

Activity Check-In

How adults travel for
sport & physical activity

The Activity Check-In tracks behaviours and attitudes from both adults, children and young people towards sport and physical activity, revealing the impacts of a rapidly changing world.

Each wave captures views on a specific topic of current relevance – in this publication we focus on how adults in England travel for sport and physical activity.

Full data sets are available on our website.

This thematic report explores how adults in England travel for sport and physical activity (SPA), drawing on findings from the Activity Check-In survey conducted in September 2024. The findings highlight patterns of travel for SPA, the use of sustainable travel modes, and the barriers and facilitators that influence travel choices.

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Context

Travel is an important part of how people take part in sport and physical activity. Understanding how people travel, what influences their choices and the barriers they face can help organisations identify opportunities to support participation and encourage more sustainable travel where appropriate.

Adults are most likely to travel for sport and physical activity as the driver of a car, van or motorbike (44%), followed by active travel (42%) and traveling as a passenger in a car, van or motorbike (32%).

Within this research, sustainable travel includes active travel (such as walking, running and cycling), public transport (including bus, train, tram and metro) and car-sharing.

About this research: Findings are based on a nationally representative survey of 2,180 adults in England, with an additional 1,201 adults from lower socioeconomic groups (DE) included to enable more detailed analysis of this audience. This resulted in a total sample of 1,640 adults from lower socioeconomic groups.

Full details of the methodology are provided at the end of this report.



Use of sustainable travel

Most adults (90%) have used some form of sustainable travel in the last year. Just over a quarter (26%) use sustainable travel all or most days throughout the year, while a third (33%) do so at least once a week.

Separately, 29% of adults report using sustainable travel for sport and physical activity (SPA) at least a few times per year.

Other activities for which adults report using sustainable travel at least a few times per year include running daily errands (49%), visiting family and friends (45%), and travelling to or for work (36%).

Use of sustainable travel for SPA is more common amongst adults from higher socioeconomic groups (43%) than those from middle (30%) and lower socioeconomic groups (25%).

Usage is also higher amongst younger adults aged 16–34 (38%), compared with those aged 35–54 (27%) and those aged 55+ (24%). Males (33%) are also more likely than females (25%) to use sustainable travel for SPA.



Amongst those who never use sustainable travel for SPA, the most commonly cited reasons relate to convenience (64%), followed by infrastructure (46%) and personal or other reasons (43%).

Some respondents said they find traveling in their own vehicle more convenient (45%) or more enjoyable (32%). Others cited public transport not being reliable enough (28%) or costing too much (20%).

Environmental considerations

Around two in five adults (41%) agree or strongly agree that they consider environmental factors when traveling to take part in SPA.

Greater consideration of environmental factors is seen amongst those from higher socioeconomic groups (54%) and younger adults aged 16–34 (54%).



Motivations for sustainable travel

The most common reasons cited for use of sustainable travel modes for SPA are:

- More convenient / not far to go (49%)
- Saves me money (46%)
- Travel is part of my physical activity (46%)

Adults from lower socioeconomic groups cite the same top three reasons. They are more likely to say they travel to SPA via sustainable modes because this is their only available mode of travel and they like to travel with friends or teammates.

They are also less likely to cite reasons relating to convenience, consideration of environmental impact and travel being part of their physical activity.



Modes of sustainable travel

Among adults who use a sustainable mode of travel for SPA, active travel is the most commonly used mode (87%). Active travel is more common for journeys of less than five miles (75%) than for journeys over five miles (32%).

Public transport is the next most commonly used sustainable mode of travel for SPA (59%), followed by car-sharing (17%). The difference in use between shorter and longer journeys is less pronounced for these modes, although both are more commonly used for journeys of less than five miles than for journeys over five miles.

Use of active travel differs by socioeconomic group. Adults from higher (92%) and middle (89%) socioeconomic groups are more likely to use active travel than those from lower socioeconomic groups (79%).

However, adults from lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to use active travel for journeys of over five miles (37%) than those from middle socioeconomic groups (29%).

There are no reportable differences between socioeconomic groups in the use of public transport or car-sharing for sport and physical activity.



Barriers and facilitators: Active travel

Amongst those who use active travel for SPA, the most commonly cited barriers to doing so more often are:

- Often too cold/wet/windy (26%)
- Takes too long to get there (20%)
- 'Too dark' at the relevant times (18%)

Females (21%) are more likely than males (15%) to cite darkness as a barrier to traveling actively for SPA more often.

The proportion of adults citing personal safety concerns for active travel to SPA (11%) is slightly higher than for public transport (8%).

The most commonly cited facilitators of active travel relate to local infrastructure and include:

- Well-lit paths and roads (24%)
- Designated walking and cycling routes (19%)
- Designated footpaths (17%)
- Improved behaviour of other road/path users (15%)
- Bike hire schemes (9%)
- Greening of the environment (9%)



Barriers and facilitators: Public transport

The barriers to further use of public transport for SPA generally relate to practicality, reliability and cost. The most commonly cited barriers are:

- Takes too long to get there (20%)
- Cost too high (20%)
- Not reliable enough (18%)
- Not always available due to other commitments (16%)

Those who use public transport but not for SPA also report practicality and cost as primary barriers.

The most commonly cited facilitators of greater use of public transport for SPA are:

- More frequent services (35%)
- Lower fares (34%)
- Improved reliability (31%)
- Faster travel times (28%)



Barriers and facilitators: Car-sharing

Amongst those who use car-sharing for SPA, the most commonly cited barriers to doing so more often are:

- Active travel is part of my physical activity (34%)
- Flexibility to travel on own schedule (32%)
- Do not want to be reliant on others (31%)

In contrast, adults who use car-sharing but not for SPA are more likely to cite:

- Concern for personal safety (15%)
- Less cost effective (15%)
- Takes too long to get there (14%)

Barriers differ between those who use car-sharing for SPA and those who use it for other purposes.



Opportunities

The findings highlight several opportunities to support greater use of sustainable travel for sport and physical activity. Different parts of the sector can contribute in different ways, depending on their role and influence.

Strategic partners, local authorities and transport planners can help by:

- Supporting travel options that reduce the environmental impact of traveling to sport and physical activity.
- Improving local walking and cycling infrastructure, including well-lit paths, designated routes and footpaths.
- Supporting affordable, reliable and accessible public transport.

Sport and physical activity providers can help by:

- Encouraging active travel for shorter journeys, where it is already more common.
- Creating environments where people feel safe traveling actively, particularly in the dark.
- Recognising that convenience, flexibility and journey time strongly influence how people travel to activities.
- Considering that motivations and barriers differ across groups, including by age and socioeconomic status.



Methodology

This research forms part of the wider Activity Check-In survey and was conducted as part of Wave 13 using a quantitative survey.

Topic-specific questions on travel for sport and physical activity were included alongside the regular tracker questions in fieldwork carried out between 12 and 19 September 2024.

Findings are based on a nationally representative sample of 2,180 adults in England.

An additional 1,201 adults from lower socioeconomic groups (DE) were included to enable more detailed analysis of this audience, resulting in a total DE sample of 1,640 respondents.

Full data sets are available on the Sport England website.