

Empowering women to cycle

Insight from qualitative research
with women in Ireland

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1 Introduction

This paper summarises the findings of qualitative research with women in Ireland. It provides insight into women's cycling habits, including barriers to and motivations for cycling, to inform subsequent phases of the research to be conducted by Sustrans, and a final report to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).

Method

CFE conducted an online survey of 1,000 women aged 18 and over who live in Ireland about their attitudes to cycling and current cycling behaviour. Survey respondents were asked to express their interest in taking part in further research on the barriers and enablers of cycling. A sample of 30 women was invited to take part in ethnographic research which involved using a smartphone app (through the Sago 'Qualmobile' platform) to keep a travel diary of journeys made over a two-week period. Participants were purposefully selected from those who volunteered to take part in further research based on:

cycling frequency, to ensure that participants were able to record at least one cycling journey over a two-week period

home location, to highlight specific barriers/enablers of cycling in urban, suburban and rural locations

age group, to provide insight into barriers/enablers of cycling for women of different ages and at different life stages

Although numbers in the sample as a whole are small, respondents from different ethnicities and nationalities and with disabilities or long-term health conditions are represented. It is important to note that the views of those who do not cycle at all or only cycle very infrequent are not represented.

The app asked all participants to report on at least three journeys taken by any form of transport over a two-week period, and capture photos and images to 'show' what the journeys were like. They were encouraged to report on infrastructure that either facilitated, or inhibited or deterred, them from cycling the journeys they made.

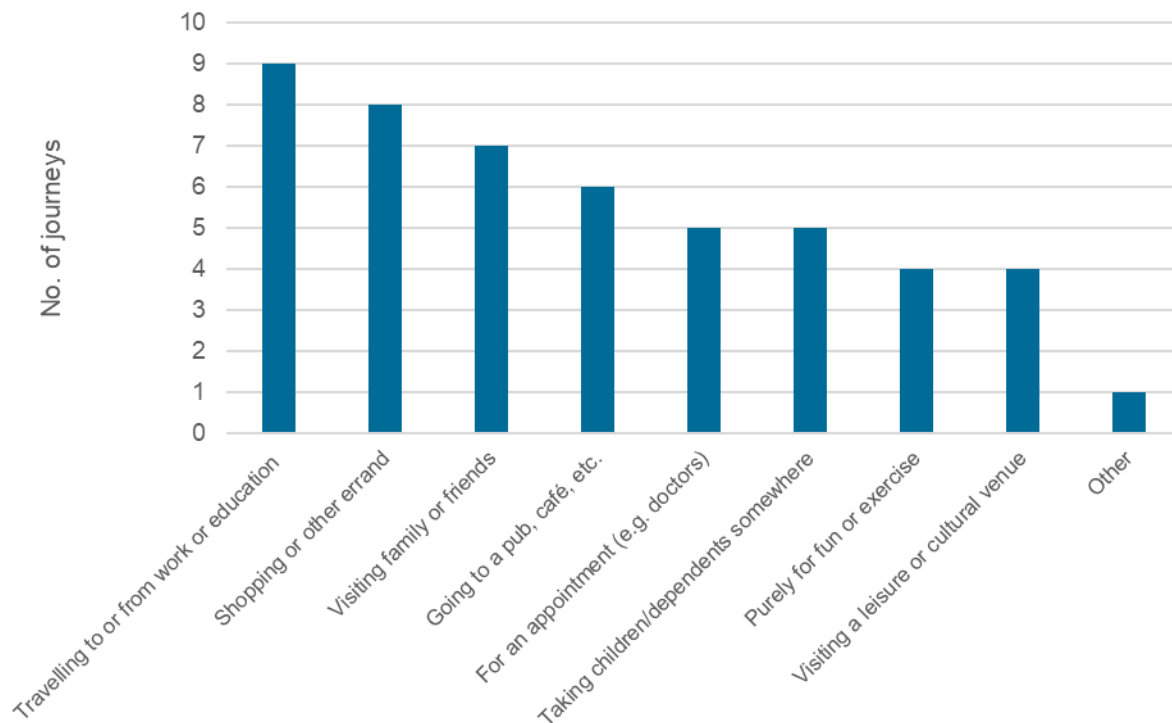
Of the 30 invited to take part, 22 completed a diary for at least one journey, with most (19) completing diaries for at least three journeys. A total of 33 journeys by cycle were recorded across the sample. All the app participants were then contacted and asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview: 18 were interviewed via Teams or telephone, one took part through a text message conversation. Further details of the sample who took part in both stages of the qualitative research are provided in [Appendix 1](#).

All qualitative data – transcribed video and audio diary entries, media files and interview transcripts – were imported into NVivo and coded thematically to identify what motivates women to cycle, the key barriers to making journeys by cycle and measures that could help to increase the proportion of women traveling by cycle. Quantitative data collected via the app is summarised in [Appendix 2](#).

2 Cycling habits

The women who participated in the ethnographic research did a large amount of cycling. Most cycling journeys were for ‘functional’ reasons, such as commuting, running errands, and visiting family and friends. However, some of the women did cycle for leisure, particularly with their families on weekends or during holidays ([Figure 1](#)).

Figure 1: Purpose of cycling journeys (App respondents who travelled by cycle, Base = 22)



Functional cycling

The women who commuted by cycle had either done this for a long time or had started doing it when they returned to their workplace after the COVID-19 pandemic. The time of this cycle commute was up to half an hour.

It was also common for the women to run errands by cycle, including to their local shop, chemist, newsagent, post office or library. It was less common for respondents to travel to a larger supermarket by cycle; typically, these journeys were undertaken by car

because it is not possible to easily transport a 'family shop' on a cycle. Occasionally interviewees reported that they commuted to appointments, such as with their doctor or dentist, by cycle if they were close to their home. One person cycled to the gym as a warm-up.

Lack of time is a barrier to engaging in exercise, particularly for women who often combine work and caring for children and/or other dependents. The opportunity to integrate exercise into their everyday lives by undertaking functional journeys by cycle is a key motivator for many of the women in our sample.

I'll, kind of, come up with a reason to cycle someplace. Because if I'm looking out and saying, 'Oh, it's a gorgeous day and I'd like to go for a cycle,' but, I suppose, I prefer to go for a cycle with a purpose. So I'll say, 'Do you know what, I'll cycle into town now and I'll get a whatever and then I'll cycle home.' So, it's, kind of, got a destination and a reason to go but really it's probably more of a leisure cycle with an excuse

45-54 year old woman, living in a suburban location

Cycling for leisure

Two of the women recorded journeys by cycle purely for leisure purposes via the app. Among the interviewees, few cycled for leisure on their own; most did so with their family at weekends or during the school holidays. However, this usually involved transporting bikes to a destination by car, rather than cycling from the doorstep. Locations for leisure cycling included canal paths, local forests, lakes and parks, or for those who were close enough, the beach. Those who lived close to a Greenway had either cycled on it or expressed a desire to cycle on it in the future. Four of the women who had cycled on the Waterford Greenway regarded it as an enjoyable activity.

We have a greenway, Rock to Waterford, and that's lovely to do as a family. And other families do it, so you get to go with them and make a day out of it.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

The Greenway offers a really nice pocket of nature within quite an urban area. I think that's good for people...because I think it's really easy to lose touch with nature...and I think that's really good for your mental health. I find it really beneficial. it's just really nice to slow down a little bit and be amongst a bit of greenery.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location



I chose this image because it was a time I went biking on the greenway. I enjoyed the freedom of cycling and not having to worry about traffic and cars and freedom of the speed of it.

18-24 year old woman, living in a rural location

A small number talked about cycling on holiday. One had cycled some of the Wild Atlantic Way but found the roads too narrow and difficult in bad weather. Others had cycled in other parts of Ireland (including on the Greenways), one on organised rides.

Perception of a 'cyclist'

All women were asked whether they would describe themselves as 'a cyclist'. Despite cycling regularly, most answered 'no' to this question. The women perceived a 'cyclist' as someone who cycles fast, often and for long distances, wears Lycra, and cycles for fitness rather than function. The women generally did not associate themselves with this image

I wouldn't consider myself a proper cyclist if that makes sense. I see those guys going out in groups on a Sunday, and they are probably cycling for a long, long time. I see that, and I could never picture myself doing that.

35-44 year old woman, living in a rural location

I see all these people at the weekends, sometimes the cycling club, and they're all wearing their helmets, and wearing green. I would consider them cyclists.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

A number of women described how the 'group riding' side of cycling did not appeal to them. Most liked the freedom and flexibility of cycling – not needing to be in a certain place at a certain time or adapt to others' needs or interests – and this is perceived as incompatible with group cycling. A couple of women also mentioned that they did not feel 'good enough' to keep pace with a group and travel a long distance.

I wouldn't really want to be with the group and struggle to keep up. You can possibly do it at your own pace, I've never investigated that, but it just doesn't appeal to me. I prefer just to do it on my own or with friends or family or whatever.

55-64 year old woman, living in a rural location

I'm a very anxious person. I just think that I wouldn't fit into that [group cycling]. I wouldn't be very fit, very healthy and active. I think they'd be well ahead of me, and I'd be left behind. I do think it's good for other people. I think it's a nice little community for people who enjoy that sort of thing, but it's not for me.

35-44 year old woman, living in a rural location

Interestingly, when the women described a cyclist, they often referred to men. Group cycling in particular was perceived to be a 'male activity', and no women could recall seeing female cycling clubs or groups cycling in their local area. There is clearly a gendered image of cycling, particularly cycling for leisure.

This morning I was doing a brief drop-off and there was a group of men, basically like Tour de France on the road. You never see women do that. Like, you would never see a group of women actually cycling.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

I'm not aware of any local cycling groups [for women]. My husband does one... but it's very small, there's 4 or 5 of them that go together on a regular basis and organise event. But, they go off up a mountain or to a greenway somewhere halfway up the country. I wouldn't have any interest in that kind of thing, but I'll cycle into town, or to the shop, or to the library.

45-54 year old women living in a suburban location

Combining cycling and public transport

Very few of the women had experience of combining cycling and public transport. Those in rural areas (and some in suburban areas) did not live close enough to a train station to cycle there. Most had not considered taking a cycle on a local bus and did not think it would be possible, though most also acknowledged that it would be beneficial and might encourage more people to use a cycle or public transport more.



Of those who lived close to a train station, two had taken their cycle on a train. One, who lived in Dublin, took her cycle on the train very regularly. A number of factors helped to facilitate her commute by cycle and rail, including the ease with which it was possible to reserve a cycle space when booking a ticket online. The only difficulty she had experienced was getting on the train with a cycle at rush hour when the train was busy and/or when there were multiple people with a cycle. Another Dublin resident regularly took the DART (Dublin Area Rapid Transit) and would like to take a cycle if it was permitted.

It would make life easier, you don't have to use the car anymore, if you could use the DART and then stop there and then go wherever you have to go by bike. But it doesn't look like it is possible.

35-44 year old woman living in an urban location

The other respondent who took their cycle on the train used to use a standard cycle but purchased a folding model specifically to enable them to use for their commute by train. However, this respondent also found it challenging to transport their cycle during rush hour, particularly folding the bike on a crowded platform in a hurry. This had deterred her from using her cycle for the commute to work.

A number of cities are introducing cycles and scooters that can be located and rented for short journeys via an app, for example, by commuters wishing to travel to and from public transport and their place of work. One Dublin resident regularly used the 'Bleper bikes' as a convenient way of getting around in the city, and one that she preferred to public transport. Unfortunately, there had been occasions when she had been unable to use a bleper bike because they had been damaged and were out of action.



Changes in cycling habits across the life course

Almost all of the women in the study had cycled as a child, and most had experienced periods in their life when they cycled more and less than they did currently.

Participants of all ages had fond memories about cycling when they were younger, generally up to their teenage years. For those growing up in rural areas in particular, cycling gave them the freedom to travel to different places, and a functional way of getting to school or to meet up with friends. Learning to drive and a preference for travelling by car was the most common reason for stopping cycling, along with moving away to college or for work.

Having children impacts both positively and negatively on women's cycling habits. Some women described how having children had resulted in them cycling more. These participants enjoyed cycling as a family and perceived it to be an important skill for their children to develop.

It's [cycling] become a family activity. Before that I probably wouldn't have thought about doing it. I was closer to everything, so I could walk.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

Since we moved here, and since our daughter got a little bit older, for sure, we cycle much more... We try to promote it, even during the weekend me, my husband and my daughter, she's only 6, go out and cycle. That's what she loves.

35-44 year old woman living in an urban location

However, for some, having children presents a barrier to cycling, particularly when they are too young to cycle themselves. One participant was put off cycling as a family activity by safety concerns and, as a consequence, she cycled less too.

After college, it [cycling] decreased a good bit, and then I had my baby, so I wasn't interested in cycling for a couple of years... I don't even want my son cycling at all where I live. I'll cycle myself, but I don't want him cycling at all. I know that's terrible, but it's just too dangerous for him.

25-34 year old women, living in a rural location

Moving, especially between an urban and rural location, can also encourage or discourage women from cycling. Those who had spent time living in Dublin cycled for functional purposes because it was quicker than driving and more reliable than public transport.

At university, in Dublin, I realised that you couldn't really rely on public transport, so I got cycling then... In a small town, you don't really get around on a bike, whereas in Dublin

it's an easier option and better than public transport. So, yes, I think I definitely cycle more now.

18-24 year old woman, living in an urban location

For others, walking was considered an easier option than cycling when living in a city with close proximity to work, education and other amenities. As a result, this represented a period in their life when they cycled less.

When we were in the city centre I was cycling less because we were walking much more. I was literally living outside my workplace, so it was two minutes... everything was so close, we didn't really need to [cycle].

35-44 year old woman living in an urban location

While I was in college, or in uni, I didn't cycle very much at all, because I lived a two-minute walk away and so it didn't really make sense for me to go via bike. In the last two years or so, it's become much more prominent.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

Changing jobs can also be a trigger for cycling more or less. One participant, who had previously worked as a vet, stopped cycling because of concerns about getting injured and not being able to work. Taking a job with a longer commute stopped some cycling to work.

Four of the women described how they had returned to cycling for leisure during the COVID-19 pandemic when many other forms of exercise were not possible because of the restrictions. Once restrictions were lifted and the women returned to work, chose to commute by cycle

Other triggers for starting to cycle, or cycling more were the significant rise in petrol and diesel prices, and a wish to address health issues.

My health, that's what triggered it for me... since I started my cycling 5 years ago, my health's improved, everything's improved. And I'm using less medication. So it does work.

35-44 year old woman, living in an urban location

All of the interviewees reported that they were likely to continue cycling in the future, particularly those who had increased the amount they cycled recently and had seen the benefits in terms of their health, time / convenience and cost savings. These and other motivations for cycling are explored further in the next chapter.

3 Motivations for cycling

Regardless of the amount they cycled themselves, all respondents were hugely positive about the benefits of cycling, and all provided a number of different reasons why cycled certain journeys. In most cases, it was the combination of perceived benefits, rather than a single factor, that motivated respondents to cycle. The most common set of reasons included the health benefits derived from traveling in an active way, in conjunction with the ease, convenience and/or cost of cycling compared with other forms of transport. In all cases, the decision to undertake a journey by cycle was a personal choice or preference – no one cycled because there was no alternative. The environmental benefits of cycling were rarely mentioned and do not appear to be a significant motivator for this group.

Speed and convenience

Relative journey time was a common reason for cycling. The women often chose to cycle rather than walk, or take public transport or even drive during peak times, because it was perceived to be quicker

I was really happy about skipping all the traffic during rush hour. If I chose any other mode of transport, such as public transport or my car, I would have been stuck in traffic.

18-24 year old woman, living in an urban location

If I'm going to grab a coffee with a friend, I'll cycle down instead of walk, because it's about a 25-minute walk, so it's just quicker to fly down on the bike.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

Not to be smug about it, but it is lovely when there's a massive traffic jam and you're just whizzing past it in the cycle lane.

45-54 year old women living in a suburban location

Even when cycling might not be the fastest option, the women sometimes chose this mode of transport because it was perceived to be more reliable predictable in terms of the journey time – journey time by public transport and car can vary considerably depending on the traffic conditions.

Some respondents also perceived cycling to be a more convenient option for certain journeys than driving, for example, because it meant they did not have to find a place to park. Others enjoyed the flexibility and control that cycling gave them. Using a cycle enabled these respondents to travel at a time to suit them, rather than in accordance with a bus or train timetable.

Cost

Once a cycle has been purchased, cycling is a low-cost option. Several women were motivated to travel by cycle for this reason and the opportunity to save money, particularly in the context of the rising cost of living and the high fuel cost.

For our family, it's just money-saving as well. You know, we don't need 2 cars because of it [cycling].

25-34 year old woman, living in a urban location

Parking is expensive in Blackrock, so this is also a factor for cycling down.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

[Cycling] doesn't cost me anything extra, so the cost is definitely a huge factor, obviously with the whole cost of living thing.

25-34 year old woman, living in a rural location

Exercise and fitness

Although most cycled for function more often than for leisure, all the women recognised health benefits of travelling by cycling and valued the time saved by integrating exercise into their routine, rather than exercising separately.

Once I've cycled, I don't feel like I have to go and do exercise in the afternoon because I've done it, I've killed 2 birds with one stone.

45-54 year old women living in a suburban location

I like to cycle because I find it a great way to exercise. I find it's so much cheaper especially these days with the cost of living and the price of diesel and petrol.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

It's very healthy and means I can do a little bit of exercise. When I have the kids back from school, I don't really have a lot of time for myself. So, I said, 'Well, if I can go and do some shopping and cycle, that would be great.' And that's what I did.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

Physical and mental health

Five women with long-term health conditions all described how cycling had helped. Two women had cancer previously and recognised the important contribution cycling made to the achievement of their aim to maintain as healthy a lifestyle as possible. One woman with IBS explained:

I found when I was doing a bit of research about it, they said that low-impact exercises are really good, I think it's just because it releases endorphins and stuff, and that's all good for your body. Usually, I do yoga and I cycle in the morning, and I've found that the combination of those two things has really, really helped the sick feeling.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

Another participant commented on the mental health benefits of cycling. In this sense, cycling was perceived to be comparable to walking, particularly the opportunity it presents to be outside.

[Cycling] is basically freedom and the opportunity to physically relieve my stress

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

I think the impact it has on my mental health is huge. I haven't been cycling for a little bit since I left the position I was at, and I can already tell that my mental health is affected. Just being out and being on the bike really just makes me happy, honestly, there's no other way of saying it. It does me good.

25-34 year old woman, living in a suburban location

When asked to compare cycling with other forms of exercise, many of the women expressed a preference for cycling. In addition to the opportunity to be outside, cycling is perceived to be more flexible than some other forms of exercise which is important for those seeking fit exercise around other commitments. Cycling is also perceived by some to be 'low impact' and more gentle than other forms of exercise. Finally, cycling requires minimal preparation or organisation. Combining it with travel means that it does not really 'feel like exercise'.

The thing I like about cycling is, I'm getting exercise, but I'm kind of tricking myself. If I was in the gym and a stuffy room just doing the same task, I would know I'm exercising, and I would be bored. Whereas, when I'm on the bike, I'm out exercising and I'm enjoying it.

25-34 year old woman, living in a suburban location

It's not, like going to the gym, when you sign up for lessons and you have to be there at 11 o'clock. I can go whenever.

25-34 year old woman, living in a urban location

To be quite honest, I'm not a huge person for exercise. You know, I've never stood in a gym in my life. My exercise would tend to be walking and cycling.

55-64 year old woman, living in a rural location

It works with whatever schedule. I don't need to get in sync with anyone else. I think for women anyway, for family life... it's very, very flexible.

25-34 year old woman, living in a rural location

Two women discussed cycling as a way of losing weight, but on the whole the exercise benefits were explained more in terms of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and feeling better as a result rather than for weight loss and management.

Enjoyment

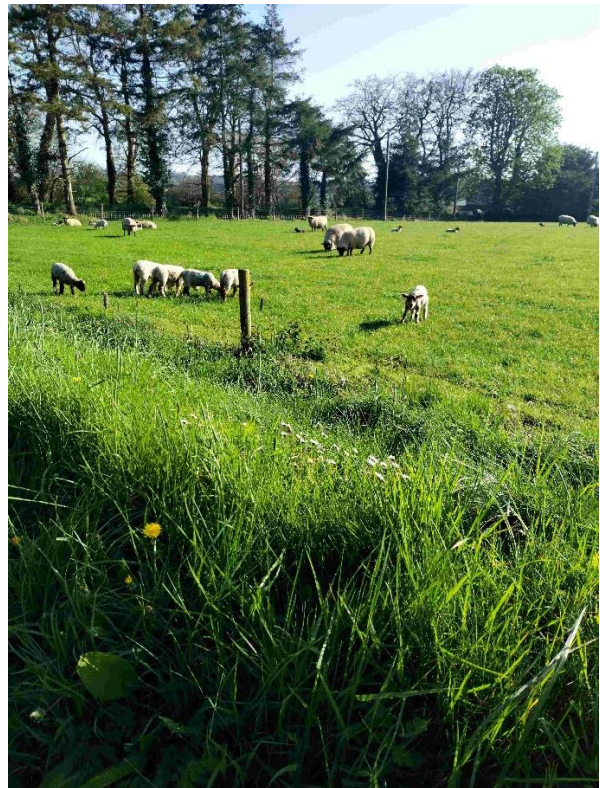
For all of these reasons and more, the enjoyment that women gained through cycling was clear. This is to be expected given the sample is comprised of women who cycle at least some of the time, but several reasons were given for why they enjoy it so much. Respondents talked about 'feeling refreshed' and 'energised' following a cycle journey. They also enjoyed taking in the scenery and being amongst nature. For others, the original motivation for cycling was functional or to address a health issue. Over time, however, their enjoyment of cycling increased, and this had motivated them to continue cycling or to cycle more.

First of all [cycling] was a necessity, but then afterwards I really came to enjoy it, and I looked forward to getting up in the morning to cycle to work. So it kind of changed over time.

25-34 year old woman, living in a suburban location

[This is] an image of lambs and sheep in a field that is near my house. I enjoy cycling because I can see the countryside and I can see animals like the sheep and cows and it just kind of makes me very calm to cycle

35-44 year old woman, living in a rural location



4 Barriers to cycling

Barriers to cycling are wide ranging. They are commonly associated with an individual's characteristics and circumstances, attitudes and physical abilities, as well as a number of external and environmental factors. The focus of this research is on external factors, particularly infrastructure, and related issues, such as personal safety and the security of cycling equipment.

Cycling infrastructure

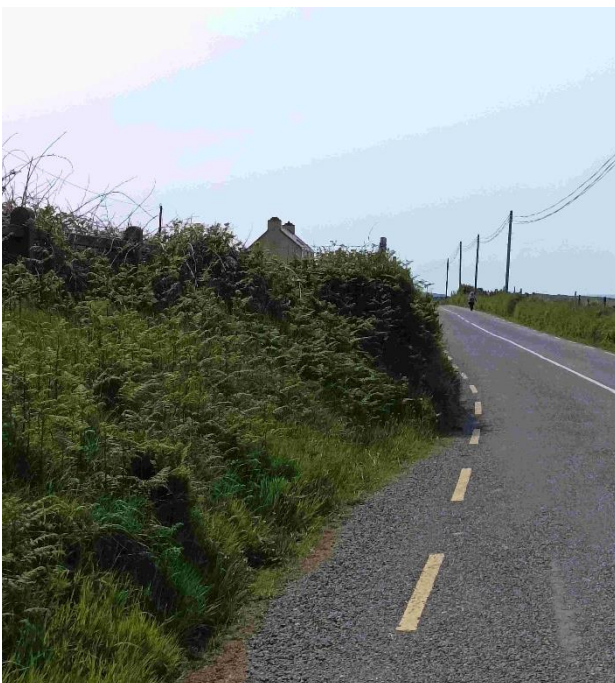
Provision of cycle lanes

Some women were confident cycling on the roads and, although they felt unsafe at times, this did not deter them from doing it. Others lacked confidence to cycle on the roads and were reluctant to undertake journeys that meant they had to travel for all or most of the distance alongside motor vehicles because of safety concerns. The particular features of the roads that made people think that cycling was unsafe depended on where they lived. However, the size of the road, the speed of the traffic and the volume and type of vehicles using the road were all factors.

Some of the women living in more urban areas were put off cycling journeys that took them along main roads with a high volume of traffic, including buses and large trucks, that was often travelling at speed.

I live about a mile from town but it's off a main road, and there is a huge volume of traffic on it. It's only one lane each way so you'd have to cycle on the hard shoulder and it's not a pleasant experience ... The cars just fly along ... and people pull into the hard shoulder to let somebody overtake them. So it's not safe, really.

55-64 year old woman, living in a rural location



In more rural areas traffic is typically lighter, but the roads tend to be narrower. There is less space for car drivers to pass cyclists on rural roads and there is often no footpath for cyclists to divert onto in order to allow cars to pass. While some women still felt confident and safe to cycle on these roads because of the lower volume of traffic, for others concerns about sharing the road users and the lack of cycle paths acted as deterrents.

Some of the cars drive too fast and too close to the cyclists. It's not safe. I have no choice but to take the car.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

If there was cycle lanes I think I would be more inclined to go and do the 5km cycling stuff. But those roads are quite windy. I wouldn't walk those roads either, it's just too dangerous.

35-44 year old woman, living in a rural location

Regardless of the geographical location, a lack of respect towards cyclists from some drivers deterred some women from cycling.

I think the majority of Irish drivers do not know what it's like to be a cyclist in Ireland. I believe if they cycled Irish roads for even just a week they would understand cyclists much more.

25-34 year old woman, living in a suburban location

I think that some motorists don't have enough awareness of sharing the road with cyclists...for example, not leaving much space when overtaking.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

There's no empathy for the person cycling, that the bike needs that extra bit of space, or maybe let the cyclist out before you, it's not going to kill you, you're not going to be that much later. It's like it's everyone for themselves.

55-64 year old woman, living in a suburban location

The women who did not feel confident or safe to cycle on the roads only tended to cycle when they could undertake most or all of the journey on cycle lanes and paths. The presence, or not, of cycling infrastructure determined whether this group would choose to undertake a journey by cycle.

One of the big benefits for my commute to work is that a lot of it can be done on cycle paths...I think if it was a long cycle, all on main roads with cars, I think I'd be less inclined towards that. If there are cycle lanes available, it does make me more inclined to use my bike.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

I do a good bit [of cycling] at the moment but the lack of cycle paths does stop me from travelling to other places that I could go to. Going to the shops on the other side would be the same distance but I wouldn't travel there because of the roads, they're so small and narrow, that it just wouldn't be safe.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

I feel uncomfortable to do everyday journeys by cycle, especially as there's no lane for bikes, so I feel insecure.

25-34 year old woman, living in a suburban location

Several women expressed their frustration when cycle lanes end part way through a journey and they are forced to continue on the road. It is particularly off-putting when lanes end abruptly and without warning. Respondents indicated that they were reluctant to cycle unfamiliar routes for fear the cycle lane would end and they would be placed in a dangerous position.

We're on the main road and we have a cycle lane for a quarter of it and then it just stops, and we're left to our own devices for the rest.

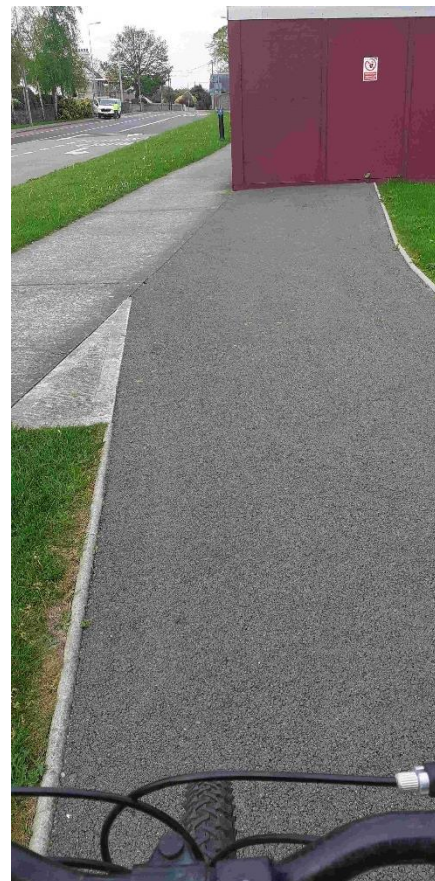
25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

There are a couple of points where you're on a cycle lane, you turn, and the cycle lane is gone and you're suddenly on the road with the cars. There's not a lot of clear signage if you're not aware of it. This particular cycle lane then reappears, but it's on the other side of the road, across four lanes of traffic.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

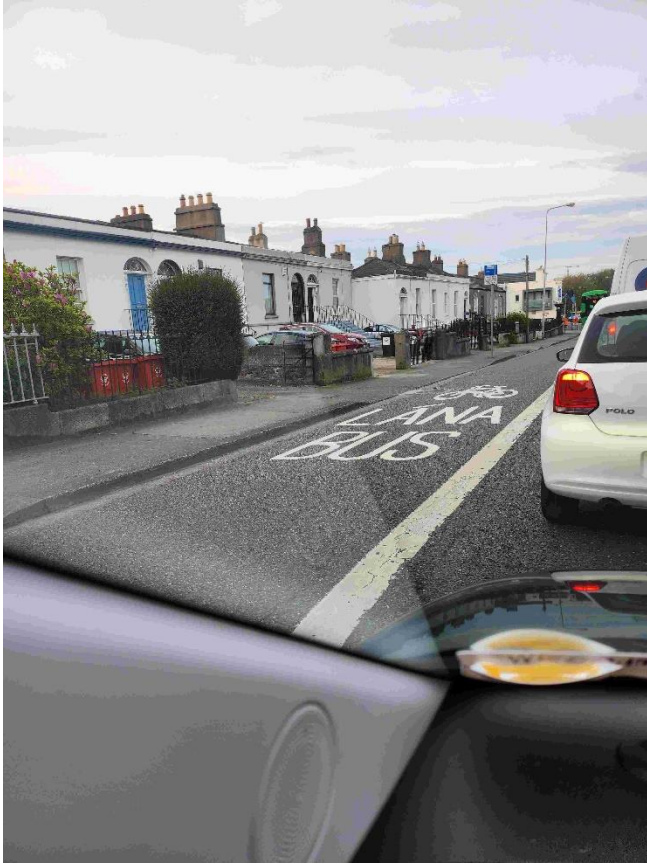
One part of the cycle path literally stops at a wall and has a confusing layout with adjacent footpath.

45-54 year old woman, living in a suburban location



Design of cycle lanes

The introduction of cycle lanes has encouraged some women to cycle and to undertake journeys by cycle they may have otherwise undertaken by car. However, the design of the cycle lane can have an impact on their willingness to use it. Respondents held very negative views about shared bus and cycle lanes. Sharing a space with large buses was not something that most of the women thought was safe for cyclists, and even those who did use them thought that they would be likely to put others off.



Most of the time on the road, it's shared with the Dublin bus and taxis. Taxis, okay. The Dublin Bus, not so much. It's quite scary, especially when you see the cyclist right in front of the bus, and the bus is slowing down because there is a cyclist. But it's not the cyclist's fault. There's no other space.

35-44 year old woman living in an urban location

I don't love cycling where there's not really a distinguishing barrier between cyclists and buses, because it's a really heavy bus route.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

Where cycle lanes were demarcated by a white line on the road, rather than being physically separate, women had experienced vehicles veering over the line; that made cyclists feel vulnerable and less willing to cycle on those routes.

Misuse and quality of cycling infrastructure

In predominantly urban locations, cars were often observed parked on cycle lanes. Both members of the public and delivery drivers had been seen obstructing cycle lanes outside local shops and in town centres.

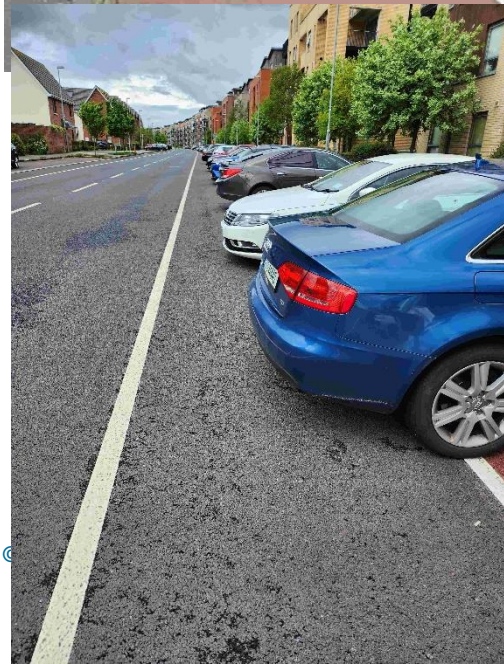
Cycling, even this area, is just not safe. We have lanes that are supposed to be for cyclists and instead people park their car there.

35-44 year old woman living in an urban location

One participant recorded how her usual cycle along a towpath was blocked by a locked gate on one occasion.

I usually cycle on a towpath and today the gate on the towpath was shut, which is really frustrating so I couldn't go further.

35-44 year old woman living in a suburban location



[The] worst part [of my journey] is the main street close to my house that has great cycle lanes on both sides of the street but most of the time the cycle lanes are covered by parked cars and you have to go to the main surface.

25-34 year old woman living in an urban location

Although parked vehicles causing an obstruction was the main issue, a couple of women also described further ways in which cycle lanes were misused, including by cyclists themselves. People on scooters and cyclists had been observed travelling in the wrong direction on cycle lanes. Pedestrians and joggers also occupy the lanes for cyclists.

People are using the cycle lanes for walking on and scooters. They need to be stopped!
People cycling the wrong way on the cycle lanes is another misuse of the cycling rules.

45-54 year old woman, living in an urban location



Although not a common, a minority of respondents raised concerns about the quality of the cycle paths in their local area. Potholes and loose chippings or glass had been observed on the surface of the cycle path and one respondent described a cycle path that had a tree in the middle of it. These obstacles pose a risk to safety and could also damage a cycle, for example, by puncturing tyres. This can act as a further deterrent to cycling, particularly long distances, for women who lack the knowledge and skills to repair a cycle and are concerned about getting stranded far from home.

There was a lot of bumps and potholes on the road I was cycling.

18-24 year old woman, living in a rural location

Cycle storage and security

Some women were put off cycling to certain shops or places where they knew there would be nowhere safe to lock their cycle.

There is nowhere I could safely park my bike and leave it there comfortably while I went into a shop, which is a shame.

25-34 year old woman, living in a urban location

I took a photo of a big new supermarket which doesn't have proper bike parking. Most



people lock bikes onto trolley area. It's a pity it wasn't a condition of planning permission.

45-54 year old woman living in a suburban location

The availability of cycle storage was less of an issue in town centres. However, respondents expressed concerns about the safety and security of these facilities and the risk of cycle theft.

If I was cycling [to work], there are underground lockers that I can just lock my bike to. But I would definitely be quite cautious going into town, say on a Saturday, and just locking my bike to a random pole or whatever. A lot of people in my family have had bikes stolen there, even with the really good locks.

25-34 year old woman, living in an urban location

Road infrastructure

Similar issues in relation to the road surface were also raised. Respondents complained they often had to take care to avoid potholes, gravel and broken tarmac when cycling on the roads, particularly in rural areas. A range of other issues that relate to the wider road infrastructure were also raised.

Road was being resurfaced, very loose gravel, I cycled slow to prevent skidding but still felt gravel flew up at me and my son as cars went past, no way to avoid debris and no alternative route available.

25-34 year old, living in rural location



Junctions

Junctions (particularly those with no cycle lane) were described as particularly unsafe for cyclists. Junctions often narrow the space available for traffic to move through and sometimes require all road users to move into a specific lane to go in a particular direction. The cyclists perceived that the risk of drivers getting too close or knocking them off their cycle is heightened at junctions. The fear of these risks occurring is exacerbated by a perception that car drivers are not always looking out for cyclists or do not understand what signals from cyclists mean.

It's a fear I have that they don't understand the sign I'm making, and if I go to turn then, all of a sudden, I am going to have this car take me as I am turning right

55-64 year old woman, living in a suburban location

Some of the cyclists described how they sought to avoid encountering these risks:



I don't know what it is about the drivers in that section, they just seem to want to make the turn as quick as possible when they see a cyclist. I've been in so many dangerous situations in that particular spot. I just get off and cross the road.

25-34 year old woman, living in a suburban location

At junctions, what I do a lot of the time for safety is, I'll use the pedestrian bit.

45-54 year old women living in a suburban location

However, these evasive manoeuvres could pose a risk to pedestrians on foot.

Lighting

A lack of street lighting, as well as inclement weather, can act as a barrier to cycling year-round. Some women are reluctant to cycle after dark and in poor lighting conditions because of concerns about their personal safety. For some, this stems from negative encounters with groups of males while out cycling and a general perception that it is unsafe for females to be out after dark, even on Greenways and cycle paths they feel comfortable cycling on during the day.

You couldn't go on a Greenway when its getting dusky...or the towpath in the Winter, It'd be so dark and a bit too secluded.

(35-44 year old women living in a suburban area)

There is no light and, like, it's pitch black so It's scary and you worry for your safety. No women is going to go down a pitch dark road with no cycle lane. Like, it's just not going to happen. A man might do it, yes, but a woman, she's not going to do it.

(25-34 year old women, living in a rural location)

Sometimes I just get unpleasant interactions with groups of men or groups of teenage boys that'll yell something at me as I'm going past. I once had some teenage lads try and step in front of me while I was cycling, and made to grab my bike, and I just had to yell at them and go round them.

(25-34 year old women, living in a urban location)

For others, their concerns about cycling at night relate to being visible to cars. Those who did cycle at night wore reflective gear and had good lighting on their cycle to

mitigate this. They felt safe to cycle in the dark as a result, and in some instances felt safer than if they were out on foot.

If I'm out and I'm passing a bunch of young lads and they're menacing or fooling or whatever, I find if I'm walking, it takes a while to get past them, but if I'm cycling I'm past them fairly quickly. So it kind of increases the safety in those situations.

(45-54 year old women living in a suburban location)

I actually never felt unsafe because I felt that I was on a getaway vehicle.

(25-34 year old woman, living in a urban location)

Road works

Although temporary, the presence of road works can deter women from cycling, because they can act as an obstacle and limit visibility. One Dublin resident discussed how the ongoing roadworks in the city had impacted on her feelings of safety and the extent to which she cycled in that area.

I actually would be cycling more, but, this time of year, there are a lot of road works in Dublin. Parts of the journey I would be making are on the routes where the roadworks are happening... The first time I went I was like, 'I can't do this again.'

18-24 year old woman, living in an urban location

5 Measures to increase cycling among women

Two of the primary motivators for women who choose to cycle functional journeys are speed and convenience; the primary barrier is often directly or indirectly related to personal safety. Participants identified a number of ways to make cycling safer and more accessible by enhancing the cycling and wider infrastructure and giving greater consideration to the needs of cyclists when decisions about future changes and infrastructure developments.

Better integration between the cycling and public transport infrastructure

Adapt buses in order to create the space to enable cycles to be transported by bus.

Ensure there is sufficient capacity on the rail network to enable more cyclists to transport their cycle by rail.

Provide safe and secure places to store cycles at bus and railway stations for those who do not wish to take their cycle with them on their onward journey.

Expand shared bikes schemes to ensure cycles are available in close proximity to bus stops and railway stations.

Address damage to blepper bikes and ensure they are regularly maintained so they are available to those who wish to use them.

Enhancements to the cycling infrastructure

Where possible, install dedicated cycle lanes that physically separate cyclists from other road users. This is particularly important to women wishing to cycle with their children.

In shared spaces, ensure the lane is wide enough to accommodate cyclists and other users, and that the area for each user is clearly marked and signposted.

Ensure continuous cycle lanes where possible and add signposting to alert cyclists when a cycle lane is ending and where they can pick up the next lane.

Repair damage (e.g., potholes) to cycle lanes and ensure they are well maintained and free of debris and other obstacles.

Ensure cycle paths are well lit.

Implement penalties for those who obstruct or misuse cycle lanes, e.g. by parking their vehicle in the lane.

Consider installing mechanisms to enable cyclists to access help in the event of a breakdown or medical emergency on a cycle path, such as emergency phone boxes, puncture repair and first aid kits.

Enhancements to the wider infrastructure

Consider the needs of cyclists when designing and/or making changes to road infrastructure, such as junctions, to enable cyclists to progress safely.

Introduce traffic calming measures to reduce the speed of motorists, such as speed bumps or cameras.

Repair damage (e.g., potholes) to roads and ensure they are well maintained and free of debris and other obstacles that could cause a hazard to cyclists.

Driver education, such as signposting, to remind drivers to give cyclists space and priority at junctions.

Appendix 1: Qualitative participant demographics

Table 1: Age group of respondents

18-24	2
25-34	9
35-44	5
45-54	2
55-64	3
65+	1
Total	22

Table 2: Nationality

Irish	21
Rest of the World	1
Total	22

Table 3: Ethnicity

White	21
Asian or Asian Irish	1
Total	22

Table 4: Current status

Employed full-time	15
Employed part-time	3
In education	1
Unemployed / seeking employment / unable to work	1
Retired	1
Homemaker	1
Total	22

Table 5: Declared disability

Disabled	5
Not disabled	17
Total	22

Table 6: Home location

Urban	10
Suburban	6
Rural	6
Total	22

Appendix 2: Quantitative app data

Table 7: Number of journeys by mode of transport

Cycle	33
Car	20
Public transport	6
Walking	14
Total	73

Figure 2: Purpose of journey by mode of transport

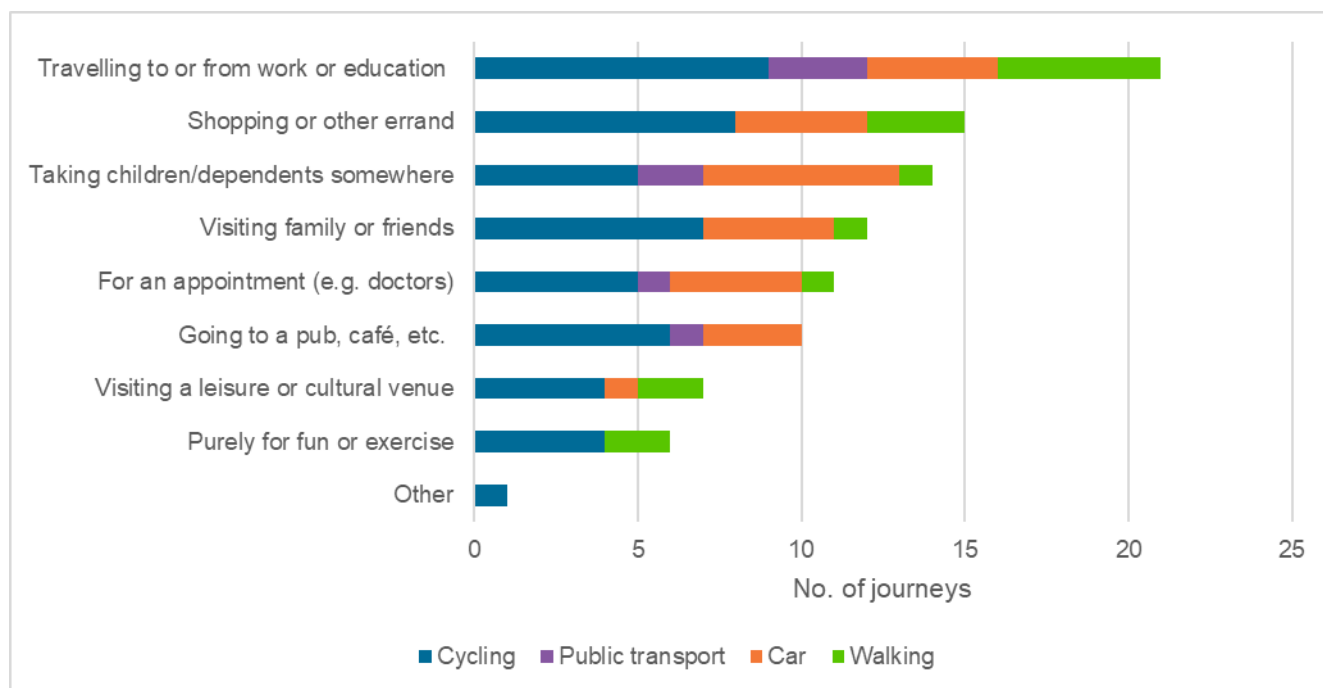


Figure 3: Reasons for cycling the journeys

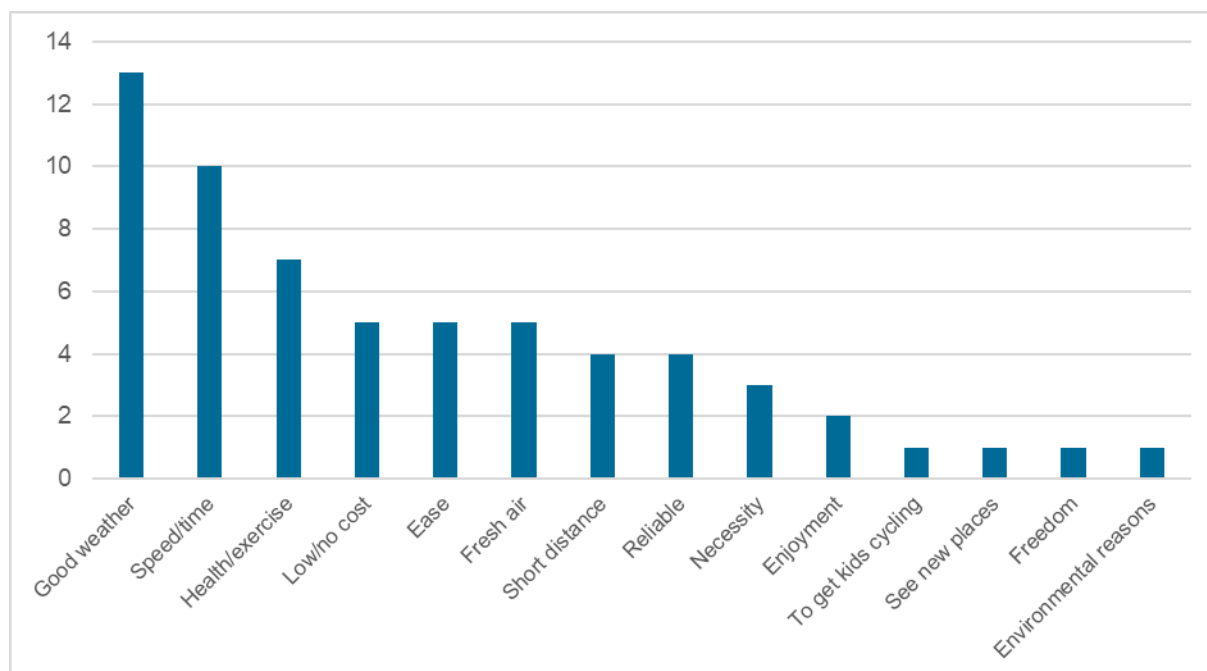


Table 8: Factors that might encourage people to cycle journeys currently undertaken by other forms of transport

	Car	Public transport	Walking	TOTAL
Safer roads	9	2	5	16
Better cycling-specific routes	8	1	5	14
More accessible cycling routes (e.g. free of gates)	4	1	3	8
Nothing	5	0	1	6
Safe cycle storage at destination	3	0	2	5
More cycling-specific routes	1	1	2	4
Better health/fitness levels	2	0	2	4
Ease of combining cycling & public transport	1	1	1	3
Owning/having access to an e-bike	1	0	1	2
Being better at cycle repairs	2	0	0	2
Showers/changing rooms at destination	0	1	0	1

