

Encouraging walking, wheeling and cycling in rural communities



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Introduction

What

Over 80% of land in Wales is rural,¹ with just under a third of the population² living in these areas.

This guide is designed to help local authorities engage with rural communities and encourage more people to walk, wheel and cycle. It highlights effective campaigns and best practice to increase the number of purposeful walking, wheeling and cycling journeys in rural areas.

We've undertaken and read existing research to ensure this guide is useful and promotes campaigns that work.

We welcome the feedback of users and local authorities. We'll integrate this feedback into future versions of this guide.

Why

Rural and remote communities face unique transport challenges not typically experienced in urban areas.³

Transport poverty is a significant concern across rural Wales,⁴ where public transport is limited, car-use is high, and safe, dedicated walking, wheeling and cycling routes are often lacking.⁵

Many rural residents – particularly disabled and older people– experience social isolation. Greater distances, dispersed populations, and limited access to services all contribute to reduced mobility and fewer social connections.⁶

As outlined in Llwybr Newydd: the Wales transport strategy 2021, we must work towards "Safe Cycling from Village to Town." This includes creating hub-and-spoke corridors that connect market towns with surrounding communities.⁷

How

Improving public transport links to key hub towns alongside developing safe infrastructure for walking, wheeling, and cycling,⁸ will help build healthier, more sustainable, and more accessible transport systems for rural communities.

Transport for Wales and Welsh Government are working with local authorities to change the way people travel.

This guide presents a range of proven interventions and campaigns that can be implemented locally. It intended for communications professionals to use to promote walking, wheeling and cycling for everyday journeys.

It also outlines key messaging to help address barriers to walking, wheeling and cycling for people living in rural communities.

We will continue to update these case studies and tools as we learn more about what works best for rural communities in Wales.

Walking, wheeling
and cycling can
significantly
enhance the
wellbeing and social
connectedness of
rural communities.

Walking, wheeling
and cycling can
boost economic
growth and tackle
transport poverty.

Walking, wheeling
and cycling in
place of private car
use would play a
crucial role in Wales
becoming carbon
net zero by 2050.



Key messaging

Implementing safer routes

In the UK, rural roads have consistently accounted for 70% more fatalities than urban roads over the past five years. In 2023, deaths on countryside roads in Wales rose by 7%.⁹

A study by Cycling UK identified road safety as the biggest barrier to more local journeys by bike.¹⁰ Creating safer walking, wheeling and cycling routes in rural Wales is therefore essential.

Improved, accessible infrastructure – combined with lower traffic speeds – can help make walking, wheeling, and cycling easier and more appealing for everyone¹¹. Integrating these safer networks with public transport will further encourage people to choose sustainable transport options.¹²

Initiatives such as [Quiet lanes](#) and [Greenways](#) offer a way to expand transport choices by providing safer, more attractive environments for walking, wheeling and cycling.¹³

Improving route connectivity

Research shows that safe, connected routes are key to encouraging more people to choose walking, wheeling and cycling for everyday journeys.¹⁴ To achieve this, active travel infrastructure should be integrated into wider transport planning to create a fully connected network.

Over half of Wales's population lives within a mile of the National Cycle Network, which spans all 22 local authority areas.¹⁵ Strengthening connections between rural communities and this network is vital, not only for improving health and wellbeing but also for supporting local economies and increasing access to essential services.¹⁶

An example of this approach is Sustrans' [Linking Up project](#), which aims to connect eight rural Welsh communities to the National Cycle Network to improve access to employment opportunities, services and key destinations through walking, wheeling and cycling.

Building cycling confidence

A study by Cycling UK in a rural community found that access to bikes and storage, along with improved cycling confidence, are key enablers for encouraging everyday cycling.¹⁷

Local authorities can support behaviour change and build individual confidence by offering cycle training – either directly or by supporting community-led initiatives with promotional backing.

For example, Carmarthenshire County provides free one-to-one adult cycle training with qualified instructors. These sessions are tailored to individual needs and cover road safety, route planning, confidence building, and even include access to e-bikes for training purposes.¹⁸

Targeted approach

Create a behaviour change strategy that reflects both individual needs and the local context.¹⁹

While broad messaging has value, the most effective strategies are those that target specific population groups with tailored approaches.²⁰

One effective intervention is Personal Travel Planning, which offers individuals customised advice, incentives, and encouragement. This personalised support helps people adopt more sustainable travel habits by addressing their unique needs and motivations.²¹



Campaigns that work

Working together

Partnering with local organisations to deliver tailored events and campaigns can be an effective strategy to shift perceptions and influence social norms around walking, wheeling and cycling.²²

Sustrans' [Learning from Others Toolkit](#) highlights three impactful strategies to boost walking and cycling:

- **Promoting your area** – Use social media, creative advertising, leaflets, posters, and on-site information boards to raise awareness and interest.
- **Partner with local businesses** – work with cafes and shops to offer practical support like free water refills, a place to dry off, or access to basic repair tools such as a puncture kit.
- **Improve infrastructure** – Add features such as additional cycle parking or bike maintenance stations along popular routes.

Connecting communities

More connected communities supports our vision of a healthier, cleaner and more prosperous Wales. Everyone should have access to safe and convenient walking, wheeling and cycling routes.

In Wales, a successful example is the 'hub-and-spoke' model which has been implemented around [Bow Street, Ceredigion](#). This approach integrates walking, wheeling and cycling, public transport, and shared transport to enhance rural access to nearby villages and towns. Well-connected interchanges then link to larger towns and cities, making better use of the rail network, Traws Cymru services, and fflecsi.

In Scotland, Cycling UK's Connecting Communities programme²³ offers a valuable model for Wales. Since April 2024, the programme has delivered over 1,300 cycling activities to build skills and confidence, organised over 550 walking activities to encourage route exploration, and engaged over 7,800 participants. Initial survey results show that the majority of participants said they were more likely to cycle and feel safer doing so.

These examples demonstrate how community-focused transport solutions can be tailored to local needs.

Promoting the use of e-bikes

E-bikes and e-cargo bikes make cycling a viable option for many more people, enabling longer journeys and tackling challenging terrain with ease²⁴. They expand the range and type of journeys that can be made by bike²⁵, offering a practical alternative to cars – enhancing independence and promoting social inclusion²⁶.

Local authorities can support cycling uptake in rural communities by making e-bikes and e-cargo bikes more affordable and accessible.

Examples of successful schemes that can inspire rural communities:

- [E-Move](#) operated by Sustrans Cymru
- Pedal Power's '[See Cycling Differently](#)'
- [Pembrokeshire bike hire](#)
- [Bike to the future - Newtown](#)
- [Beics Antur Bikes | Antur Waunfawr](#)
- [Wheel Together | Facebook](#)

For legal guidance on e-bikes, visit: [Riding an electric bike: the rules - GOV.UK](#)

Endnotes

- ¹ Welsh Government, [Sustainable transport in rural areas](#), 2024.
- ² Rural Urban Classification (2021) and Census 2021 population: [Rural Urban Classification \(2021\) of LSOAs in EW | Open Geography Portal](#).
- ³ Welsh Government, [Sustainable transport in rural areas](#), 2024.
- ⁴ Sustrans, [Encouraging more walking and cycling](#).
- ⁵ Living Streets, [Walking for Everyone: A guide for inclusive walking in cities and towns](#), 2022.
- ⁶ Department for digital culture, media and sport, [A connected society](#), 2018.
- ⁷ Welsh Government, [Llwybr Newydd: the Wales transport strategy](#), 2021.
- ⁸ Welsh Government, [Sustainable transport in rural areas](#), 2024.
- ⁹ NFU Mutual Rural Road Safety, [rural-road-safety-report-2024.pdf](#), 2024. Raw data for urban-rural is available here: DfT's Table RAS0302, [Road safety statistics: data tables - GOV.UK](#).
- ¹⁰ Cycling UK, [Behaviour change in rural areas primary research consultation report](#), 2023.
- ¹¹ Living Streets, [How changes to infrastructure can change travel behaviour](#), 2023.
- ¹² Active Travel Board, [Active Travel in Wales: Annual Report](#), 2024.
- ¹³ Campaign to Protect Rural England, [CPRE's guide to Quiet Lanes](#), 2003.
- ¹⁴ Cycling UK, [South Hams and West Devon Active Travel Behaviour Change Strategy](#), 2023.
- ¹⁵ Active Travel Board, [Active Travel in Wales: Annual Report](#), 2024.
- ¹⁶ Sustrans, [Linking Up Wales](#).
- ¹⁷ Cycling UK, [Behaviour change in rural areas primary research consultation report](#), 2023.
- ¹⁸ Carmarthenshire County Council, [Adult Cycle Training](#).
- ¹⁹ Transport Scotland, [Interventions to address common barriers to active travel](#).
- ²⁰ Transport Scotland, [Interventions to address common barriers to active travel](#).
- ²¹ Transport Scotland, [Interventions to address common barriers to active travel](#).
- ²² Cycling UK, [South Hams and West Devon Active Travel Behaviour Change Strategy](#), 2023.
- ²³ Cycling UK, [Connecting Communities impact | Cycling UK](#).
- ²⁴ Welsh Government, [Sustainable transport in rural areas](#), 2024.
- ²⁵ Welsh Government, [Sustainable transport in rural areas](#), 2024.
- ²⁶ Welsh Government, [Sustainable transport in rural areas](#), 2024.

