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Active travel for all ages

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Supporting older adults to stay active	3
Teaching cycling skills to the next generation.....	5
Making cycling fun and accessible.....	6
Promoting age-inclusive cycling in Barcelona	7
Conclusion	8
Resources.....	10
About the Active Travel & Health Working Group	12



Introduction

During this webinar, part of Urban October, experts from across Europe shared their latest efforts to encourage active travel for both children and older adults. Hosted by POLIS' Active Travel & Health Working Group, the event explored the power of walking, wheeling, and cycling not only as essential means of transport but also as ways to boost well-being, independence, and social connectedness.

Supporting older adults to stay active

Andy Cope, from Sustrans in the UK, presented research focused on active travel for older adults. Discussing the "[Best Foot Forward](#)" work report done in partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better, he explained that people between 50 and 70 have unique motivations for staying active, like maintaining independence, preparing for retirement, or adjusting to personal



life changes. However, the barriers to staying active are just as varied, ranging from health issues to car-centred infrastructure or safety perceptions. Cope stressed that infrastructure improvements, like well-maintained walking paths and bike lanes, can go a long way toward encouraging active lifestyles.

Within the key insights and policy implications, Cope stressed the importance of recognising the differences in capabilities, opportunities and motivations in the 50-70 age group and ensuring that the behaviour change interventions and messaging should be more inclusive, targeted and granular. He also highlighted that intersectionality should also be considered, where race, age, gender and socio-economic aspects will influence people's perceptions and decisions about travel.

Sustrans' "[Transport to Thrive](#)" project also showcased the importance of providing infrastructure that supports active travel for young adults aged 16-24. This age group, often facing pressures to drive, can benefit from improved bike paths, pedestrian spaces, and public transport. Coper also briefly shared some insights on how different reports and research feed and support the work Sustrans is continuously doing in advocacy and policy advice in improving active travel, such as the report "[The potential of low traffic measures for healthy active ageing](#)" and many others. Together, these projects make a case for accessible, inclusive, active travel options that meet the needs of diverse age groups.



Teaching cycling skills to the next generation

Anna-Kaisa Montonen shared how Turku is teaching children the skills and confidence they need to travel actively. Through the EU's SCALE-UP project, the city has set up a centralised bike-lending programme for schools and daycares, giving children a chance to practice essential skills on a cycling track. The programme's structured approach has already shown positive results, with children not only improving their skills but also developing a new enthusiasm for cycling.

Beyond cycling skills, Turku has also rolled out campaigns like the "Polar Bear Campaign," which rewards children for sustainable travel with stickers to connect a polar bear family. Additional programmes like "Travel Friends," where parents escort small groups of children on their walk or cycle to school, further support safe, community-based active travel for children.

Creating safer, more welcoming streets for children

Sandra Nascimento from APSI Portugal spoke on the barriers young people face in urban spaces dominated by cars. Many children are unable to walk or cycle independently due to safety concerns, leading to what she calls the "dehumanisation" of public spaces. Through the SigAPÉ project, APSI is working with communities to redesign school routes so children can safely



walk or bike to school. By conducting walkability studies with children and partnering with local governments, APSI has launched "Walking Bus" programmes, where children can join supervised walks to school. The project also enabled an awareness campaign led by the children, where they identified the most relevant issue for them and created the campaign around it. The children had the chance to interact with the community about more respectful behaviours towards pedestrians and present the campaign to representatives of the local government and other institutions.

Nascimento spoke about the importance of reclaiming urban spaces for children to play, socialise, and exercise freely. Her team is also working on Brincapé, a project that turns streets into play zones, allowing children to move, play, and explore in spaces once dominated by cars. The project also produced manuals for other communities that want to improve the quality of their public space and allow for more liveable and welcoming uses. For APSI, child-friendly public spaces are essential for healthier, more connected communities, and they are committed to collaborative and coordinated community-based actions to bring visibility to children in the urban environment.

Making cycling fun and accessible

Ana Pereira introduced Bicicultura, a cooperative dedicated to making cycling accessible in Lisbon. Bicicultura promotes various initiatives, including Veloteca, a bike share scheme where people



can try out different types of cycles. They also run programs for cycling businesses, a bike exchange program for children, and much more.

One of their key projects is the "School Bike Train," which organises children to cycle to school in groups led by trained adults. The initiative functions like public transport, with set routes and schedules, giving children a structured way to reach school actively and safely. The project has now expanded across Portugal, with more than 36 routes operating nationally.

Pereira discussed "Crescer na Rua," an initiative with a clever name that merges the Portuguese words for "grow up" and "kindergarten." The project brings young children on routes through the neighbourhood during school hours using large tricycles. This initiative aims to increase outdoor playing time for children while also helping them, their teachers, and their families see urban spaces as places for enjoyment and to grow up, not just transit. The emphasis on joy and community connection makes Bicultura's work in Lisbon a powerful model for other cities.

Promoting age-inclusive cycling in Barcelona

Dr Wilbert den Hoed, from Delft University of Technology, presented insights from the EN-TOUR-AGE project, which examined European tourist cities in transformation for age-friendly mobility. Dr den Hoed presented one of the case studies,



Barcelona and how to make urban cycling more inclusive for older adults, showing that by 2030, 32% of the city population will be older than 65 years.

Despite the benefits of cycling, older adults are often underrepresented among cyclists. His research gathered input from older cyclists and developed six recommendations to make cycling in Barcelona accessible to all, including simpler routes, better signage, age-friendly infrastructure, and social awareness. Dr den Hoed echoed Andy Cope from Sustrans in recognising the diversity and plurality in cycling, particularly among adults over 60, to target and adjust the measures and make more positive visibility in messages.

The EN-TOUR-AGE toolkit guides cities to create age-friendly mobility options, not only to support older adults but also to encourage active travel habits across generations, evidencing the transversal or co-benefits. Dr den Hoed stressed that age-friendly active travel should be part of urban policy, enabling people of all ages to enjoy the benefits of cycling, walking, and other active modes of travel.

Conclusion

The Active Travel & Health webinar provided practical insights into how cities can make active travel accessible and appealing across age groups. For young children, projects in Turku and Lisbon are creating structured ways to build cycling skills, using monitored bike tracks, cycling skills cards, and group “bike trains”



led by adults to help young cyclists navigate safely. Meanwhile, in Portugal, APSI's "Walking Bus" and public space initiatives show the potential of community-driven programmes to reshape streets into child-friendly environments, promoting safer and more independent travel to school.

For older adults, Sustrans' work highlighted the diversity in the active travel desires, needs, and barriers and how this should play a whole in planning and designing infrastructure and measures. Endorsed by the EN-TOUR-AGE project in Barcelona, which highlighted the importance of age-friendly infrastructure. This includes not only cycling paths designed to reduce physical and cognitive strain but also systems that make active travel feel safe and socially inclusive for ageing populations. Findings from this project indicate that small adjustments, like reducing complex traffic patterns and installing consistent signage, can increase older residents' comfort and interest in cycling.

The diverse strategies discussed in this webinar underscore that promoting active travel requires tailored approaches that address the unique needs of each age group, reflecting the need to promote positive visibility. The projects and initiatives and their experiences encourage us to examine how our public spaces are being used and designed. Moreover, they presented opportunities for cities to have a clearer roadmap to designing public spaces that support healthy, active lifestyles across generations, ultimately making urban spaces more inclusive and vibrant.



Below is also a non-exhaustive list of further resources to inspire, guide, and exchange ideas about different approaches to promote active travel for all ages.

Resources

[Cycling for everyone: A guide for inclusive cycling in cities and towns | Sustrans, Arup](#)

[Walking for Everyone: A guide for inclusive walking in cities and towns | Sustrans, Arup](#)

[Report: Best foot forward report | Sustrans, Centre for Ageing Better](#)

[The potential of low traffic measures for healthy active ageing | Sustrans](#)

[Transport to Thrive | Sustrans](#)

[Age-friendly cycling | EN-TOUR-AGE Project](#)

[Grow up on the Street! | BiciCultura](#)

[CicloExpresso | BiciCultura](#)

[SigAPÉ pela Saúde | APSI Portugal](#)

[Rua é Saúde | APSI Portugal](#)

[Manual – RuaESaude | APSI Portugal](#)

[Manual - Incubadora Brincar | APSI Portugal](#)

[Urban95 | Van Leer Foundation](#)

[Complete Neighborhoods for Babies, Toddlers, and Their Caregivers | Institute for Transportation and Development Policy](#)

[Access for All: Access and Babies, Toddlers, and Their Caregivers | Institute for Transportation and Development Policy](#)



[Cycling Cities Start with Streets Designed for All Ages | Institute for Transportation and Development Policy](#)

[Reimagining the Right of Way | LSE](#)

[Age-friendly Gothenburg | City of Gothenburg](#)

[Mobility from a senior perspective | City of Gothenburg](#)

[Building Better Lives | Cycling Without Age](#)

[The City & You | City of Vienna](#)

[Ageing is Living: National Programmes for Age-friendly Cities and Communities | WHO](#)

[The WHO Age-friendly Cities Framework | Age-Friendly World](#)

[Active older adults | Greater Manchester Moving](#)

[Active children and young people | Greater Manchester Moving](#)

[Young City Makers | Humankind](#)

[Age-friendly case study: Supporting older people to shape their environment through walk audits | Centre for Ageing Better](#)

[Walking and cycling 'not safe or attractive enough' for many in their 50s and 60s | Centre for Ageing Better](#)

[Designing urban safety for and with young women | TU Delft](#)

[The Age-Friendly City | The John Adams Institute](#)

[Active Transport for Healthy Aging | Healthy Active by Design](#)





About the Active Travel & Health Working Group

The Working Group on Active Travel and Health is dedicated to preserving walking, wheeling, and cycling as integral parts of mobility systems while considering interactions with urban planning, environment, and health.

The working group aims to foster discussions and exchanges on strategies and measures for prioritising active modes and enabling a more balanced distribution of public space for improved quality of life for everyone.

Shifting the priority to active modes is a process that demands bold actions and leveraging from opportunities and integration. So, the working group meetings and workshops bring opportunities to approach active travel as a horizontal issue, exploring the linkages with other areas that strengthen the potential and benefits of active modes for more sustainable and inclusive mobility.

Find out more on the [POLIS website](#).

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