

Wheels for Wellbeing Quick Guide to Accessible Active Travel



What is active travel?

Active travel means making ordinary everyday utility trips or journeys in ways that include physical activity.

The most common active travel modes are [walking/wheeling and cycling](#).

Utility trips are trips made for any reason other than simply making the journey – Going for a walk/wheel is not a utility trip; walking/wheeling to meet a friend, is.

Active travel journeys can include journeys with any destination - commuting, caring journeys such as school runs, shopping, medical appointments, social activities and more, where physically active modes are used for some or all of the trip (see [multi-modal journeys](#) below).

Active travel, powered mobility aids and micro-mobility

Recognition of all fully-powered mobility aids used by Disabled people as active travel modes is critical for equity and inclusion of Disabled people in public spaces:

At Wheels for Wellbeing, we consider that electric and e-assist micro-mobility devices have the potential to be important low-carbon modes for Disabled and non-Disabled people, with further potential to reduce driven trips and so reduce risk of road traffic collisions and air pollution. There is ongoing debate about whether e-scooters and other micro-mobility devices should be included within active travel.

Mobility devices that do not require pedal power and are entirely e-assisted still offer physical activity for many Disabled people. The core and limb strength required, for example, to stand on an e-scooter can offer important exercise as too can the hand-eye coordination offered by a power chair or mobility scooter. In addition, these devices might be the only means that Disabled people can access the outdoors and the mental health benefits of travelling through parks/green spaces and their local community.

Therefore, we define fully-powered micro-mobility use as active travel for Disabled people, alongside other walking/wheeling and cycling mobility modes.

We do not define micro-mobility use as active travel for non-Disabled people. Non-Disabled people will almost invariably have other, comparable, more active alternative modes they could use, such as walking or cycling. However, this does not mean we consider micro-mobility to be a negative choice: used correctly it is a low-risk, low-cost, non-polluting, fun and convenient option for many non-Disabled users.

- **Active travel includes Disabled people using all forms of powered micro-mobility as their mobility aid, as well people using legally recognised class 2 and 3 “invalid carriages”, to undertake utility journeys.**
- **Non-Disabled people using micro-mobility devices such as e-scooters are not using active travel, but are still choosing a positive, valid form of mobility.**

Examples of powered mobility aids are powerchairs, mobility scooters, powered attachments to manual wheelchairs, e-assist cycles and micro-mobility devices.

The core strength, dexterity, endurance of uneven surfaces and movement involved in making any journey outdoors are all physical challenges for many Disabled people. In addition, the benefits of being outdoors, taking part in community, self-care and social activities and making chosen journeys with increased independence are hugely important. Disabled people who are restricted to remaining in their home or to only travel in private vehicles due to inaccessibility of public space and inadequacy of mobility aids are [frequently denied these benefits](#).

We need legal recognition of all types of mobility aids used by Disabled people, and broader understanding amongst decision makers and the wider public of the physical, psychological, social and economic benefits that fully-powered mobility aids bring and could bring to so many Disabled people.

E-assist pedal cycles (EAPCs)

E-assist cycling provides [moderate to vigorous physical activity](#), comparable to brisk walking, meaning e-cycling is a form of active travel for Disabled and non-Disabled people. A [high proportion of Disabled cyclists](#) use e-assist cycles, including using e-assist cycles as essential mobility aids.

Active travel and multi-modal journeys

Multi-modal journeys are any trips in which a person uses more than one way of travelling to reach one destination.

Active multi-modal journeys use at least one active travel mode for at least one section of a journey.

Active multi-modal journeys include walking/wheeling or cycling to a bus, train or tram stop, or to a cycle or vehicle hire station, then will usually also include walking/wheeling or cycling to a final destination.

Active travel, horse riding and horse driving

Active travel modes are those commonly used to complete utility journeys. Horse riding and horse driving are not practical, every-day journey modes for most people in the UK: The high cost of horse ownership or hire and practical considerations prevent most people from riding at all, let alone to education, employment, shopping, healthcare or on social visits. Horse riding and horse driving can be good leisure, exercise and therapy for Disabled people, but they are not active travel modes.

Equestrian activities (horse riding and horse driving) are not active travel modes in the UK, because very few people can use these modes to make utility journeys.

Why is accessible active travel important?

Physical health, mental health and social benefits

A high proportion of Disabled people can participate in active travel with access to the appropriate mobility aids and an accessible environment.. Active travel brings [huge physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits as well as increased mobility and social participation](#).

Environment and sustainability

[Transport is the UK's largest source of CO₂ emissions](#). Enabling accessible active travel could hugely reduce carbon emissions via mode shift, with the resulting reduction in miles driven simultaneously reducing the negative health, social and economic impacts of [air pollution](#) and [road collisions](#). The shift from internal combustion to electric cars will have a relatively much [smaller effect on CO₂ emissions](#) and potentially may increase risk of injury and death to people walking/wheeling and cycling due to [lack of noise](#) as well as [increased vehicle weight and front-end height](#).

[Disabled people are more severely affected by climate breakdown](#) and other negative impacts of high-carbon transportation such as poor air quality than non-Disabled people. Providing accessible active travel options will mitigate the impact of climate breakdown on Disabled people while reducing carbon emissions.

Many [Disabled people want to live and travel sustainably](#). Participating in active travel is a way that we can reduce our environmental impact and bring health and social/community benefits to the wider [population as well as ourselves](#).

Congestion

Active travel and public transport [take up less road space](#) than private vehicles. The more people who can use active travel, the less congestion there will be for those who need to drive or be driven, including some Disabled people, people with temporary impairments and those transporting heavy items long distances.

Economic

Across all transport types Disabled people make [38% fewer journeys](#) than non-Disabled people. Working-age Disabled adults are far less likely than non-Disabled people to [hold a driving license](#), making active travel important to enable many Disabled people to make journeys when and where we want to. Most public transport journeys also begin and end with active travel. Being able to make utility journeys in a reliable, timely fashion is critical in enabling Disabled people to access education, employment, healthcare, caring, community and social activities, all of which have knock-on economic impacts.

Improving active travel infrastructure has been shown to consistently [increase footfall and spend](#) in local businesses. This includes [“Purple Pound”](#) spending from enabling Disabled people to access shops and other venues, in line with the legal obligations businesses and local authorities already have under the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#).

How can we make active travel more accessible?

UK Legislation and international obligations

The [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) and [United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#), to which the UK is a signatory, both require Disabled people to be provided with equal access to mobility compared to non-Disabled people.

“Parties shall take effective measures to ensure personal mobility with the greatest possible independence for persons with disabilities, including by **facilitating the personal mobility of persons with disabilities in the manner and at the time of their choice**, and at affordable cost.” - *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities article 20(a)*

UK national guidance

Government reports such as [Gear Change](#), and guidance such as [LTN1/20](#) and [Inclusive Mobility](#) provide useful information about accessibility standards

Wheels for Wellbeing guidance and campaigning

For information on inclusive cycling, see our 4th edition [Guide to Inclusive Cycling](#) (5th edition due in 2024), as well as more recent guidance on our [resources page](#).

If you're a Disabled cyclist or ally, join our free [Disabled Cycling Activists Network](#) for peer support and resources.

Representation of Disabled people

Representation is an essential part of improving access to active travel. For free, high-quality images of Disabled cyclists, [register for our photobank](#) or contact info@wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk

