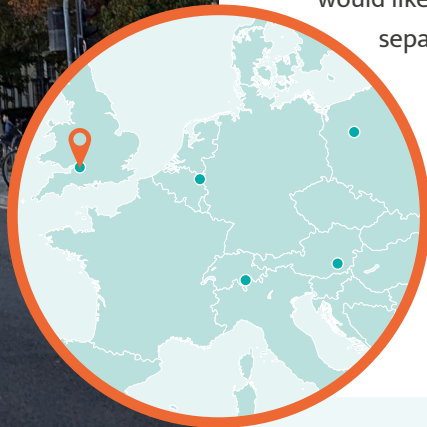




Bristol

About Bristol

As the largest city in the South West region of England, Bristol has a population of approximately 483,000 residents. It is home to two universities with roughly 71,000 enrolled students between them. With over 287 different ethnic groups, more than 45 religions practiced and at least 90 languages spoken, Bristol is a very diverse city. It is also a hilly city and home to the steepest residential road in the country. Despite the City's strong ambitions to promote and facilitate cycling – and being named the UK's first Cycling City in 2008 – cycling only accounts for approximately 10% of trips. Safety is the largest barrier to cycling in the city with the charity Sustrans reporting that 75% of residents would like more cycle paths that are physically separated from traffic and pedestrians.



Cycling in Bristol

Bristol has a broad portfolio of cycling-promoting initiatives. The offering spans individuals and organisations and targets a wide range of trips, from commutes to cycling for leisure. Whilst cycling infrastructure projects such as new cycle paths improve cyclability for all, other schemes focus on specific segments of society, such as Bikes Beyond Bars which trains prisoners and provides them with a cycle mechanics qualification. In addition to cycle paths and skills training, Bristol also offers cycle parking infrastructure, bike loans, discounted or free bikes to those in need, cycling group rides and more. These schemes are funded and managed by numerous entities, from across the public, private and charity sectors.



Examples of cycling promoting initiatives

E-bike Trial

Sustainable Urban Freight Project (2021 – 2025)

Loan of e-cargo bikes to businesses for a year so they can test the feasibility of making trips by bike instead of van. Campus-based organisations are the main focus, and participants include Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI), The University of the West of England and Bath Spa University. A variety of e-cargo bike types are offered to suit the needs of the organisation.

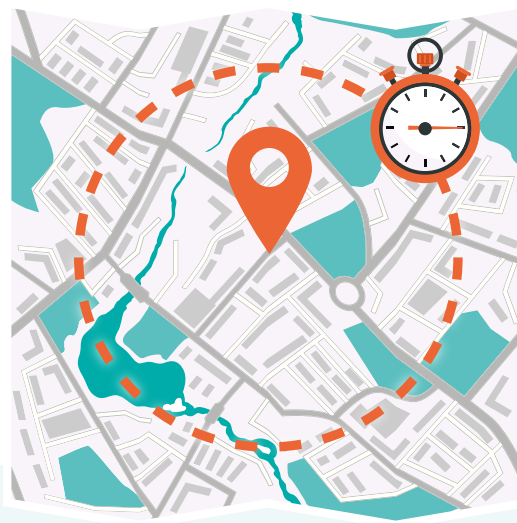
Borrow a Bike Scheme (since 2017)

Members of the public are loaned a hybrid or folding bike for up to one month, or an electric bike for up to two weeks. The scheme allows them to try cycling without the need to invest immediately. A fleet of 115 bikes are available for loan. The scheme does not target any specific trip type and individuals can use the bike for leisure rides, commutes or anything else.

Infrastructure

West of England Cycle Hangar Project (2025)

55 of the 80 cycle hangars destined for the West of England Combined Authority region will be installed in Bristol. After an extensive consultation process in which residents suggested and voted on hangar site locations, the cycle hangars are due to be installed in early 2025. Each hangar can hold six bikes and takes the space of approximately one car. Residents may rent a space for a small fee (£45 - £60 per annum).



Factors enabling cycling in Bristol

Infrastructure beyond cycle paths

Cycle paths are often the focus for cycling infrastructure projects. Cyclists' needs extend beyond these and encompass both ends of the journey. Cycle parking and cycle storage infrastructure are crucial, with the latter often overlooked. Over the last few years, three iterations of cycle hangar installations have taken place across Bristol, and demand for more cycle hangars remains high.

An initiative for everyone

Cycling should be an option for everyone and for a wide array of trips. The initiatives offered by the City Council try to reflect this. They provide schemes that focus on segments of society most in need, such as group bike rides for those aged 55 and over, and provision of free bikes, lights and locks to refugees.



Here's what we learnt...

Many of the schemes across Bristol have a focus on shared learnings. For some projects, this involves regular meetings to discuss best practice and recent experiences with other local authorities delivering the same schemes in their city. In one case, after running a trial providing e-cargo bikes to businesses, Bristol City Council produced a blueprint for use by any organisation looking to utilise e-cargo bikes. They distilled their learnings into a rich resource providing information on issues such as e-bike maintenance, insurance procurement, and bike selection.

Factors hindering cycling in Bristol

But is it safe?

Cycle paths cover over fifty miles in Bristol. However, many Bristolians will opt for other forms of transport unless they feel safe cycling. Provision of cycling infrastructure is ineffective if it is not perceived to be a feasible and safe option. Most Bristol residents want more dedicated and physically separated paths.

Are we ready for e-bikes?

While e-bikes make cycling accessible to a greater portion of society, and make navigating Bristol's hilly landscape more manageable, the practicalities of owning one are challenging. Specialist mechanics trained in e-bike repairs are sparse. E-bikes are larger than pedal bikes, which makes them more difficult to park, store and even navigate some narrow cycle paths.

Sustainability is important but so is comfort

People generally appreciate the importance of considering sustainability in their everyday lives. However, they are not necessarily willing to make personal sacrifices in its pursuit. Whilst cycling benefits the cyclist in numerous ways, such as physical and mental health, being exposed to the elements may be a less comfortable experience than driving. Thus organisations signed up to e-cargo bike trials have struggled to motivate staff to cycle for work trips rather than take the company van. And they are reluctant to be seen to push for this behaviour change preferring that employees partake voluntarily.



Lessons for governance and planning

Cycling-promoting initiatives have the potential to meaningfully alter the flow and feel of a city and to improve the sustainability and liveability of the public realm. To fully harness this potential, these initiatives need to engage with organisations as well as individuals. And with a drive towards sustainability, organisations' enthusiasm to shift travel patterns often already exists.

Motivation, however, can falter once an organisation enrolls in a scheme and it is here that the importance of the 'champion' comes to the fore. Having an individual spearhead change from within the organisation itself, and facilitating them from the outside, has proven to be effective in overcoming the obstacle of inertia in participation within the workforce.

Involving residents in the planning stage of new infrastructure schemes has proven an effective means of garnering public support and mitigating resistance during implementation. For example, site selection for the latest round of cycle hangars in Bristol was undertaken using online public consultation.

The centrality of e-bikes in the future of cycling cannot be overlooked, and skills training and cycling infrastructure should reflect and accommodate this. Trials offer a great opportunity for long-term change but these may need to be complemented by activities that ease continued use of bikes post-trial for participants. They could, for example, offer participants the opportunity to purchase trial bikes at a discounted price.



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This project has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Innovate UK, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), the National Centre for Research and Development (NCBR), the Dutch Research Council (NWO), and the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) under the Driving Urban Transitions Partnership, which has been co-funded by the European Union.

