

MORE ACTIVE MOBILITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE: FINLAND BENEFITS FROM REDUCING CAR USE

The Ministry of Transport and Communications' National Programme for the Promotion of Walking and Cycling aims to increase the combined modal share of walking and cycling from the current 30% to 35–38% by 2030. In order to achieve the target, the current measures are not enough. Without more decisive action, the health, economic, and environmental benefits of increasing walking and cycling will remain a dream.

Cities have a long tradition of car-based transport and urban planning. This is reflected in the reduced physical activity and, consequently, the decline in public health and increasing health care costs. While the car-centric lifestyle still prevails, there are weak signals of a shift towards more active, healthy, and sustainable mobility patterns: carlessness is becoming more common in dense and large cities. In the Oulu region, the popularity of cycling is significant compared to other urban areas in Finland. In Helsinki, the conditions for reducing car use have increased. According to the recent national studies measuring school children's physical activity, children in urban areas are more active than those in rural areas.

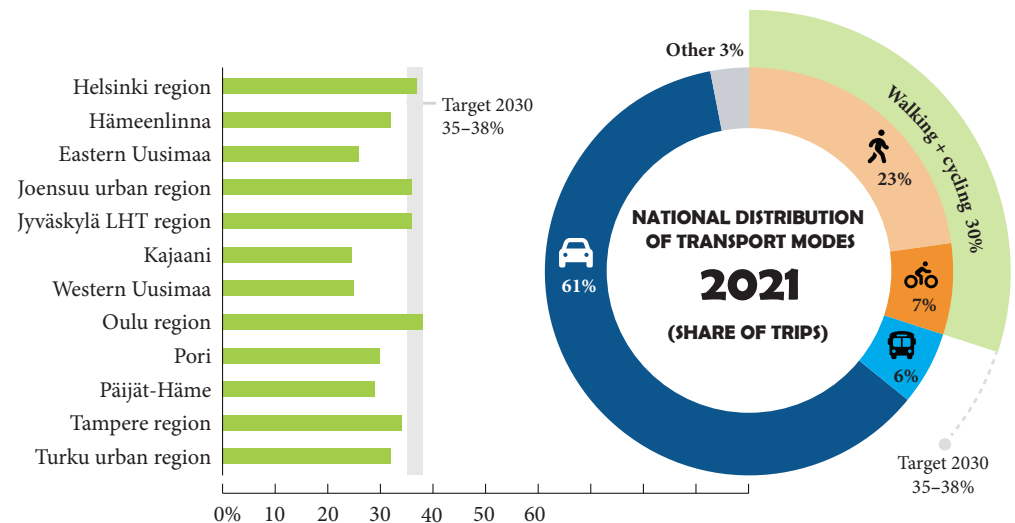
Active travel, i.e. walking and cycling, combines physical activity and transport, and, thus, promotes health, equality, and sustainability. However, in order to become more common, walking and cycling must be easy and attractive. Experiments and a functional urban structure provide the basis for the increase in active travel.

Most journeys are made by car, so increasing the modal share of walking and cycling requires a reduction in car trips. Therefore, measures to limit car use must also be part of the sustainable mobility toolbox.

Measures to promote public transport will enable modal shifts for longer journeys, where a competitive alternative to the car must be offered. The travel chain approach helps to see walking and cycling as part of the transport system, especially in urban areas.

Behaviour change takes time. To bring about and consolidate change, we need to better understand people's daily lives as well as create long-term plans across different sectors and levels of government to support active travel.

Walking and cycling as a share of trips in 2021



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS AT THE LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL:

FACILITATE WALKING AND CYCLING, REDUCE DRIVING

Choose how and which forms of mobility will be actively supported in the future. Introduce a modal hierarchy and draw a solid development plan, which includes measures to limit car use.

CREATE THE SPACE AND THE NEED FOR EVERYDAY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Develop and implement the investments in a comprehensive and coordinated way through cooperation across sectors and administrations. Create a framework for constructive dialogue and development activities between local service providers and municipal actors.

BOLDLY TAKE A STEP FROM EXPERIMENTS TO PRACTICE

Ensure that the skills and the transformative capacity of the actors in your region are strengthened. Evaluate the effectiveness of the experiments in the long term. Ensure adequate funding and multidisciplinary cooperation between actors. Determine the party responsible for the promotion of sustainable mobility.

FACILITATE WALKING AND CYCLING, REDUCE DRIVING

Walking and cycling make urban mobility smoother

In a dense urban fabric, walking and cycling are viable alternatives to car travel. Until now, walking and cycling have been developed with much less ambition and with smaller budgets than private car transport. Addressing environmental challenges and the deterioration of people's physical fitness requires walking and cycling to be developed as the primary modes of transport in cities.

An active promotion of sustainable transport means consistently steering the whole transport system in a sustainable direction. Recognising the limits of car use helps to see walking and cycling as important and viable modes of transport.

In addition to measures that promote walking and cycling (e.g. building accessible footpaths and cycle paths), there is also a need for measures that restrict private car use (e.g. closing off streets or areas to cars, congestion charges, road tolls, or reducing parking spaces).

Incentives and restrictions work most effectively together. Reducing the use of cars is a politically sensitive issue, but it is necessary for the full utilisation of the potential of active transport.

CREATE THE SPACE AND THE NEED FOR EVERYDAY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Urban infrastructure and the investments in urban space must be developed in a holistic way, from the viewpoints of minimising the environmental impact, improving health, and making everyday life smoother.

Municipalities, cities, and urban regions need to promote the use of active transport by increasing the cooperation between different sectors and administrative areas in a coordinated way. In order to overcome the current siloed transport planning, the design focus must be on people's everyday lives rather than on the means of transport. It is important to recognise that transport planning is linked to urban planning, health promotion, physical and recreational facilities, and education. Therefore, municipalities need to define a common goal for these sectors to increase active travel and develop a strategy to achieve it.

The urban structure creates the conditions for walking and cycling, but is not enough on its own

Car use should be limited, especially where there are alternatives, i.e. where services are most easily accessible by walking,

cycling, and public transport. This accessibility is created by an urban structure which is sufficiently dense.

In a less densely built, car-dependent urban structure, the promotion of walking and cycling is worth approaching from a travel chain perspective. This so-called promotion of multimodal mobility can mean, for example, not travelling from car-dependent areas to the city centre by car, but by combining cycling, driving, and public transport. Congestion pricing in the city centre, accessible and efficient public transport, high-quality park-and-ride services connected to the public transport ticket, and limited parking facilities in the city centre help travel chains become more common in large cities.

Regardless of the urban structure, the behavioural change towards active travel can be supported as part of recreational walking and cycling. Also this needs its own high-quality infrastructure, interwoven into the structure of leisure services and the network of green spaces.

MODAL HIERARCHY IS AN EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING TOOL

The modal hierarchy of transport allows for consistent planning. From the viewpoints of, for example, everyday physical activity and the energy consumption of transport, it prioritises walking, cycling, and public transport over car transport.

Modal hierarchy has been adopted as a planning principle for transportation, for example, in Helsinki, where it is used within the implementation of key plans and projects.

However, in the decision-making of city regions, provinces, and central government, there is a lack of uniform commitment to prioritising different modes of transport. The modal hierarchy should be incorporated into the guiding principles of the Ministry of Transport and Communications' administrative plans, the Land Use and Building Act, and the plans of intent for agreements on land use, housing, and transport (in Finnish MAL agreements).

Walking and cycling development programs aim to increase the use of active modes of transport. Car use needs a similar development programme, which, in line with the modal hierarchy, defines a target for maximum car use as well as outlines the amount of urban space available to cars.

This car use development plan also means identifying and promoting the kind of car use that is socially necessary and desirable.

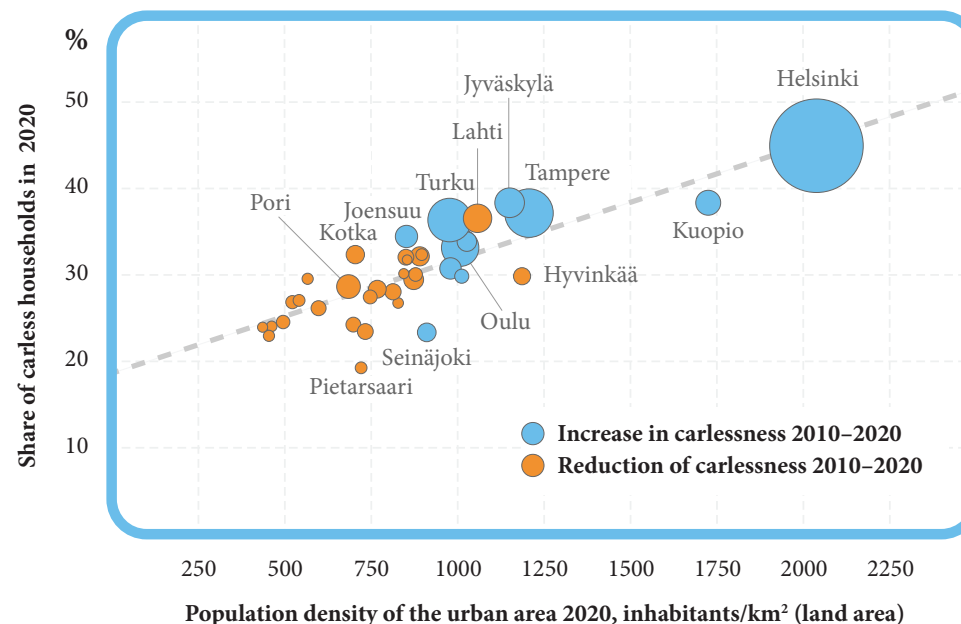
A comprehensive development plan (for the transport system) that includes different transport options can identify the travel chains constituting of walking, cycling, public transport, and private cars, and enable their implementation at the city-region level.

The service structure is a key factor in promoting active transport

Increasing physical education in schools is often offered as a solution to the sedentary lifestyles of children. According to the STYLE study, the service structure and infrastructure of cities are also essential in this respect. When the essential services for everyday life are located close enough, active travel becomes a viable option in urban areas. For example, the urban structure and the density of the school network determine the accessibility of schools, and thus impact whether children walk, cycle, or are driven by car to and from school.

In larger urban areas, the use of electric scooters is now challenging the more active modes of transport, especially walking, but also cycling and using city bikes. Municipalities should maintain an active dialogue, developing services, their regulation, and control in cooperation with the electric scooter rental companies, so that the increased use of these scooters would reduce car use and promote, rather than hinder, sustainable modes of transport.

Carlessness is becoming more common in dense and large cities



BOLDLY TAKE A STEP FROM EXPERIMENTS TO PRACTICE

In recent years, government grants have played an important role in promoting walking and cycling. They have complemented the municipalities' own efforts for active transport, and over the years, municipalities have found different, successful ways to promote walking and cycling.

Strengthening the skills and transformative capacity of regional actors, with an emphasis on the long term, on experimentation, adequate funding, and multisectoral cooperation, is essential. This is already well implemented in the pioneering municipalities.

The next step would be to strengthen the transformative capacity in a number of the other 300+ municipalities in Finland, in order to achieve wider societal benefits through climate and public health impacts from the increase in active transport.

- **From experimentation to more sustainable change at the national level:** The funding for mobility management pro-

jects should be strengthened. In order to achieve wider societal benefits, the impact assessment process of these projects needs to be defined in order to ensure better visibility and sharing of the best practices and lessons learned.

- **Promoting sustainable mobility in municipalities requires a responsible party** that combines and coordinates the promotion of walking and cycling in different administrative sectors.
- **Increasing the amount of walking and cycling in municipalities requires not only resources but also building the transformative capacity.** The seven elements of transformative capacity reflect the ability and resources of a municipality to implement change, and should be integrated into the ongoing efforts to promote sustainable transport.

TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITY CONSISTS OF SEVEN ELEMENTS

1. Visionary individuals driving the change, and committed decision-makers.
2. Systematic monitoring of the state of the transport system for all transport modes.
3. Futures work for active and sustainable mobility.
4. Pilot projects offers travellers the opportunity to experience change and adapt to the new situation.
5. Experiments are only useful if we learn from them.
6. Easy-to-use guidelines and procedures promote the adoption of tested solutions and best practices.
7. Cooperation across administrative, sectoral, and cultural boundaries.

TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE, ACTIVE TRAVEL OF THE FUTURE

The pursuit of the shortest possible travel time often overshadows the more fundamental objectives of transport system development. A much broader set of indicators should be used when monitoring the sustainability of the transport system, covering social, economic, and environmental factors as well as taking into account the characteristics of pedestrian and cycle transport alongside motorised transport.

Good accessibility is a key objective. However, it means much more than just getting from one place to another quickly enough.

For example, the ability of people with low income to pay for tickets, accessibility for people with reduced mobility, and IT interfaces that are simple enough and work for everyone are an essential part of accessibility.

When looking at the future of mobility, it is important to consider equality, accessibility, safety, and sustainability. In addition to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, key environmental concerns include the preservation of green spaces and biodiversity, and the use of natural resources throughout the transport system and supply chains. The long supply chains must also be taken into account in tendering processes.

The health benefits should be further emphasised – they are linked both to the benefits of active transport and to the sedentary lifestyle caused by driving.

The costs of driving today far from reflect all the negative externalities of environmental pollution, such as the impact on public health.

A safe transport system takes into account not only physical accidents and incidents, but also the individual's sense of safety and other emotional, qualitative factors that affect mobility.

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Healthy Lifestyles to Boost Sustainable Growth (STYLE) is combining interdisciplinary knowledge on trends in transport and physical activity. Interpreting them through infrastructure and service designs and changing lifestyles, we generate insight on novel business opportunities and intervention models that induce physical activity. This provides innovative pathways towards current national policy targets and promotion of the societal vision. The project is funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland.

Read more: www.styletutkimus.fi/en

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