

Experiences of disabled cyclists – 2017 survey

From February to March 2017, Wheels for Wellbeing carried out a survey to gather the views and experiences of disabled cyclists nationally in order to better understand their issues and concerns.

We believe this is the first ever such survey. Results challenge some widely held assumptions about disabled people and cycling. They also highlight a clear need to carry out a lot more research into this group.

A total of 221 disabled cyclists from around the UK took part in the survey – a huge thank you to everyone who participated!

Below are the results:

Summary

Disabled cyclists are most likely to:

- Be **middle-aged**;
- Own a standard **two-wheeled bicycle**;
- Find **cycling** easier than walking.

Experiences:

- 1 in 3 have been asked to dismount and walk their cycle, even though they were using it as a **mobility aid**;
- **Inaccessible cycling infrastructure** is the biggest difficulty encountered by disabled cyclists;
- The **cost** of non-standard cycles is a key barrier for many disabled cyclists.

Demographics:

Gender

The gender breakdown of respondents was 56% male, 41% female and 1% other.

Age

Disabled cyclists were most likely to be middle-aged, with the highest proportion of respondents (27%) aged 45-54. 72% of respondents were aged between 35 and 64. Fourteen percent were aged 65 and over, whilst only 5% were 16-24. Just under one in ten (9%) fell within the 25-34 age bracket.

Frequency of cycling

Disabled people who cycle tend to cycle regularly: survey respondents were most likely to cycle on a weekly (37%) or daily (37%) basis. Just over 14% cycled one or two times a month, whilst 12% said they cycled less than once a month.

Reasons for cycling

Disabled cyclists said they mainly cycle 'for leisure/fun' (84% agreed with this statement). Three quarters (76%) said they cycled to exercise and just under half (48%) for general transport. Nearly one in three (29%) cycle for work/to commute, with 27% cycling for sport.

Cycle ownership

The vast majority (92%) of disabled cyclists own their own cycle (as opposed to hiring or borrowing). In terms of the kinds of cycle that disabled cyclists own:

- Most own a standard two-wheeled bicycle, with or without adaptations (52%);
- 17% own a handcycle, with the same proportion owning a recumbent trike;
- 13% own a tricycle;
- Tandems were owned by 8% of disabled cyclists;
- 18% of disabled cyclists own a cycle that uses electric-assist (e-assist).

Access to cycling for those not owning their own cycle:

Of the respondents who cycle but do not own their own, it was most likely for them to access cycling through an inclusive cycling group (23% said they access cycling in this way). A third said they borrow a cycle from a cycling group or another person, whilst one in ten hire a cycle when they need one.

Issues and experiences:

Cycling or walking?

Whilst assumptions are often made about cycling not being possible for disabled people, our survey showed that a majority of disabled cyclists (69%) find cycling easier than walking. Only 6% said they find walking easier, whilst 25% expressed a view that they found both equally easy/difficult.

Barriers to cycling

'Inaccessible cycling infrastructure' was cited as the biggest difficulty faced by disabled cyclists. The cost of non-standard cycles was also a key issue for many.

Key experiences

Disabled people's ability to cycle is often affected more by other people's reaction to them/lack of understanding of the fact they are disabled, than by their own impairment.

"I've been unable to cycle due to barriers on cycle paths... and access certain roads and paths due to objects... such as speed bumps on cycle paths and roads"

"I would love to be able to go to places like Lea Valley... but can't take my trike on the train as it is not viewed as a mobility aid, as a mobility scooter would be"

Encouragingly, 57% of respondents said they had received positive comments or been given a 'thumbs up' by passers-by when out cycling. However, sadly 36% had encountered abuse or disability hate crime when cycling. Just over a third (36%) have at some point been unable to park or store a non-standard cycle because the facilities were inadequate.

With regard to the use of cycles as a mobility aid, nearly one in three (32%) have been asked to dismount and walk their cycle, even though they were using it for this purpose. Interestingly, 11% have been allowed to cycle in a pedestrianised area once they'd explained that they were using their cycle as a mobility aid. Being dependent on individual enforcers' understanding/lack of understanding is very stressful for people and some prefer not to cycle, in order not to risk being arrested or challenged.

For those cycling non-standard cycles, cost and lack of subsidies is a significant barrier to cycling. One in ten disabled cyclists have been unable to obtain a cycle through the Cycle to Work scheme because the cycle they requested exceeded the £1,000 loan limit. 19% have been unable to find any inclusive cycling opportunities in their area.

"I never even tried to access the Cycle to Work scheme but I would challenge it as indirectly discriminatory on the grounds of disability if I had the choice"

Key measures to encourage more disabled people into cycling

Respondents were of the opinion that 'ensuring cycling infrastructure is inclusive' is the most significant measure in terms of encouraging more disabled people to cycle. Many also agreed that the introduction of subsidies for non-standard cycles would help.