

# Engaging young people to improve active travel



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# Introduction

## What

This guide is intended to help local authorities engage more young people and engage them more effectively. This is with the aim to get more young people walking, wheeling and cycling everyday journeys.

Specifically, this guide is aimed at young people aged 16 to 25. It is intended to complement our [school journeys guide](#) which is aimed at under 16s. There will be some overlap between the two.

This a useful, practical document. We've undertaken and read existing research to ensure this guide promotes activities that work.

We welcome feedback from young people and local authorities. We will integrate this feedback into future versions of this guide.

## Why

Early adulthood is an important time for personal and social development. This is an age when people leave compulsory education and start higher education, apprenticeships or work. Access to good walking, cycling and public transport is vital to help young people access educational and employment opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

However, young adults make fewer journeys than older adults.<sup>2</sup> Young people are, therefore, more likely to use a range of travel options (rather than primarily the car).<sup>3</sup> Ensuring active travel works for young adults is vital if they are to benefit from opportunities and use sustainable transport throughout adulthood.

## How

Transport for Wales and the Welsh Government are working with local authorities to change the way people travel. We're doing that through targeted interventions that we know work.

This guide provides a number of interventions, events, and campaigns to be run at a local level. These are intended for communications professionals to use to promote active travel. It sets out key messaging to help overcome barriers to active travel for young people.

It highlights a number of interventions that can work for young people. We will update these case studies and tools as we better understand what works for young people in Wales.





Transport plays an important role in young people's personal development.<sup>4</sup>

Young people are more likely to travel using sustainable transport modes.<sup>5</sup>

Young people recognise the importance of reducing car use.<sup>6</sup>

# Engaging young people

## Understand your audience

To target young people effectively, it's important to understand the age demographics within your area. Tools include:

- Age Census 2021: [Office for National Statistics](#)
- Usual resident population by age and local authority: [StatsWales](#)
- National level population estimates by year, age and UK country: [StatsWales](#)

Targeting universities, colleges and work places can be another way to engage young people. We have published a case study on 'Engaging with young people at Neath Port Talbot College' to highlight good practice.

## Collaborating

It's important that young people are involved in the consultation processes. They often report that their views are not heard.<sup>7</sup> By listening and collaborating, interventions are more likely to be successful and embedded in their lives.

Use everyday language and avoid jargon to better engage them. For example, use 'walking, wheeling and cycling' rather than 'active travel'.

Engaging with young people sets out [8 top tips](#) on how to engage with young people effectively. For example, young people should be seen as a separate stakeholder group with their own needs and values.

## Social media

Social media is a great tool to increase take up of active travel. For younger people, social media is more likely to be their main source of news (rather than a news website or app).<sup>8</sup> Social media could be effectively used to promote new infrastructure and local campaigns to young people. It can be used to demonstrate the benefits of cycling, walking and wheeling everyday journeys.

Younger people are more likely to use TikTok and Instagram rather than Facebook and X.<sup>9</sup> Focus on these forms of social media when targeting young people. Think about how to engage them using these mediums and how content can be created together.



## Evaluating success

Engagement is an ongoing process. It is important to offer opportunities for young people to feedback ideas on how and where to improve active travel infrastructure, services and initiatives.

On social media, you could highlight successful stories and testimonials from young people who have embraced active travel and sustainable transport options. This could influence young people to break the habit of using the car. It shows them that there are other options to the car and can inspire them to travel actively.



# Key messaging

## Money saving

Walking is a cheaper alternative to driving or taking public transport. With rising inflation, it is vital that we advocate for walking and wheeling. It could reduce pressure on young people's finances during the cost of living crisis.<sup>10</sup>

Effective promotion of schemes to support young people to access equipment such as bikes is a need highlighted by other studies.<sup>11</sup>

Stakeholders need to make increased efforts to ensure all young people have access to money saving schemes.

## Mental health

Nearly a quarter of young people in Wales report high levels of mental health problems.<sup>12</sup>

Walking, wheeling, and cycling can help manage feelings of stress and lessen the risk of developing depression.<sup>13</sup> It also encourages young people to socialise by connecting with friends, neighbours, and the local community, which can help tackle loneliness.<sup>14</sup>

The convenience and flexibility of active travel allows for greater transport independence for young people. This develops young people's autonomy and can increase their well-being.

## Environmental factors

Young people can be key actors in raising awareness of sustainable travel and adopting environmentally-friendly practices. As they use the car less than other age groups, they contribute less towards carbon emissions.<sup>15</sup> Evidence shows that young people are affected by the fear and stress of climate change.<sup>16</sup>

Empowering young people to raise awareness of and participate in environmentally conscious transportation choices will help mitigate change for future generations.



## Accessing opportunities

Safe and convenient active travel is essential for young people to be able to access opportunities.<sup>17</sup>

The Welsh Youth Parliament has highlighted the importance of improved connectivity between different modes of sustainable travel.<sup>18</sup> It is important to remove barriers facing different groups including neurodiverse young people, those with physical disabilities and those in rural areas to ensure all young people have access to the same opportunities.<sup>19</sup>

Young people may need to travel across local authority boundaries to reach education, employment and training opportunities. Local authorities must ensure that this is not a barrier for young people.<sup>20</sup>



# Campaigns that work

## Encourage public transport use

Affordable public transport allows young people to access opportunities.<sup>21</sup> Encouraging more use of public transport also increases active travel as people walk or cycle to bus stops and railway stations.

There are multiple schemes in place to make public transport more affordable for young people:

- [MyTravelPass](#)
- [16-25 Railcard](#)
- [16-17 Saver](#).

Increasing awareness of these schemes could increase active travel as well as public transport use.<sup>22</sup>

## Cycle safety and security

Evidence shows that cycle routes are considered less convenient, in worse condition and less accessible than walking routes.<sup>23</sup> Highlighting segregated cycling paths in the local area and the increased safety that comes with using them could encourage greater take up of cycling. Cycling with friends is another way to increase confidence and build a community of cyclists.

A survey conducted by Welsh Youth Parliament showed only 18% of 1,300 young people rated the security of cycle parking in their area as “good” or “very good”.<sup>24</sup> Secure cycle parking facilities in communities and places of learning is essential to encourage greater travel by cycles.

## Wayfinding

Wayfinding plays an essential role in helping people find their way around familiar and unfamiliar places. For young people, public spaces create a sense of identity and belonging.<sup>25</sup>

Effective wayfinding plays an important role in these spaces to ensure young people can make journeys independently. Wayfinding systems need to be accessible and communicated clearly to ensure all young people can travel with ease.<sup>26</sup>



# Endnotes

- 1 Sustrans, '[Transport to Thrive](#)' (2023), pp6-8.
- 2 Sustrans, '[Transport to Thrive](#)' (2023), pp11-13.
- 3 [National Survey for Wales](#) (2023).
- 4 Sustrans, '[Transport to Thrive](#)' (2023), pp6-8.
- 5 [National Survey for Wales](#) (2023).
- 6 Sustrans, '[Transport to Thrive](#)' (2023), pp11-13.
- 7 Amy Hazlehurst, '[Engaging young people - 8 top tips](#)' (October 2023).
- 8 Nic Newman, 'Overview and key findings of the 2023 Digital News Report', June 2023.
- 9 UKOM, '[Social media use by age](#)' (2023).
- 10 Sustrans, '[Helping people through the cost of living crisis and growing our economy: The role of walking, wheeling and cycling](#)' (2022).
- 11 Welsh Youth Parliament, '[Sustainable Ways](#)' (2023), pp16-18.
- 12 Cardiff University, '[Nearly a quarter of young people in Wales are reporting very high levels of mental health symptoms following the pandemic](#)' (April 2023).
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- 14 Living Streets, '[Next steps at university](#)' (no date).
- 15 Sustrans, '[Transport to Thrive](#)' (2023), p8.
- 16 Hickman, C. et al, '[Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey](#)', The Lancet Planetary Health (2021).
- 17 Sustrans, '[Transport to Thrive](#)' (2023), pp6-8.
- 18 Welsh Youth Parliament, '[Sustainable Ways](#)' (2023), pp36-38.
- 19 Department for Education, 'Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training Statutory guidance for local authorities' (2019), pp10-11.
- 20 Department for Education, 'Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training Statutory guidance for local authorities' (2019), pp11-13.
- 21 The Health Foundation, '[A place to grow: Exploring the future health of young people in five sites across the UK](#)' (2018)
- 22 Welsh Youth Parliament, '[Sustainable Ways](#)' (2023), pp16-18.
- 23 Welsh Youth Parliament, '[Sustainable Ways](#)' (2023), pp30-33.
- 24 Welsh Youth Parliament, '[Sustainable Ways](#)' (2023), p31.
- 25 Yang et al, '[An evaluation of wayfinding abilities in adolescent and young adult males with autism spectrum disorder](#)' Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders (2021).
- 26 Welsh Youth Parliament, '[Sustainable Ways](#)' (2023), pp36-38; Sustrans, '[Transport to Thrive](#)' (2023), p28.

