

# Get **cycling**

A guide to choosing and using your bike



 **BETTER  
BYBIKE**

  
**sustrans**  
JOIN THE MOVEMENT

# get cycling

There's a good reason why you never forget how to ride a bike. Cycling solves so many problems at once. It keeps you fit, it's fast, cheap, reliable and good for the environment.

Buy the right bike and it will become your indispensable travelling companion. You can use a bike to get to work, school, the shops, or out into the fresh air for pure enjoyment. Cycling is one of the easiest forms of exercise to fit into your daily routine.

This book of practical advice and tips is jointly brought to you by Better By Bike and the sustainable transport charity Sustrans, to help you choose, use and look after your bike.





## buying the right bike for you

Your bike should complement your lifestyle so, before you buy, think about when you want to use your bike and where you want it to take you. Choose the type of bike which reflects the majority of journeys you intend to make. And remember, as with most things, you get what you pay for, and sometimes bikes come with lots of extra features that you might not need.

**Road bikes** are lightweight with skinny tyres. Most have drop handlebars and they're designed to be aerodynamic and speedy. Racing bikes are lightweight and fast. Touring bikes usually made of steel which means a heavier bike suitable for carrying heavy loads.

**Mountain bikes** have sturdy frames, knobbly tyres and highly effective brakes. They often have suspension and a wide selection of lower gears, perfect for all types of terrain. With slick tyres they are also comfortable for city riding.

**Hybrid bikes** are a cross between the speed of a road bike and the strength and gearing of a mountain bike. They are lightweight but sturdy with smooth tyres and an upright riding position suitable for a wide variety of terrain. A good everyday option.

**Folding bikes** are ideal for people who commute on public transport but use their bikes at either end of their trip. These bikes fold down compactly, and have smaller wheels and fewer gears.

**Electrically assisted bikes** are great if you need extra help to get up hills, or have a longer daily commute. Choose a bike that is electrically assisted, where the power kicks in when you pedal, helping you up the hill rather than completely taking over.



Road bike



Mountain bike



Hybrid bike



Folding bike

## the perfect size for the right ride

The most important thing is to buy the right size frame for you.

Unlike children's bikes, there are no standard guidelines on different size frames for adults. The size of frame depends on the type of bike you want, and the type of riding you will be doing.

If you need to stop quickly you'll be glad that you chose a frame size that gave you clearance from the cross bar of at least an inch or more. For mountain biking you'll need even more clearance since you'll be putting your feet down quite a lot.



The **cross bar** is the main tube on the bicycle frame that runs from the saddle to the handlebars. Traditionally women's frames don't have a cross bar.



### Tip

If you intend to use your bike to get to work it's worth finding out if your employer runs, or is willing to set up, a **Cycle to Work scheme**.

You could **save a minimum of 25% on the price of your bike** (including End of Hire Fee) and accessories and also pay for them in easy stages.



**Find your local bike shop:**

[betterbybike.info](http://betterbybike.info)



**Free bike loan: borrow a bike for up to a month –**

[betterbybike.info/loanbikes](http://betterbybike.info/loanbikes)

# getting your bike set up

Getting the right size of bike is the first step. By making a few simple adjustments your bike will be a perfect fit.



## Tip

Make sure you can still reach the brake levers once you've adjusted your handlebars!

## riding position

Your riding position can be altered by adjusting the saddle and handlebars.

### There are three things you want to achieve:

- 1 The right saddle height – to make the most of your leg power or to make sure you can put a reassuring foot on the ground;
- 2 Good contact with your pedals to maximise the power in your legs;
- 3 Ability to reach the handlebars and your brakes – for good control and comfort.

Everyone is different so you will need to find a comfortable balance that suits you.

## handlebar position

Well positioned handlebars are crucial for your comfort, and important for control of your steering and brakes.

Handlebars vary in how they can be adjusted. A good position to start is with your handlebars at the same height as your saddle. If you prefer a more aerodynamic 'head down' position, lower the bars. If you want a 'head up' riding position that's easier on your back and gives confidence in traffic, raise the bars.

## saddle position

Getting the saddle in the right place will help you get the most from your pedal power without straining your body.

Bikes have a handy feature that allows you to move the saddle forwards or backwards and adjust its angle. Adjust the saddle so your leg pushes vertically down on the pedal. If you find you want to slide forward or backwards as you ride, adjust the saddle to suit.

Use an adjustable spanner or an allen key (depending on your bike) to loosen the bolt underneath the saddle at the top of the seat post. You can then slide your saddle backwards or forwards and tilt it up or down. Tighten it well before trying!

## adjusting saddle height

To find the right height for your saddle:

- 1 Place your bike next to a large wall;
- 2 Hop on and put one hand on the wall for balance;
- 3 Put the ball of your foot on the pedal at its lowest point without stretching. Your leg should be straight. If you find you're rocking from side to side when you ride, you're probably too high and cycling will be harder work.

To adjust the height of your saddle undo the bolt or quick release at the top of the frame so you can slide the seat post up or down, making sure you don't go past the minimum mark. If your seat needs to be higher than the seat post allows, you need a longer seat post or a bigger bike.

## different saddles


Women tend to have wider hips than men, and so women's saddles are wider than men's for the correct fit. Do make sure your saddle is comfortable – it can make all the difference to the enjoyment of riding your bike.



# love your bike

## care for it and it will care for you

Like any machine, a bike will work better and last longer if you care for it properly. Get in the habit of checking your bike regularly – simple checks and maintenance can help you have hassle-free riding and avoid repairs.

 **Tip**

If in doubt, leave it to the professionals. Bike mechanics are much more affordable than car mechanics, and some will even collect your bike from home and return it when all the work is done.









 **love your bike**


Once you make your bike part of your daily life you'll never look back. Support us with a donation and know your money is helping us to achieve more safe and happy journeys. Visit [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk) to donate online.



## tools

There are specialist tools for specific tasks, but all you need to get started are:


-  a pump
-  an old toothbrush
-  lubricants and grease
-  cleaning rags
-  a puncture repair kit
-  tyre levers
-  allen keys and screwdrivers
-  spanners

 **Tyre levers** are small plastic tools that attach to the spokes of your wheel and help to ease the tyre away from your wheel rim. Tyre levers are really helpful if you have a puncture.

An **allen key**, also known as a **hex** or **zeta key**, is a tool used to drive screws and bolts that have a hexagonal socket in the head and are extremely handy for maintaining bicycles.




### regular checks

 **every week** Check your tyres, brakes, lights, handlebars and seat are in good order and tightly secured. Any wheel quick releases must be in the closed position.

Do your light batteries need replacing or your tyres need more air? Are your brakes squeezing the rim of the wheel (if they're touching the tyre that's not good) and are your handlebars and saddle secure?



 **every month** Give your chain a really good wipe clean and lubricate with chain oil;

Wipe the dirt from your wheels;

Check the tread on your tyres - any bulges or bald spots mean that you need new tyres;




Check your brake pads aren't touching the tyres, and check there is still life in the pads - if not change them;

Are your gears changing smoothly? If you're having problems with your gears, it's best to leave gear adjustments and repairs to a bike mechanic;




Check for damaged or frayed gear or brake cables.

 **every year** It's worth taking your bike to an experienced mechanic once a year for a thorough service. All good bike shops will have a mechanic who can answer any questions you might have.



 **public bike pumps**  
discover free on street location [betterbybike.info/bikepumps](http://betterbybike.info/bikepumps)

 **Tip**  
A fully inflated tyre makes life so much easier and reduces punctures. Even a slightly under-inflated tyre will slow you down.

 **Tip**  
Go easy with the oil! Be careful not to get any oil on wheel rims or brake pads. If you do, just clean it off with some lubricant spray and a rag.


### fixing a puncture

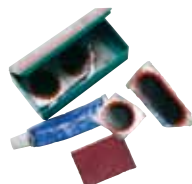
Punctures don't happen often and are easy to fix yourself.

If you don't fancy repairing a puncture on your journey, carry a spare inner tube and a pump so you can change the tube, then fix the puncture when you get home.

If you don't mind repairing punctures when they happen, make sure you carry your repair kit and pump at all times. All puncture repair kits have full instructions with pictures.

Alternatively, if you don't want to get your hands dirty just take it to your local bike shop and they will fix it for you.

 **Tip**  
Carry a spare inner tube and some tyre levers with you so you don't have to repair a puncture immediately.










## routes to ride

Once you've got yourself a bike, it's time to get out there and discover some of the great places to ride it! Visit our website [betterbybike.info](http://betterbybike.info) for great leisure rides in your area suitable for all levels of ability.

### Suggested rides:

-  **Bristol to Bath Railway Path** – The first off road cycle path built in the UK and still regarded as one of the best. A 13 mile off road route between the cities of Bristol and Bath. Suitable for all ages and abilities.
-  **Two Tunnels - Bath Two Tunnels** – At over one mile long, the Combe Down tunnel is the longest cycling tunnel in Britain and features an interactive light and sound installation. Suitable for all ages and abilities.
-  **Avon Cycleway** – An 85 mile circular route in the countryside around Bristol. The route takes in many lovely villages, numerous historic landmarks and a some beautiful landscape. The route is largely on country lanes, but also includes some off road tracks.
-  **Festival Way** – This fantastic route connects the town of Nailsea to the heart of Bristol linking thorough nearby towns and villages and travelling through Grade II listed grounds of Ashton Court Estate.

 **Tip**  
Visit our website for mobile-friendly leisure rides in your area. You can also print or download.

### Where can I find out more?

Information and inspiration to get cycling in the West Country, visit [betterbybike.info](http://betterbybike.info). Further information on the National Cycle Network, visit [sustrans.org.uk](http://sustrans.org.uk) or call **0845 113 00 65**.

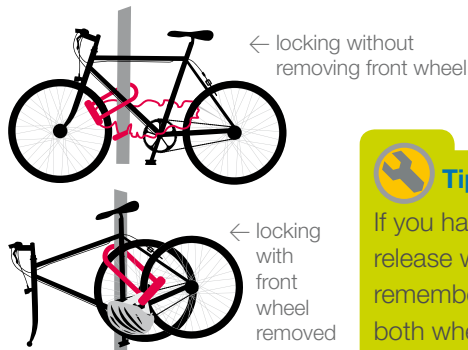


# never leave home without your essential accessories!

## don't lose it, lock it!

There are three simple ways of cutting the risk of bike theft:

- 1 A good lock;
- 2 Using it effectively;
- 3 Choosing the right location.



**Tip**  
If you have quick release wheels, remember to lock both wheels to avoid getting one wheel stolen.

**Tip**  
Replace quick releases with regular bolts to make them more secure.

**Tip**  
Never leave home without your lock!

### Always lock your bike and remove lights and panniers.

Almost 400,000 bikes are stolen every year in England and Wales, so taking precautions will help keep your bike safe.

**Invest in a strong lock.** Some locks are stronger than others and price influences their quality. D-locks are sturdy, and cable locks are useful to secure any parts of the bike which are quick release such as the saddle or front wheel.

**Think: location, location, location.** Where you lock your bike is critical. Leave it on a well lit and busy street so any potential thieves are conspicuous.

**Home insurance policies** can often easily be extended to include your bike when it is at home. Take a photo of the bike and write down the frame number.

**Bike insurance policies** are available and cover your bike when you're out and about.

Accessorising is the key to any good outfit and riding a bike is no different. Carefully chosen extras can transform any bike from a leisure vehicle into a valuable year-round mode of transport.

## helmet

A helmet will not prevent accidents from happening but can provide protection if you do fall off your bike. They are particularly recommended for young children. Ultimately, wearing a helmet is a question of individual choice and parents need to make that choice for their children.

Always buy a new helmet which conforms to one of the recognised safety standards such as BS or CE, fits correctly, and is comfortable. Follow the fitting instructions or ask your local bike shop to help you choose a correctly fitting helmet. Check your helmet regularly and, if it takes a bash, always replace it as it will not offer the same protection.

## bell

A bell is a must for any considerate cyclist. A friendly tinkle will let people know you're approaching, but never assume they can hear you.







## what to wear?

### pop it in your pannier!

Rucksacks are fine for carrying light loads but can make you hot. For heavier loads, longer or more regular journeys, panniers are recommended. If you don't want to invest in panniers, strap your rucksack to a bike rack, or put a basket on the front. If you want to carry really heavy loads use a bike trailer.

### lights

See and be seen! When cycling in the dark, you are required by law to have a white light on the front and a red light on the rear. These can clip onto your bike, backpack or your clothes.



#### Tip

Gain confidence by booking yourself onto one of the Bikeability adult training courses designed to help you navigate both urban and rural roads. Visit [betterbybike.info](http://betterbybike.info)

### mudguards

A lot of bikes are still sold without mudguards, so you'll need to get a pair fitted if you want to avoid mud or dirty water being sprayed up your back in wet weather.

### pump

It's a good idea to have your own pump so you'll always be able to sort out a flat tyre. If you're out in town and have left your pump at home, why not use one of the free public bike pumps that Better By Bike have installed. For locations, visit [betterbybike.info/bikepumps](http://betterbybike.info/bikepumps)



#### Tip

There are a couple of types of bike valves. Most pumps will adjust to fit both or you can buy an adaptor.

For the majority of short local cycling trips there is generally no need to wear special clothing, any more than you would for a walk to the shops. In fact, it's possible to cycle in smart clothes, provided they give you enough freedom to pedal.

### does the shoe fit?

Shoes that are suitable for walking are also great for cycling.

### glow in the dark

If you ride at night or in heavy traffic, it's important to make yourself as visible as possible to other users. A reflective vest or jacket is ideal. Vests are a cheap solution and easy to stow in your bag; and reflective bands for ankles and sleeves are also good to get you seen.

### extremely cold extremities?

Wear gloves to keep the cold away, and ear muffs can be handy.

### don't let a little rain hold you back

Once people start riding, they generally don't want to stop! People even enjoy riding in the rain – honestly! All you need is a waterproof jacket and trousers plus some reflective gear.

# where can I go? the roads are your oyster!


## when you plan your route you should aim for...

- ☀ Quiet roads or cycle paths;
- ☀ Low speed limits;
- ☀ Bus lanes;
- ☀ Parks and open spaces which allow cycling.

## ...and avoid:

- ☀ Very busy junctions;
- ☀ Large and fast roundabouts;
- ☀ Pavements;
- ☀ Dual carriageways;
- ☀ Lorry-heavy routes.

If any of these are unavoidable, don't let it defeat you, you can always get off and push!

 **Tip**  
If you're thinking about cycling to work, why not use the weekend for a trial run?

Plan your routes around quiet streets and interesting places – the whole road network is open to you and there are lots of cycle paths and traffic-free routes out there.

Find the best route for you by using mobile apps or using a local cycle map.

Gain confidence by booking yourself onto one of the Bikeability adult training courses designed to help you navigate both urban and rural roads.

Visit [betterbybike.info](http://betterbybike.info).

## types of path

**It is illegal to cycle on a pavement** – use roads or cycle paths.

**Public bridleways** can be used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. By law, those on two wheels should give way to other users. Remember the surfaces can be variable and not always suitable for all bikes.

**Shared use paths** are free of motor traffic and designated for use by walkers, cyclists and sometimes horse riders. These paths generally have good surfaces.

Sustrans' well signed **National Cycle Network**, passes through the centre of every major town in the UK, and 75% of you live within a couple of miles of it. A third of the routes are traffic-free with paths along disused railways, canal towpaths and forest tracks. Just look out for the blue signs near you or visit [sustrans.org.uk](http://sustrans.org.uk)

 **ways to get in on the action:**

- Become a Supporter Visit [sustrans.org.uk](http://sustrans.org.uk)
- Make a donation or call **0845 838 0651**
- Volunteer for Sustrans to find out more.

## know the signs

Most signs and markings relating to cyclists are self-explanatory, but it's worth familiarising yourself with the ones below.



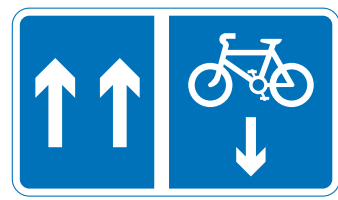
When you are on the **National Cycle Network** you'll see these signs. The number relates to the route you are following with red for National route and blue for Regional route.



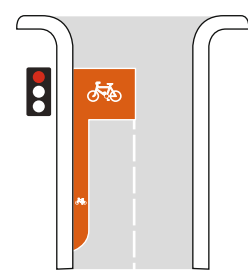
A **shared use**, unsegregated cycle and pedestrian route.



**Segregated shared use** route for cyclists and pedestrians. Make sure you ride on the correct side.



A **contra-flow cycle lane** lets you ride against the direction of flow of the one-way street in safety and usually offers a more convenient and direct route.



**Advanced stop lines** for cyclists give you a visible area to wait, where you are segregated from other traffic. At the front of the queue, you can be seen, reducing the chance of a conflict as vehicles turn. You must stay behind the front stop line and must proceed when the lights are green. Motorists must stay behind the first stop line and not obstruct the forward areas.

### tips for motorists

- ⚙️ **When turning left** watch for cyclists coming up on your near side and don't cut them up;
- ⚙️ **Give cyclists a wide berth when overtaking;**
- ⚙️ **At night, dip your headlights** when approaching cyclists;
- ⚙️ **In wet weather**, allow cyclists extra room as surfaces may be slippery.

Cyclists and motorists are equally entitled to use and share the same road space.

### tips for cyclists on roads

- ⚙️ **Ride in a position where you can see and be seen;**
- ⚙️ **Make eye contact** with other road users, especially at junctions, then you know they've seen you;
- ⚙️ **Signal clearly** at all times;
- ⚙️ **Follow the Highway Code** – don't jump red lights and don't cycle on the pavement unless it's a designated cycle path;
- ⚙️ **Consider wearing a helmet and bright or reflective clothing**, especially in towns, at night and in bad weather;
- ⚙️ **In wet weather watch your speed** as surfaces may be slippery and it will take you longer to stop.

### tips for cyclists on shared use paths

- ⚙️ **Don't go too fast** - it can intimidate others;
- ⚙️ **Use your bell** to let others know you are approaching, but don't assume they can hear or see you;
- ⚙️ **Give way** to others and always be prepared to slow down and stop if necessary;
- ⚙️ **Keep left** or on your side of any dividing line;
- ⚙️ **Be careful** at junctions, bends or entrances.
- ⚙️ **Be particularly aware** of vulnerable users, such as children or people with disabilities.



### public bike pumps

On street bike pumps have been installed at various locations to help keep tyres pumped up for a more efficient and enjoyable ride. To find out where they are – [betterbybike.info/bikepumps](http://betterbybike.info/bikepumps)



[betterbybike.info/bikepumps](http://betterbybike.info/bikepumps)





# be a cycle-friendly employer

For organisations large and small, there are so many benefits to be gained from encouraging employees to leave the car at home and travel to work by bike. These include:

- ⚙️ **A healthier, more productive workforce** – cyclists tend to be fitter than non-cyclists and are less likely to be take sick days;
- ⚙️ **Punctual, less stressed employees** – journey times by bike are more predictable and exercise is a great stress-buster;
- ⚙️ **Reduced car parking costs** – ten bikes can be parked in the space of one car;
- ⚙️ **Improved environmental credentials** – you'll be helping to reduce traffic congestion, pollution and emissions.

## Steps towards cycle-friendliness

- ⚙️ Provide sufficient **secure cycle parking** for staff and visitors;
- ⚙️ Provide **changing facilities** – these could include lockers, a drying room and showers;
- ⚙️ Set up a **Bicycle User Group (BUG)** to champion cycling among colleagues and improve conditions for cyclists;
- ⚙️ Run a **buddy scheme** to pair up experienced and less confident cyclists so they can ride together;
- ⚙️ **Provide information** on the best cycle routes to your workplace and offer training;
- ⚙️ Offer a **bike mileage allowance** for work-related trips and/or set up a bike pool;
- ⚙️ Set up a **tax-free, bike purchase scheme** for employees (see tip below);
- ⚙️ Become a **Cycle Champion** and get a marketing and promotional tool kit to help encourage others to ride to work.



## How can I find out more?

For information about projects in your area, visit [betterbybike.info](http://betterbybike.info)

# cycling for all



**Here are a few handy hints to help you look good and feel confident.**

- ☀️ Specialist clothing is not necessary for most short, local trips. Just about anything goes but keep items like long scarves and wide-leg trousers away from your bike's moving parts;
- ☀️ Ride at a steady pace and you won't arrive at your destination looking hot and sweaty. Pedal power is the quickest way to get around town and your journey time won't vary with traffic;
- ☀️ Get some training. Whatever your ability, a cycle lesson with a qualified instructor can improve your skills and boost your confidence;
- ☀️ Keep your bike in good shape by carrying out regular checks. Repairs are better done at home or at a bike shop than on the road;
- ☀️ Plan your route as it's no fun getting lost. Don't cycle anywhere that you would not feel safe walking and steer away from dimly lit or secluded areas at night.

Riding a bike in becoming more accessible to people who find it difficult to ride a standard bicycle. A selection of specialist inclusive cycles, companion bikes and wheelchair accessible bikes are available for people to ride via a range of cycling centres aimed at getting more people enjoying cycling.

**How can I find out more?**  
For information about projects in your area, visit [betterbybike.info](http://betterbybike.info)

**Tip**  
Just 30 minutes of pedal pushing burns over 300 calories. Cycling firms your thighs and bottom, and can even tone the tummy muscles.  
**How can I find out more?**  
For information about projects in your area, visit [betterbybike.info](http://betterbybike.info)



## cycling with children

### transporting young children on two wheels

It's now easier than ever for you to ride with young children.

**Tow bar:** approx. four to eight years. A tow bar converts a standard child's bike to a trailer bike by lifting their front wheel from the ground to prevent them from steering, while enabling them to pedal independently. When you reach a safe place, the tow bar can be detached and their bike freed.

**Child seats:** approx. six months to five years (one child). Once a baby can support its own head (usually six to 12 months), he or she can be carried in a child seat. Seats are fitted mainly to the rear of the bike.

**Trailers:** babies to five years (up to two children). Trailers are great eco-friendly solutions for travelling with more than one young child – be it on a family day out or the school run. Young babies can be strapped into their car seat and carried in a trailer, and older children can be strapped in and protected from the wind and rain.

**Tag-along trailer bikes:** approx. four to nine years. Tag-alongs (the back half of a child's bike attached to the back of an adult one) allow a child to be towed. They're great as your child can add some of their own pedal power, or just freewheel and enjoy the ride. You can attach these to any bike, including a tandem.



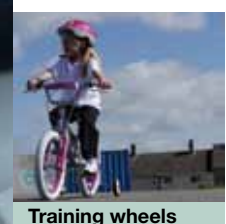
Child seats



Trailers



Tag-along trailer bikes



Training wheels

- Tips**
- ☰ Good foot support makes the journey much more comfortable for children, and good padding protects young bottoms from bumps.
  - ☰ Straps and padded headrests are essential because children will sometimes fall asleep on a ride.
  - ☰ Look for seats that can grow with your child and are compatible with panniers.

## teaching your child to ride

Get a child on a bike and it's hard to get them off! It's fast, fun, gives them a sense of freedom and independence, and is good for their health and the environment.

There are lots of ways for children to develop and gain confidence before they head out on their own.

**Tricycles or trikes** have their own balance and stability and are available for children from 10 months to five years old. They have pedals so they can have all the fun of getting around under their own steam.

**Balance bikes** are like normal bikes but without pedals so children learn to balance, steer and gain confidence on two wheels while being able to place their feet on the ground.



**Going it alone.** Traffic-free paths and local green spaces are a great place to learn to cycle in safety. A third of the National Cycle Network is traffic-free and 75% of the population live within two miles of it.

Find out more about local traffic-free bike paths from Sustrans at [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk) or phone 0845 113 00 65.

Bikeability cycle training may be on offer at your child's school to teach them how to ride on the roads safely, confidently and courteously. If your school doesn't already offer it, pester them!



Balance bikes

**Stabilisers** support the rear of the bike. Children can enjoy their independence and learn how to pedal and brake smoothly, before they master their balance. The stabilisers can then be raised, reducing support, to help develop balance.

**Better by Bike.** For upcoming courses, adult cycle training and holiday sessions visit [betterbybike.info](http://betterbybike.info)



Going slightly further each time, pushing both pedals round and round, soon your smiling child will be an official, brand new cyclist!

# children love bikes and love to ride





Cycling helps kids grow up fit and healthy, and introduces them to the wider world and the adventure it holds.





Information and Inspiration  
to get cycling in the West Country  
visit **betterbybike.info**

 [facebook.com/betterbybikeUK](https://facebook.com/betterbybikeUK)  [@betterbybike](https://twitter.com/betterbybike)



**Better By Bike** are working in partnership with Sustrans.

**Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable.**

We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices.

**Make your move and support Sustrans today.**

[www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

