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LONDON
CYCLING
CAMPAIGN

WHAT STOPS WOMEN CYCLING IN LONDON?

An LCC Women's Network Report

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Our key asks are:

1. Act on physical safety
2. Act on social safety
3. Provide local cycle networks

ROUTES
FOR
WOMEN

SUMMARY

In the summer of 2023, the LCC Women's Network asked women¹ about their experiences of cycling in London via a public survey. We wanted to understand why less than a third of London's daily cycle trips are by women, in contrast to Dutch cities, where women make up more than half.²

Based on more than 1,000 responses, the survey results show with real clarity some of the key factors that put women off cycling in London – including a shocking level of abuse and aggression from drivers, and a lack of safe cycle routes to use all year round. Too many women have to choose between routes that they feel put them in danger or at risk of conflict, either on busy hostile roads or quiet unlit routes. Most say that they don't have a local cycle network that meets their needs, especially when cycling with children.

Women told us that they regularly face abuse when they cycle, especially on roads with no safe space for cycling. The most common theme for the abuse was drivers telling women to “get off the road”, both verbally and by driving in a dangerous and intimidating way. A fifth of respondents had stopped cycling, either permanently or for some time, as a result. This echoes a UK study of cycling ‘near misses’ which found that women are almost twice as likely to face harassment or bad driving as men.³ It seems that abuse towards women cycling has become normalised.

Women also reported a lack of good cycle infrastructure, including protected cycle lanes and low traffic routes, as a major barrier to cycling. Ninety percent told us they would start to cycle or cycle more if they had good infrastructure for their journeys. But parks, towpaths and other unlit, isolated routes do not serve women well as cycleways. Women say they have to make longer journeys to avoid these socially unsafe routes after dark, or have to choose between them and dangerously busy roads, and many simply stop cycling when it gets dark early.

These barriers mean women's mobility, freedom and quality of life are all impacted.

The survey reinforces the LCC Women's Network campaign asks to the Mayor of London, Transport for London, the Metropolitan Police and every London borough to act, urgently, on these barriers to women's mobility and freedom - so that women can cycle all the everyday journeys they want to, for greater equality, more active lifestyles, less road danger and lower carbon emissions.

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KEY FINDINGS

Women cycling in London face frequent harassment, intimidation and abuse

- **93% of respondents** said drivers had used their vehicles to intimidate them. For 77% it was at least once a month.
- **More than one in five women** said they gave up cycling temporarily or permanently after these incidents.
- **Police responses to these incidents were mostly inadequate**, according to respondents. Of the 25 described incidents that mentioned the police, only one resulted in significant follow-up action.

- **"Get off the road"** was by far the most common form of verbal abuse shouted at women cycling, as if a woman on a bike is not a legitimate road user. This abuse often happened on roads with no cycle lanes when women take 'primary position' in the middle of the traffic lane, for instance to prevent close passing on narrow stretches. Drivers also responded with 'punishment passes', tailgating and even deliberately hitting women with their vehicles.

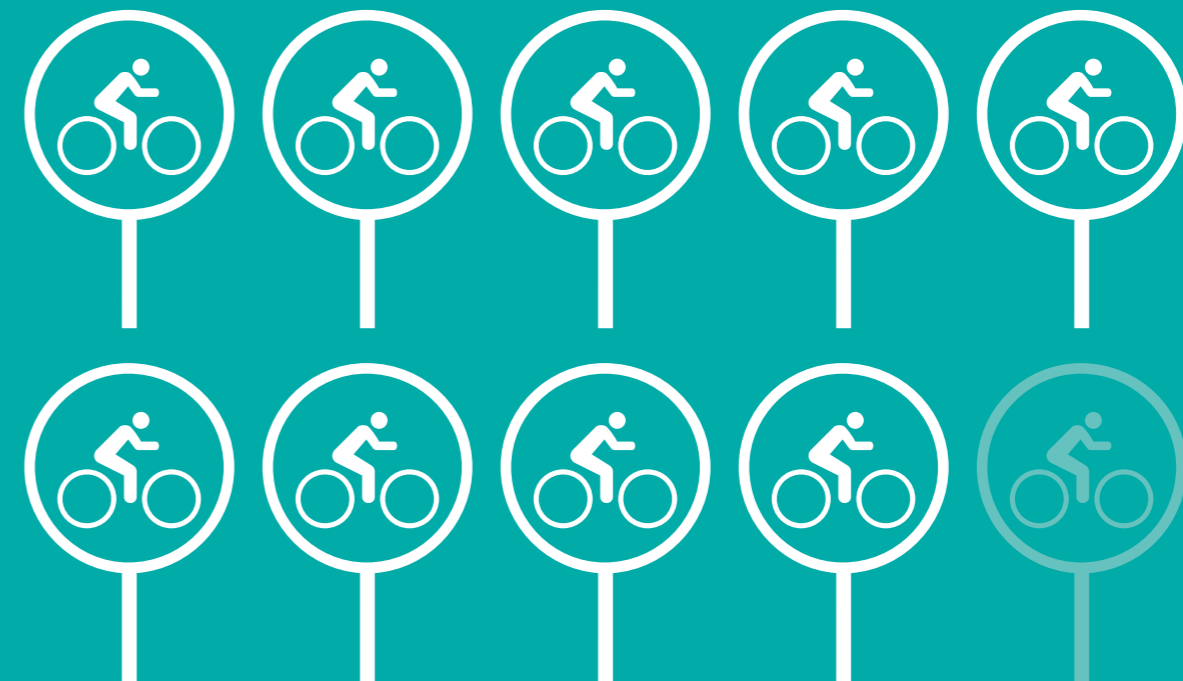


Women need safe, protected space for cycling

- **88% said** they prefer cycling on protected cycle lanes or low traffic routes, or will not cycle without them.
- **45% of women** said that good cycle infrastructure would help them switch to cycling from other forms of transport for local journeys
- **25% of women** say the only reason they can cycle is good infrastructure for their journeys.

NINE OUT OF TEN

women said they would start to cycle, or cycle more, if they had better infrastructure (such as protected cycle lanes) for their journeys.



Many women avoid isolated or dark cycle routes (such as parks or towpaths)

- **Over half** said they routinely face a choice between busy roads without safe space for cycling or a route through quiet and/or dark places where they feel at risk.



ONE IN THREE

women stop cycling after dark or in winter due to a lack of safe routes

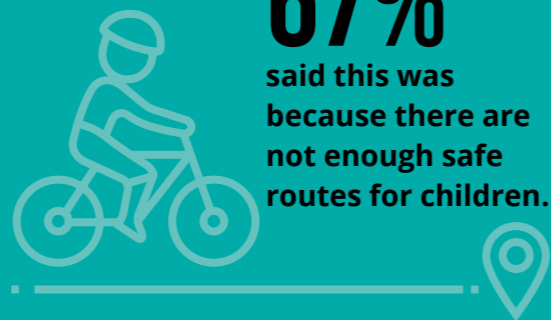
Women need better local cycle networks

- **86% said** that half or more of all their journeys are local (less than 3 miles from their home).
- **But 29%** do not cycle these shorter journeys because there isn't a safe route
- **Only 15%** said their London borough provided a local cycle network that meets their needs.
- **Many women** mentioned needing safe and secure bike parking and storage at key local destinations.

Children's freedom to cycle is also restricted

- **39% of those responding** with children said their kids never cycle, alone or with an adult.

Of these,
67%
said this was
because there are
not enough safe
routes for children.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

What should the Mayor, Transport for London and borough councils do to enable more women to cycle in London?

The LCC Women's Network launched in 2023, calling on the Mayor to make cycling a safe mode of transport used by women and men equally across London by 2030. This was accompanied by asks on physical safety, social safety and local cycle networks. The survey results showed overwhelming support from women on all three issues to enable them to cycle in London.

These three asks therefore form our recommendations, with further points drawn from the survey results:



Act on physical safety

Transport for London & borough councils to deliver cycling infrastructure across London that is physically safe and of the highest quality, to give women the confidence to cycle, including with children, without fear of collision with motor vehicles.

Transport for London and borough councils to design cycle schemes that work for women, including those who cycle with children, by ensuring all cycle schemes are inspected by a design review panel that includes experts on women's cycling design.



Act on social safety

The Mayor of London to deliver, measure and report on faster, verifiable actions to radically improve social safety for women cycling in London, working in partnership with the Metropolitan Police, Transport for London and the boroughs.

The Mayor of London, Transport for London and the Metropolitan Police to address gendered abuse and violence towards women cycling. Actions should include:

- **The Metropolitan Police** to swiftly follow up and act on reports of gendered abuse or violence while cycling
- **The Metropolitan Police** to record and report on crimes against women cycling, identifying crime 'hotspots' and targeting criminal behaviour in these areas
- **The Mayor of London** to run a targeted public information campaign to raise awareness of aggression and abuse towards women cycling in London
- **Transport for London** to include 'social safety' as a key priority in its Cycle Route Quality Criteria, to ensure London's signed cycleways are socially safe, well-lit cycle routes available to all, year and day round.



Provide local cycle networks

Think beyond the commute. Borough councils & Transport for London to appropriately prioritise local cycle networks, such as low traffic neighbourhoods and safe routes to amenities and schools, as they do commuter cycle corridors into central London.

Borough councils to identify and prioritise neighbourhoods within 3km of their town centres to deliver high-quality cycle routes, low traffic neighbourhoods and high levels of secure and convenient cycle parking. Local implementation plans (LIP) and other funds, as well as TfL's Strategic Cycling Analysis, Strategic Neighbourhood Analysis and other data should be used.



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SURVEY RESULTS

This survey was produced by the LCC Women's Network, which formed in 2023 by women from London Cycling Campaign, JoyRiders, and Londra Bisiklet Kulübü.

In April 2023, the Network launched a petition calling on the Mayor of London to make cycling a mode of transport that men and women use equally by 2030. Our petition defined three asks of the Mayor, working in partnership with other authorities. They can be summed up as **physical safety, social safety, and good quality local cycle networks**, based on barriers to women cycling identified by research in London and elsewhere.⁴ The survey questions were grouped under these three asks.

'What Stops Women Cycling in London?' was a public survey, sent out to LCC members and supporters, to the over 1,200 people who registered for our LCC Women's Freedom Ride in March and shared on social media in the summer of 2023.

The survey had responses from 1,043 people who said they were women or non-binary. Most respondents said they cycle in London currently, with 84% saying they cycle at least once a month. 61% said they were white British, with 23% from other white backgrounds, 11% from non-white backgrounds and 5% from mixed heritage backgrounds. 15% told us they live with a disability or a chronic health issue. For more information about who responded to our survey, as well as the full survey results, see lcc.org.uk/results.

Below are the key results.

1. PHYSICAL SAFETY

Survey results confirm that this is our most vital ask of the Mayor and London's boroughs to enable women to cycle in London: safe, high-quality infrastructure, such as protected cycle lanes or low traffic routes. For many women, having these safe routes makes all the difference between being able to ride a bike in London or not. The survey responses also suggest that separate space for cycling is not just important for women's physical protection from motor vehicles, but to provide a legitimate space on the street, where they are less likely to be treated by aggressive drivers as if they are 'in the way'.

// I was cycling in 'primary position', in the middle of the lane. A passenger got out of his car and came towards me shouting at me to get off the fucking road //

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9 OUT OF 10

of women surveyed would start to cycle, or cycle more, if infrastructure was better in their area.

88%

said they either prefer, or rely on, good quality cycle infrastructure to cycle in London.

71%

said 'physical safety' for women cycling was our most – or one of our three most – vital asks of the Mayor.

25%

said they only cycle in London because they have good infrastructure for their journeys.

For more on this campaign, see lcc.org.uk/freedom

2. SOCIAL SAFETY

This survey uncovered a shocking toll of abuse and aggression towards women who cycle in London. A large majority of women's survey responses about these interactions either described drivers shouting at them to get out of their way, often with gendered terms of abuse - or trying to force them out of the way with aggressive driving - on roads that did not have protected space for cycling.

This verbal abuse was often gendered ("bitch", "slut"). Some women also reported sexual harassment, ranging from unsolicited sexual comments, to men taking photos or videos of women cycling, to a small number of physical, sexual assaults, such as groping or slapping women on their bikes stopped at traffic lights. There were also a smaller number of age-related insults, racist or anti-religious comments, body shaming and abuse for cycling with children. The abuse came from car and van drivers, taxi and bus drivers, as well as male cyclists.

The results also show the impact on women of inadequate cycle routes that do not feel safe after dark. A lack of routes that feel safe all year and all day round means women face difficult choices - some have to ride longer distances to feel safe, while others simply give up cycling when it gets dark early.

// Two men tried to push me off my bike on an isolated and poorly lit route. I didn't cycle for months after because I was too scared to. I now cycle on the road alongside cars. I don't feel safe there but it's not as traumatic. //

// A van overtook me then drove very close alongside, slowing down to my pace. A man leaned out of the passenger side and started making gestures and comments. I was trapped between the van and the pavement. I arrived at work crying and had to adjust my route so I didn't pass the van again later. //

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9 OUT OF 10

women have had verbal abuse and aggression from other road users. For 64% it happens at least once a month.



25

responses mentioned the police. Only 2 had a good response from them and only 1 resulted in a prosecution.



The most common abuse shouted was "Get off the road!" or similar, attacking women's right to cycle

Get off the road!



93%

of women said drivers had used their vehicles to intimidate them. For 77% it was at least once a month.



OVER 1 IN 5

women have stopped cycling, either for a period of time or permanently, because of abuse and aggression on the road

The most common form of aggressive driving was close passing (often a 'punishment pass', deliberately overtaking too closely).



33%

of women won't cycle after dark or in the winter because their routes feel too risky

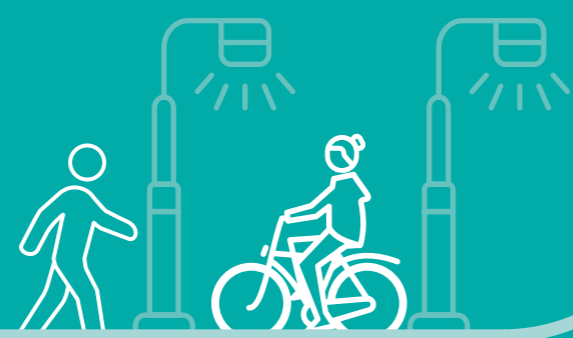


65%

of women never cycle alone on an unlit or isolated route after dark

1 IN 8

even described incidents involving physical contact, mostly drivers making contact with a woman using their car, but there were also assaults by passers by, including sexual assaults



55%

of women have to choose between a route on busy roads without safe space for cycling or a route through quiet and/or dark places where they feel at risk



For more on this campaign, see lcc.org.uk/freedom

3. CYCLING LOCAL JOURNEYS

Women tend to make shorter, more cyclable trips than men – for instance, women in their thirties do four times the school run distance and half the commute as men of the same age.⁵

Our survey results confirmed that a large proportion of women's trips are local, but the lack of a safe network prevents many of them from doing most of these journeys by bike.

A large proportion of women with children say their children do not cycle at all, either alone or with an adult, and this was mainly due to a lack of routes that are safe enough.

// I was cycling on the road where I live. There are cars parked on each side so I have to cycle in primary position. A driver drove towards me at speed, then as he passed he wound down his window and shouted "BITCH" in my face. //

// I experienced the most aggression when I was cycling with a trailer with my kids in. It was impatient drivers in residential areas getting frustrated that they couldn't overtake me. They would yell out of their windows and once someone stopped in front of me to tell me I was a bad mother for putting my kids in danger! //



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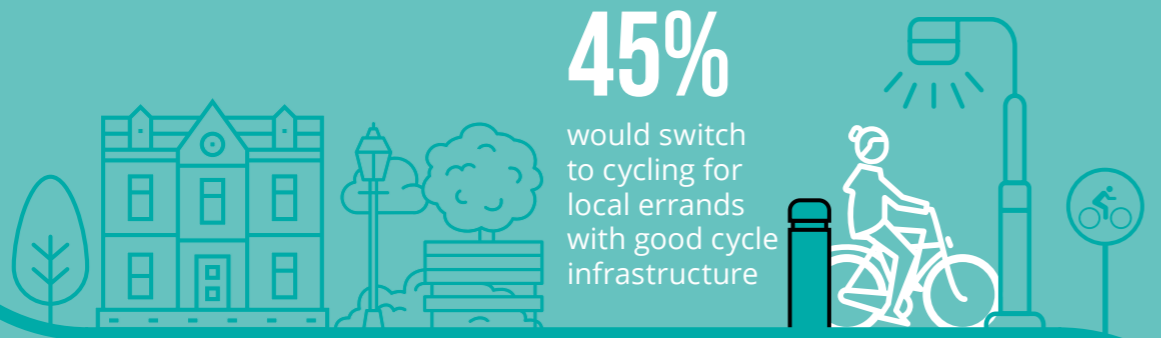
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Only **15%** of women say they have a local cycle network that meets their needs



29% of women don't cycle more local journeys because of a lack of safe routes

45% would switch to cycling for local errands with good cycle infrastructure

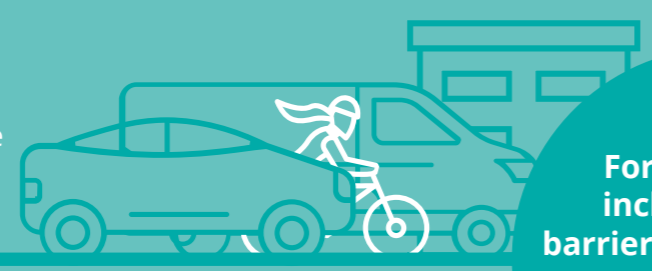


For **86%** of women, short local trips (3 miles or less) make up at least half of all their journeys



39% of women with children said their kids never cycle local journeys, either alone or accompanied⁵

Of these, **67%** said this was because there were not enough safe routes for them



For full results, including other barriers to cycling that women told us about, see lcc.org.uk/results



NOTES

- 1 Women, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.
- 2 CBS Statistics Netherlands (2022) CBS Open data StatLine. https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/portal.html?_la=en&_catalog=CBS and Transport for London (2022) Travel in London - Report 15. <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/travel-in-london-report-15.pdf>
- 3 <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/jun/11/female-cyclists-bad-driving-harassment-study-uk-women-men-near-miss>, quoting Aldred, R. and Crowther, S. (2015) 'Investigating the rates and impacts of near misses and related incidents among UK cyclists', Journal of Transport and Health. Elsevier, 2(3), pp. 379-393.
- 4 The research included:
 - Ravensbergen, L. et al. (2018) 'Biking to Ride: Investigating the Challenges and Barriers of Integrating Cycling with Regional Rail Transit', Transportation Research Record. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2672(8), pp. 374-383
 - Transport for London (2021) Cycling potential in London's diverse communities, <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/cycling-potential-in-londons-diverse-communities-2021.pdf>
- 5 Mayor of London & Transport for London (2023), 'Cycling action plan 2: building on successes' (2023)
- 6 Marstrand-Taussig, L. (2021) 'Do inclusive transport strategies really consider the needs of all?' <https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/evolution/news/69199/do-inclusive-transport-strategies-really-consider-the-needs-of-all->
- 7 Aldred, R. and Crowther, S. (2015) 'Investigating the rates and impacts of near misses and related incidents among UK cyclists', Journal of Transport and Health. Elsevier, 2(3), pp. 379-393.
- 8 Marstrand-Taussig, L. (2021) 'Do inclusive transport strategies really consider the needs of all?' <https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/evolution/news/69199/do-inclusive-transport-strategies-really-consider-the-needs-of-all->
- 9 These are percentages of respondents who answered questions about children and did not choose 'Not applicable'.

This report is by the LCC Women's Network, convened by LCC and including members of JoyRiders and Londra Bisiklet Kulübü. We are grateful to our sister organisations for all their help with this work.

With thanks to all the women who responded to our survey in summer 2023.

For more information about this report or LCC's Women's Network campaigning, email women@lcc.org.uk.

