delivered through the Cycling Proficiency Scheme, developed by The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA), which can be traced back to 1947 in the post war period focusing on teaching children basic road skills⁷. This was often delivered informally through schools and local police. In 1958 the government funded the launch of the National Cycling Proficiency Scheme (NCPS) where local authorities were responsible for delivering the scheme to children aged 9 years and above⁸.

While widely recognised, earlier approaches to cycle training varied in quality and consistency. In 2005, the government introduced the National Standard for Cycle Training, establishing a clear framework of the skills, knowledge and behaviours required for safe and effective cycling. This Standard underpins Bikeability, the national cycle training programme, which translates these competencies into a structured and consistent delivery model⁹. Oversight of the National Standard is provided through the Cycle Training Standards Board (CTSB),

1 Bikeability Trust (2025) Bikeability Trust Strategy 2035. Available at: <https://www.bikeability.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2035-Bikeability-Trust-strategy.pdf>

2 TRL Limited (2026) The interaction between Level 3 cycle training, infrastructure and cycling to school. Report prepared for the Bikeability Trust, Project Ref: 11226467 (unpublished at time of writing)

3 TRL Limited (2026) Evaluation of Bikeability Level 2 Training: Long-term impact. Report prepared for the Bikeability Trust, Project Ref: 11226461 (unpublished at time of writing)

4 WPI Economics (2026) Economic analysis for Bikeability Level 1/2 and

Level 2 Training: Cost-benefit analysis and delivery model comparison. Report prepared for the Bikeability Trust (unpublished at time of writing).

5 <https://www.cyclinguk.org/news/seven-years-cycling-progress-reduces-barriers-men-not-women>

6 <https://www.walkwheeletricitytrust.org.uk/media/13416/sustrans-2023-walking-and-cycling-index-uk-aggregated-report.pdf>

7 <https://www.rospace.com/about-us/history/timeline>

8 Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), The Effectiveness of Cyclist Training (2001), archived at: https://web.archive.org/web/20060325184347/http://www.rospace.com/roadsafety/info/cyclist_training_effectiveness.pdf

9 Department for Transport, National Standard for Cycle Training (2019), <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5faaa059e90e73062910954/national-standard-cycling-document.pdf>



which supports the development and maintenance of cycle training standards in England. At present, Bikeability delivery guidance is the only cycle training programme formally ratified by the Board ¹⁰.

Bikeability has helped to standardise cycle training through defined levels, quality assurance processes and instructor accreditation, and has supported its integration within the education system. The programme is overseen nationally by the Bikeability Trust, which maintains standards and ensures quality, while delivery is carried out locally by a range of accredited providers, including local authorities and independent training organisations. Bikeability funding is structured across three progressive levels: Level 1 focuses on basic cycle control and handling skills in a traffic-free environment; Level 2 introduces on-road cycling on quieter residential streets, developing skills such as road positioning, signalling and awareness of other road users; and Level 3 supports cycling in more complex traffic conditions, including busier roads and junctions, with an emphasis on route planning and decision-making in real-world environments. Further additional courses including Balance, and Learn to Ride, Bike Buses, courses for families, parents, and cycle maintenance all exist within the full suite of Bikeability activities that can be delivered by registered instructors.

More recently, the scope of cycle training has expanded beyond children to include adults, recognising that many people did not receive training earlier in life or require support to build confidence in contemporary traffic environments. Alongside provision for adults, there has also been increasing emphasis on more inclusive and targeted training offers, including programmes tailored for women and girls, as well as initiatives aimed at engaging underrepresented groups such as people from ethnically diverse backgrounds, disabilities and those facing social or economic barriers, including refugees and asylum seekers ¹¹.

2.4 Research Focus

research responds to the challenge of a “lost generation” of adults who may lack the confidence and capability to cycle in contemporary road environments, despite wider investment in infrastructure.

To explore this, the study is structured around four interconnected themes: confidence, cycling behaviour, role of cycle training and implications for policy and practice. These themes are derived from the study’s analytical framework and informed by both previous literature and primary research.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/cycle-training-standards-board-ctsb>

¹¹ Road Safety GB, Funding to unlock barriers to walking and cycling, <https://roadsafetygb.org.uk/news/funding-to-unlock-barriers-to-walking-and-cycling/>

Confidence

Confidence is a central factor shaping whether and how adults cycle. It includes both perceived ability (e.g. handling a bike, navigating junctions) as well as willingness to interact with traffic and other road users. A lack of confidence, particularly in on-road conditions, emerges as a key barrier to cycling uptake and continuation, even among individuals who have access to a cycle or recognise the benefits of cycling. The research explores how confidence is formed, what undermines it, and how it varies across different groups of people who cycle.

Cycling Behaviour

Cycling behaviour refers to how individuals use (or choose not to use) a cycle in everyday life. While closely linked to confidence, this theme focuses on how those perceptions translate into observable patterns of use. This includes patterns such as frequency of cycling, types of journeys undertaken (e.g. commuting, leisure, multi-stop trips), route choices, and avoidance strategies. The research considers how behaviour is shaped not only by infrastructure, but also by confidence, past experience and perceived risk. Understanding real-world cycling behaviour provides insight into the practical constraints and adaptations that influence participation.

Role of Cycle Training

Cycle training is examined as a potential intervention to bridge the gap between willingness to cycle and actual participation. Training can support the development of both technical skills and confidence, helping individuals to navigate everyday cycling environments more safely and effectively. The research considers how training is currently delivered, who it reaches, and the extent to which it addresses the needs of different groups, particularly adults who may not have received training previously or who are returning to cycling after a long gap.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Bringing these themes together, the research identifies key implications for increasing adult cycling participation. This includes understanding which groups are most affected by low confidence, how cycle training can be more effectively targeted and designed, and how it can complement wider investment in infrastructure and behaviour change. The findings are intended to inform more coordinated and effective approaches to supporting adult cycling, ensuring that provision reflects the realities of everyday journeys and the diverse needs of both current and potential riders.

3. Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews to explore cycling behaviour, confidence and the role of cycle training among adults.

3.1 Quantitative survey (YouGov Omnibus)

Quantitative data was collected through a YouGov Omnibus survey of 2,130 UK adults (aged 18+), conducted between 27th and 30th March 2026. YouGov's Omnibus uses a large, established online panel, with respondents selected and weighted to provide a sample broadly representative of the UK adult population.

The survey explored cycling frequency, purposes for cycling, and self-reported confidence across a range of cycling environments and skills. It also examined barriers to cycling among people who do not cycle, including lack of confidence and safety concerns, and captured respondents' experience of formal cycle training and its perceived impact on behaviour and confidence.

The structure of the questionnaire allowed for comparison between people who cycle and people who do not cycle, as well as analysis of the relationship between training, confidence and cycling behaviour. Standard demographic cross-breaks (e.g. age, gender, region and socio-economic group) were applied to support subgroup analysis. However, ethnicity data was not collected, limiting analysis by ethnic group.

3.2 Qualitative interviews

To complement the survey findings, a series of ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with adults who had undertaken adult cycle training. The interviews were designed to provide deeper insight into individual experiences of training, changes in confidence and behaviour, and the perceived value of training in everyday cycling contexts. On the 20th March, the Bikeability Trust included a link to an expression of interest form in their newsletter, to find people who had conducted adult cycle training and were willing to take part in a 20-minute interview. Another reminder was sent out on the 3rd April. 74 responses were received, with 55% of those respondents having taken part in adult cycle training and willing to participate in an interview. From this number, a cross section was taken including a range of people from different genders, ethnicities, geographical locations and ages, to ensure a wide

range of views were gathered. Participants were also offered a £10 supermarket voucher for their time.

The interview topic guide explored motivations for undertaking training, current cycling habits, and perceived changes in behaviour following training. Particular emphasis was placed on understanding how confidence develops, how it influences decision-making (e.g. route choice or willingness to cycle in traffic), and what barriers may remain even after training. This qualitative component enabled more detailed exploration of the mechanisms through which training influences cycling, providing context and depth to the survey findings.

3.3 Analytical approach

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows for comparison between self-reported patterns at population level and in-depth individual experiences. The survey provides a broad overview, identifying overall trends and relationships, while the interviews provide depth, illustrating how and why these patterns occur in practice.

3.4 Limitations

As with all research, this study has a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The quantitative survey is based on an online panel and therefore uses a non-probability sampling approach. While the data was weighted to be representative of the UK adult population and follow established industry standards, responses rely on self-reported behaviours and perceptions, which may be subject to recall bias or social desirability effects.

The qualitative component is based on a relatively small sample of ten interviews with individuals who have undertaken cycle training. While this allows for in-depth exploration of experiences, the findings are not intended to be statistically representative of all adults who cycle. Instead, they provide illustrative insights into how training influences confidence and behaviour in practice.

Finally, the research focuses on individuals' reported experiences and perceptions rather than direct observation of cycling behaviour. As such, the findings should be understood as reflecting how participants interpret and describe their experiences, rather than as objective measures of behaviour.





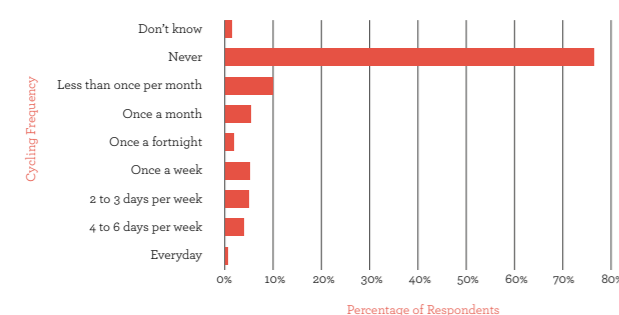
4. Profile of Survey Respondents

The findings are based on a nationally representative online YouGov survey of 2,130 UK adults (aged 18+), conducted between 27th and 30th March 2026. The data has been weighted to reflect the UK adult population.

4.1 Overall Cycling Participation

The survey indicates that cycling remains a minority activity among UK adults (see Figure 1). Three quarters of respondents (75%) reported that they had not cycled outdoors at all in the last 12 months. Only 8% cycle at least weekly, while 13% cycle at least monthly and a further 10% cycle less than once a month.

Figure 1 Cycling Participation in the past 12 months



These findings suggest that, for most adults, cycling is not a routine behaviour but an occasional or infrequent activity, and for many is not undertaken at all. This provides an important context for the rest of the analysis, highlighting the scale of the challenge in increasing participation.

4.2 Demographic Patterns in Participation

The survey also demonstrated that participation in cycling is uneven across the population. Men are more likely to cycle regularly, while women are significantly more likely to report not cycling at all in the past year. Younger adults tend to cycle more occasionally, whereas older age groups are more likely to report no cycling activity. Differences are also evident by socio-economic group, with individuals in higher socio-economic groups (ABC1) slightly more likely to cycle regularly than those in lower socio-economic groups (C2DE). These patterns suggest that barriers to cycling, including confidence, safety and access, are unevenly distributed.

While the YouGov survey did not collect data on ethnicity, existing research indicates that similar patterns are evident among ethnic minority groups, who are less likely to cycle regularly and more likely to face barriers related to safety, confidence and access. This suggests that inequalities in cycling participation extend beyond those captured in this dataset.

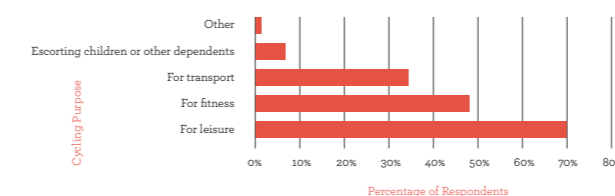
While regional and life-stage differences exist, these appear less pronounced than broader structural factors such as confidence and perceived safety, which play a more significant role in shaping behaviour.

4.3 Purpose and Patterns of Cycling

Among people who currently cycle, the most common purposes (with respondents able to select multiple responses) are leisure (70%) and fitness (48%), while only 36% report cycling for transport. Escorting children or other dependents is reported by just 5%,

indicating that cycling is not widely practiced as a mode for everyday or care-related journeys.

Figure 2 Cycling Purposes



This pattern suggests that cycling is more often undertaken for leisure or recreational purposes than as part of everyday travel. The relatively low proportion of transport-related cycling suggests that, for many adults, cycling is not yet embedded within routine journeys such as commuting or local trips.

4.4 Confidence and Inequalities

These findings are consistent with existing research, such as the National Travel Survey (NTS), which consistently shows that cycling remains a minority activity in England, with participation concentrated among a relatively small and demographically skewed group¹². This provides an important context for the rest of the analysis. It suggests that adult cycling is not yet a routine behaviour for most people, and that the population can usefully be understood as comprising two broad groups: people who do not cycle, and people who cycle at least occasionally.

Within this context, survey findings indicate notable differences in confidence between men and women. While confidence levels are broadly similar in lower-stress environments such as quiet residential streets and traffic-free paths, a significant gap emerges in more complex conditions. Women are substantially less likely than men to report feeling confident cycling in traffic, navigating junctions, or dealing with unexpected situations.

This suggests that gender differences in cycling participation are not driven by basic cycling ability, but by differences in confidence in real-world traffic conditions, particularly in environments perceived as higher risk.

Participation is also uneven across demographic groups. Previous research shows that women, ethnic minority communities and lower-income groups are less likely to cycle regularly and are more likely to report barriers related to safety, confidence and access¹³. This suggests that overall participation rates conceal underlying inequalities in who is able to cycle, underlining the importance of understanding how confidence and capability influence participation. These patterns are explored in more detail in **Section 5.1**.

4.5 Experience of Cycle Training

Experience of formal cycle training is also limited. Among those people who did not cycle, 54% reported that they had not undertaken formal cycle training, while 41% had only done so as a child and less than 1% had undertaken training as an adult.

Among current people who cycle, around 41% reported that they had not undertaken formal cycle training at all. Approximately 45% reported having undertaken training in childhood only, while 10% reported having undertaken training both in childhood and adulthood. Only 5% reported undertaking adult training only. *Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Among those who had received training, 76% said this had taken place more than 10 years ago, highlighting that cycle training is rarely experienced as a recent or ongoing form of support. This reinforces the perception of training as primarily associated with childhood, rather than as an ongoing and accessible offer in adulthood.



¹² Department for Transport, National Travel Survey: 2024 (2025), <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2024>

¹³ Steinbach, R. et al. (2011). Cycling and the city: A case study of how gendered, ethnic and class identities can shape healthy transport choices. *Social Science & Medicine*, 72 (7), 1123-1130. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.01.033>

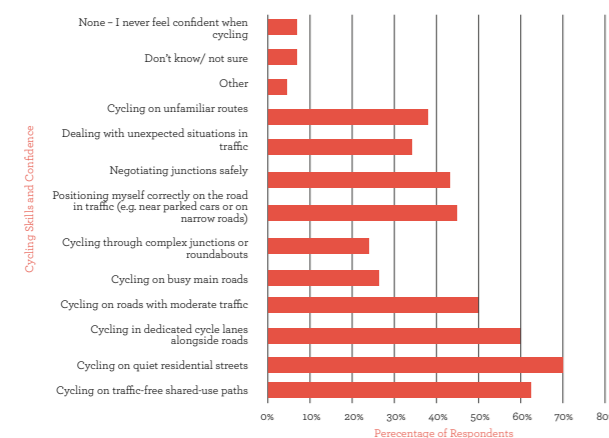
5. Cycling Confidence and Behaviour

5.1 Confidence as a Driver of Cycling Behaviour

The survey indicates that cycling behaviour among people who cycle is primarily oriented towards leisure and fitness rather than everyday utility. While 70% of people who cycle report cycling for leisure and 48% for fitness, only 36% report cycling for transport, and just 5% report escorting children or dependents. This pattern suggests that, for many adults, cycling remains an optional activity undertaken for leisure or in low-stress environments, rather than a routine mode of travel.

Figure 3 illustrates that confidence varies significantly by cycling environment, with higher levels in lower-stress settings and substantially lower confidence in more complex conditions.

Figure 3 Situations Survey Participants Felt Confident doing



Confidence levels are broadly similar between men and women in low-risk environments but diverge sharply as conditions become more demanding.

For example, around 71% of both men and women feel confident cycling on quiet residential streets, and confidence remains relatively high on traffic-free paths (approximately 63% of men and 60% of women). However, a gap emerges in moderate traffic conditions, where 59% of men report confidence compared to 36% of women.

Importantly, this gap becomes even wider in high-stress environments where 35% of men feel confident cycling on busy roads compared to 15% of women.

Similarly, 33% of men feel confident navigating complex junctions compared to just 13% of women.

These findings suggest that confidence acts as a key link between infrastructure and behaviour. Even where cycling environments are available, participation remains constrained if individuals do not feel confident using them.

The interviews undertaken as part of this research also reinforce this pattern, highlighting that confidence is influenced by the cycling environment. For instance, participants consistently described feeling comfortable in low-stress settings such as parks, canals and quiet residential streets, but far less confident in heavy traffic. Despite undertaking adult cycle training, several reported actively avoiding busy roads and complex junctions, even where these were necessary for everyday journeys.

The qualitative interviews further highlight that confidence is not only shaped by the cycling environment but also by interactions with other road users, particularly drivers. Several participants identified driver behaviour as a key source of uncertainty and risk, with some reporting that perceived deterioration in driver behaviour had reduced their willingness to cycle on roads over time. Participants particularly highlighted close passing, impatience and aggressive driving behaviours as factors that undermined confidence, even where infrastructure was available. This suggests that confidence is influenced not only by infrastructure and individual skill, but also by wider road culture and perceived safety in interactions with motor traffic.

Previous research shows that perceptions of unsafe or inconsiderate driving can deter cycling, particularly among less confident or underrepresented groups, even where objective risk is relatively low, limiting both participation and diversity¹⁴.

5.2 Confidence, Route Choice and Behaviour in Traffic

Although the survey did not directly ask about route choice, the pattern of confidence across different environments provides strong insight into likely behaviour. Higher confidence in quiet residential streets, shared-use paths and dedicated cycle lanes suggests that these are the environments in which adults are most comfortable cycling.

¹⁴ Aldred, R., Woodcock, J. and Goodman, A. (2016). Does More Cycling Mean More Diversity in Cycling? *Transport Reviews*, 36 (1), 28-44. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2015.1014451>



In contrast, significantly lower confidence on busy roads and at complex junctions indicates that more challenging traffic conditions act as a constraint on both route choice and participation.

This highlights the importance of low-stress, coherent cycling networks in enabling participation, as the issue is not simply whether individuals can ride a cycle, but whether available routes feel safe, manageable and predictable.

The survey also highlights clear limits in people's comfort with traffic-related situations when cycling. While half of people who cycle feel confident riding on roads with moderate traffic (50%), confidence is lower when it comes to specific skills and scenarios, including road positioning in traffic (45%), negotiating junctions safely (44%), dealing with unexpected situations (31%), and navigating complex junctions or roundabouts (25%).

These findings suggest that cycling behaviour is shaped not only by skill, but by perceived risk and situational confidence. The interviews indicated that while training improves awareness and understanding of traffic dynamics, this does not always translate into increased willingness to cycle in these environments. Some participants reported feeling more knowledgeable and observant following training, but no more confident in practice, particularly in busy or unpredictable traffic conditions.

As a result, many adults limit when, where, and why they cycle unless they feel able to manage these environments safely.

Case Study: Confidence remains constrained by traffic

A participant, who had stopped cycling regularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, undertook adult cycle training a few years ago with his wife to enable cycling as a family with their young children. He reported feeling confident in low-stress environments such as canals and quiet streets but remained hesitant to cycle on roads with traffic, due to concerns of driver behaviour. While training reinforced key skills such as road positioning and signalling, it acted mainly as a refresher and did not increase his willingness to use busier routes. As a result, his cycling remained largely limited to leisure and family trips, typically around once a week, with continued avoidance of higher-risk conditions

(Male, 55-64, White British, Hampshire).



6. The Role of Cycle Training

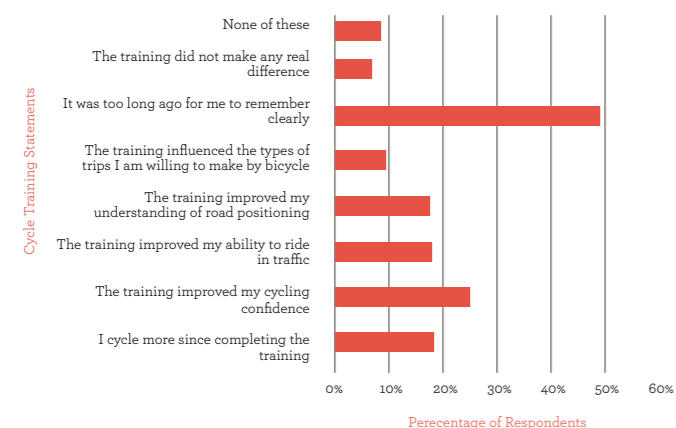
6.1 Impact of Training on Confidence and Skills

The findings suggest that cycle training plays a useful role in supporting adult cycling, primarily through its influence on confidence and specific cycling skills.

Among people who cycle, who had undertaken training:

- 25% reported increased confidence
- 18% reported improved ability to ride in traffic
- 17% reported improved understanding of road positioning

Interpretation of these findings should be treated with some caution, as many respondents had undertaken training a long time ago. Nearly half (49%) reported that it was too long ago for them to remember clearly, which may influence how participants recall and evaluate the impacts of training.



However, there were notable variations in reported impacts of training across different socio-demographic groups. Women were more likely than men to report improvements in their understanding of road positioning, suggesting that training may play a particularly important role in building confidence in traffic-related skills among women.

Differences are also evident by age. Younger adults (25-34) were significantly more likely to report increased confidence following training compared to older groups (35+). This may reflect differences in prior experience, confidence levels or openness to learning, although the underlying reasons are not fully clear from the data. It is also possible that younger adults had undertaken training more recently and were therefore better able to recall its impact.

Qualitative evidence suggests that training plays an important role in building awareness, particularly in relation to road positioning, hazard perception and understanding driver behaviour. A number of participants interviewed as part of this research, described gaining a clearer sense of how to navigate traffic and make safer decisions while cycling.

A consistent theme across interviews was that training enhances awareness of risk as well as capability. For example, participants described improved understanding of road positioning and interaction with traffic, although applying these skills in busy environments remained challenging. In some cases, this increased awareness resulted in more cautious behaviour, particularly in high-traffic environments. This helps to explain why improvements in knowledge and skill do not always translate into increased

confidence or willingness to cycle in more demanding environments.

However, the extent of these changes varies. Some participants reported little or no change in confidence following training (6%), particularly where concerns about traffic and driver behaviour remained. This reinforces the finding that training alone may be insufficient to overcome deeply held perceptions of risk.

25% REPORTED INCREASED CONFIDENCE AFTER TRAINING

Case Study – Training builds confidence but not full independence

A participant who had not cycled since childhood undertook Level 1 adult cycle training and reported increased confidence in handling a bike. However, as the training was delivered off-road and did not include riding in traffic, she continued to avoid busy roads and stuck to cycling on very quiet roads and her local park. She felt that she needed additional, more advanced training to build the confidence required to cycle on the road. Unfortunately, she had been unable to attend Level 2 sessions but expressed interest in doing so in the future to further develop her confidence.

(Female, 45-54, Asian/Asian British, London)



6.2 Limits of Training and the Need for Progression

The interviews also revealed important limitations in current provision. In several cases, training was described as relatively basic or focused on off-road environments, with limited exposure to real traffic conditions. However, this was often linked to the level of training undertaken. Participants who had completed lower-level training (e.g. Level 1) were more likely to report limited experience of on-road cycling, whereas higher-level training (Level 2 and 3) provided greater exposure to real traffic conditions. As a result, some participants reported that while their confidence had improved, they still did not feel able to cycle on busy roads or in more complex situations.

This suggests that training may need to be delivered as an ongoing process to fully support cycling in real-world environments. Importantly, the interviews highlighted that training is not only valuable for beginners but also for experienced people who cycle. Participants who classed themselves as people who cycle regularly and felt confident cycling, described gaining new insights and correcting previously unrecognised poor habits, indicating that training can function as both an entry point and as a form of skills development or refresher training.

Case Study – Training for experienced people who cycle and family riding

A confident and regular cyclist took part in family cycle training alongside his wife and young children, motivated by a desire to feel safer cycling as a group as his children began riding independently.

Despite his prior experience, he found that the training improved his awareness of risks and reinforced key safety behaviours, influencing how he cycled both with his family and independently. While the training helped both him and his wife feel more confident cycling with their children, they continued to avoid more challenging conditions, such as busy roads and night-time cycling. However, he did feel comfortable cycling on busy roads when riding alone.

He described the training as highly valuable and felt it would benefit people who cycle at all levels, not just beginners.

(Male, 45–54, White British, Cambridgeshire)

6.3 Training as a Catalyst for Behaviour Change

There is limited evidence that training alone leads to substantial increases in overall cycling participation. Among people who had undertaken cycle training:

- **9% reported that they cycle more following training**
- **10% reported that training influenced the types of trips they make**

The findings suggest that training tends to support those already considering cycling, rather than bringing new people into cycling. However, some participants reported no significant change in their cycling frequency or behaviour following training. Therefore, the impact of training may depend on wider factors discussed in previous sections, including confidence, infrastructure and individual readiness to cycle. The findings also suggest that training can increase awareness of risks, which may influence how and where people choose to cycle.

Among people who don't cycle, the potential impact of training appears more constrained:

- **16% say they would be likely to cycle if offered adult training**
- **74% say they would be unlikely**

This reinforces the view that training is most effective as an enabling intervention for those already open to cycling, helping to convert latent demand into active participation rather than creating demand where none exists. These findings are consistent with behaviour change models such as the Stages of Change framework, which suggest that individuals progress

through a series of stages from precontemplation to maintenance when adopting new behaviours¹⁵. In this context, cycle training appears most effective for those in the preparation or action stages, where there is already some intention to cycle, rather than among those with no current interest. This highlights the role of training in supporting progression from intention to behaviour, rather than generating demand in isolation.

16% SAY THEY WOULD BE LIKELY TO CYCLE IF OFFERED ADULT TRAINING

¹⁵ Friman, M., Huck, J. and Olsson, L.E. (2017) Transtheoretical Model of Change during Travel Behaviour Interventions: An Integrative Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14060581>



Case Study: Training as an entry point to cycling in adulthood

A participant who had not previously been able to ride a cycle undertook adult cycle training about 2 years ago after moving closer to university. Motivated by a desire for independence and a more sustainable way to travel, as well as encouragement from a friend who cycled, she saw training as an opportunity to learn a new skill and take control of her commute.

The training enabled her to learn to ride for the first time, leading her to purchase a bike and begin cycling occasionally for leisure and practice. However, she did not yet feel confident enough to use cycling for commuting, as her route involved busy roads which she continued to avoid.

She expressed interest in further, on-road training to build confidence, although limited availability of follow-on sessions made this difficult. This case highlights how training can act as a critical entry point to cycling in adulthood, while also demonstrating the need for progression to support everyday use.

(Female, 18-24, other ethnic group, Lancashire)

This suggests that training can expand perceived cycling options, even where overall confidence may remain constrained on busier roads.

6.4 Long-Term and Lifecycle Impact of Cycle Training

One of the clearest findings is that cycle training amongst adults taking part in the survey did not happen recently. Among those who have received training (respondents could select more than one choice):

- **76% report that it took place more than 10 years ago**
- **49% say it is too long ago to remember**

This highlights a significant gap in current provision. Training is not experienced as a routine, or repeatable form of support, but is instead largely associated with childhood. This has important implications. While cycle training in childhood remains an important life skill, helping to develop fundamental riding skills, confidence and positive attitudes towards cycling from an early age, the findings suggest that capability and confidence may still require reinforcement throughout the life course. As individuals encounter new environments, traffic conditions and cycling purposes, additional or refresher support may be needed to sustain participation and confidence over time. This aligns with the Government's wider road safety ambition to promote a lifelong learning approach to road safety education, recognising that

skills, behaviours and confidence evolve across different stages of life¹⁶.

Many adults may not have received training at all, while others may have undertaken training in a very different traffic environment to that experienced today. As a result, some may benefit from refresher or progression training when returning to cycling after a long gap, cycling with children, or transitioning to new forms of cycling such as commuting or e-bike use.

A consistent theme across interviews is that cycle training is not experienced as an ongoing or continuous form of support. Several of the interview participants expressed interest in refresher or follow-on training, particularly to build confidence in more challenging conditions such as on-road cycling or commuting.

This points to the need for a more continuous, lifecycle-based approach to training, rather than a one-off intervention.

MANY ADULTS MAY NOT HAVE RECEIVED TRAINING AT ALL,

¹⁶ Department for Transport (2026) Road Safety Strategy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-safety-strategy>

Case Study: Demand for ongoing and refresher training

A participant who had undertaken cycle training around 20 years ago, after having children, said it helped build initial confidence but was relatively basic and did not include real-road scenarios.

Although she now cycles occasionally for short local trips, she still feels anxious on roads and avoids busier or more complex road conditions. She identified driver behaviour and limited infrastructure as ongoing barriers.

She emphasised the value of cycle training but highlighted the need for refresher courses, particularly for those returning to cycling after a long gap. She also noted that while her children had completed Bikeability at school, now in their 20s they would benefit from refresher training, suggesting a gap in provision beyond childhood.

(Female, 45-54, White other, West Sussex).



6.5 Training, Confidence and the Wider Cycling System

The findings suggest that confidence develops gradually and is shaped by multiple interacting factors. While training can play an important role in building confidence and skills, it does not operate in isolation.

Training is most effective when combined with supportive infrastructure and opportunities for ongoing practice. It can equip individuals with the skills and confidence to navigate more complex conditions, but the extent to which this translates into sustained behaviour change depends on whether cycling environments feel safe, manageable and predictable.

Rather than acting as a substitute for infrastructure, training should be understood as a complementary intervention within a wider system. Infrastructure provides the conditions for cycling, while training builds the capability and confidence needed to make use of those conditions. These findings highlight that while training plays a critical role in building confidence and capability, its impact is shaped by the wider system in which individuals cycle.

TRAINING IS MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN COMBINED WITH SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

7. Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this research highlight that increasing adult cycling participation requires a more comprehensive approach than infrastructure investment alone. While safe and accessible cycling environments remain essential, the results demonstrate that confidence, skills and perceived ability play a critical role in determining whether individuals are able to take advantage of these conditions.

Taken together, the evidence points to the need for a more integrated approach to cycling policy, in which cycle training is positioned as a core enabling intervention alongside infrastructure and wider behaviour change measures. This is consistent with the Government's recently launched Better Connected strategy which emphasises the importance of integrated approaches to increasing active travel participation¹⁷.

7.1 Recognising Confidence as a Core Barrier

The survey and interview findings show that confidence is highly situational and often limited to lower-stress environments. Even among current people who cycle, confidence drops significantly in more complex traffic conditions such as busy roads, junctions and unfamiliar routes.

These findings suggest that increasing cycling participation is not simply a question of providing infrastructure. Many adults remain unable or unwilling to cycle in real-world conditions due to a lack of confidence, even where suitable environments exist. As a result, participation is constrained not only by access, but by individuals perceived ability to use available infrastructure safely.

Key Recommendations:

- Embed confidence as a core objective within national and local cycling strategies.
- Invest in interventions that build confidence, including cycle training alongside infrastructure.
- Develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track confidence outcomes, alongside infrastructure delivery and usage.

7.2 Positioning Cycle Training as Core Infrastructure

The findings highlight the important role of cycle training in addressing confidence-related barriers. Training helps build the practical skills and understanding required to navigate everyday cycling environments, supporting individuals to make effective use of available infrastructure.

¹⁷ Department for Transport (2025) Better Connected: A Strategic Framework for Active Travel in England. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/better-connected-active-travel-strategy>



Rather than being treated as an optional or supplementary activity, cycle training should be understood as a core component of the cycling system. While infrastructure creates the conditions for cycling, training builds the capability needed to use those conditions with confidence. Without this capability, investment in infrastructure alone may not translate into increased or more equitable participation.

Key Recommendations:

- **Treat cycle training as core provision, rather than a discretionary add-on.**
- **Align funding to support both infrastructure (capital) and training (revenue), recognising that current funding structures often limit revenue spend and constrain the delivery of capability-building interventions.**
- **Integrate training within active travel programmes at national and local level.**

Without this capability-building component, infrastructure alone may fail to translate into widespread equitable increases in cycling participation.

7.3 Increasing Awareness and Visibility of Adult Cycle Training

While many cycle training providers already offer structured and ongoing sessions, awareness of these opportunities remains limited. The findings suggest that many adults are either unaware that training is available or do not recognise its relevance beyond initial learning, with training still widely associated with childhood. As a result, limited visibility acts

as a barrier to uptake, particularly among those who may benefit most from confidence-building support. Increasing participation therefore requires not only maintaining and expanding provision, but ensuring that training is visible, accessible and clearly positioned as relevant to adults at different stages of their cycling journey.

There may also be opportunities to strengthen the role of adult cycle training within the workplace and occupational settings. As interest grows in work-related road safety and in cycling for work purposes, including delivery riding and business travel, more advance forms of training may become relevant. In particular, Bikeability Level 3 or equivalent on-road training could support individuals who ride for work by building confidence and capability in more complex traffic environments.

Key Recommendations:

- **Increase awareness of adult cycle training through coordinated national and local communications campaigns.**
- **Position training as relevant to a wide range of adults, including beginners, returners and experienced people who cycle.**
- **Use trusted channels and local partners (e.g. workplaces, community groups, schools) to promote available training.**
- **Improve the clarity and accessibility of information on how to access training locally.**
- **Explore the role of advance adult cycle training, including Bikeability Level 3, within workplace travel planning and work-related road safety initiatives.**

7.4 Expanding and Normalising Adult Cycle Training

A key finding is that cycle training is rarely undertaken in adulthood and is still widely associated with childhood, highlighting a significant gap in current provision. Many adults have either never received formal training or did so many years ago, often in a very different traffic context. The findings also indicate that training should be positioned not only as an entry-level intervention, but as an ongoing form of skills development for people who cycle at all levels. This includes refresher training for more experienced riders, as well as targeted support to address specific challenges such as riding in traffic or navigating complex junctions.

The growing use of e-bike, e-cargo and cargo cycles also highlight the need for training offers that reflect the changing forms of cycling. While these modes may increase accessibility and support wider uptake, they can involve different handling characteristics, load-carrying requirements and interactions with traffic. At present, there is limited consistency in training provisions and no nationally recognised training standard specific to electrically assisted cycles.

Key Recommendations:

- **Expand adult cycle training provision as a routine, accessible service.**
- **Develop lifecycle-based offers, including beginner, returner and refresher training.**
- **Normalise training as ongoing support, not a one-off childhood experience.**
- **Develop guidance and nationally recognised standards for emerging forms of cycle training, include e-bike, e-cargo and cargo cycle use.**

7.5 Targeting Underrepresented Groups

Cycling participation remains uneven across the population, with lower levels of uptake among women, people with disabilities, and lower-income households. These groups are also more likely to face confidence-related barriers and safety concerns. While the survey did not collect data on ethnicity, existing research indicates that ethnic minority groups are also less likely to cycle regularly and more likely to face barriers related to safety, confidence and access. Qualitative interviews suggest that these barriers may be shaped by local context and perceptions of safety.

The findings suggest that training has particular relevance for these groups, as it directly addresses capability and confidence.

Key Recommendations:

- **Target training towards underrepresented groups, including women, people with disabilities and ethnic minority communities.**
- **Deliver tailored and culturally appropriate programmes through trusted local partners.**
- **Combine training with access initiatives, including bikes, affordability and local support.**



7.6 Integrating Training with Infrastructure Delivery

The research also demonstrated that training is most effective when individuals have access to environments in which they can apply and build on their skills.

Confidence is highest in low-stress settings and lowest in complex traffic conditions, suggesting that both training and infrastructure are needed to support participation across different cycling environments. This reflects the interdependence between infrastructure and capability: environments enable cycling, but only if individuals feel safe using them. Addressing perceptions of driver behaviour and improving interactions between people who cycle and motor vehicles may also be critical. This could include complementary interventions such as driver awareness initiatives, promotion of the Highway Code hierarchy of road users, behaviour change campaigns focused on sharing road space respectfully and integrating cycling awareness into driver training

Key Recommendations:

- Link training to new infrastructure, including route-based and on-road sessions.
- Offer supported rides and route familiarisation alongside new schemes.
- Adopt joined-up delivery models combining capital and behaviour change interventions.
- Develop driver awareness and behaviour change initiatives that support respectful road sharing and reinforce the Highway Code principles relating to vulnerable road users.

7.7 Supporting Ongoing Practice and Behaviour Change

Confidence develops over time and through repeated experience. A single training session may not be sufficient to sustain long-term behaviour change.

Key Recommendations:

- Provide ongoing support beyond training, including led rides and peer networks.
- Focus on sustained behaviour change, not just one-off skills acquisition.
- Integrate cycling into workplaces and communities to reinforce habits.

7.8 Strengthening the Evidence Base

The research also highlights gaps in the current evidence base, particularly in relation to adult cycle training.

Key Recommendations:

- Improve data collection on adult training, participation and outcomes.
- Embed evaluation within programmes, including confidence and behaviour change measures.
- Build the evidence base on long-term and distributional impacts.

7.9 The Role of Bikeability

Building on its established reputation in children's training, Bikeability could be well positioned to play a central role in the expansion and coordination of adult cycle training provision.

Key Recommendations:

- Develop a more coherent national framework for adult cycle training.
- Support quality assurance processes and consistent delivery standards across providers.
- Strengthen instructor accreditation, continuing professional development and guidance for adult training provision.
- Promote nationally recognisable and quality-assured adult training offers across England.

8. Conclusion

This research highlights that cycling participation among adults in England remains low, with confidence emerging as a critical factor shaping whether individuals choose to cycle and in what contexts. While infrastructure investment has improved conditions in many areas, the findings demonstrate that access alone is not sufficient to enable widespread uptake. Many adults lack the confidence and capability required to navigate real-world cycling environments, particularly in traffic.

The concept of a “lost generation” of people who cycle provides a useful lens through which to understand this challenge. A significant proportion of adults either did not receive formal cycle training when they were younger or received it in a very different context, leaving them without the skills and confidence needed to cycle safely in today’s road environments. For these individuals, cycling is not a routine or accessible mode of transport, but an activity limited to low-stress, leisure settings, or avoided altogether.

As this “lost generation” moves into parenthood, these confidence and safety concerns may also shape the attitudes and behaviours of the next generation. Even where children receive formal training through programmes such as Bikeability, parental perceptions of traffic danger and road safety may continue to limit opportunities for independent cycling. This suggests that supporting adult confidence may have wider intergenerational benefits, helping to normalise cycling not only for current adults but also for future generations.

The research shows that adult cycle training has an important role to play in addressing this gap. It can build confidence, improve skills and support individuals to engage more actively with cycling. However, its impact is often partial and contingent on wider conditions. Confidence remains highly situational, and many individuals continue to avoid busy roads and complex traffic even after training. This suggests that the “lost generation” is not simply a product of missed training in childhood, but of a broader system in which skills, confidence, infrastructure and road culture must align.

Re-engaging the “lost generation” group therefore requires more than one-off interventions. It calls for a more continuous, accessible and integrated approach to cycle training across the life course, alongside supportive infrastructure and wider efforts to improve perceptions of safety on the road. In this context, adult cycle training should be understood not as a standalone solution, but as a key enabling component within a wider system designed to rebuild confidence and normalise cycling as an everyday activity.

Ultimately, addressing the needs of this “lost generation” represents a significant opportunity. By equipping adults with the skills and confidence they may have missed earlier in life, there is potential to unlock latent demand for cycling, support more inclusive participation, and contribute to broader goals around health, sustainability and equitable access to transport.





The Bikeability Trust