

#BikelsBest x YouGov Statistics Overview

The survey

Two thousand and ten British adults were asked online via YouGov for their views about making changes to our streets to reallocate priority away from motoring and toward walking and cycling. The survey was conducted in part because several recent schemes aimed at reallocating road space away from motoring and towards active travel modes have received complaints, and in several cases the schemes have been scrapped very shortly after being enacted. It was important to discover whether these complaints reflect the views of the British public in general, or are simply the voices of a minority. The nationally representative sample size of over 2,000 British adults means that these research findings can be seen to accurately represent the views of the British adult population aged 18+.

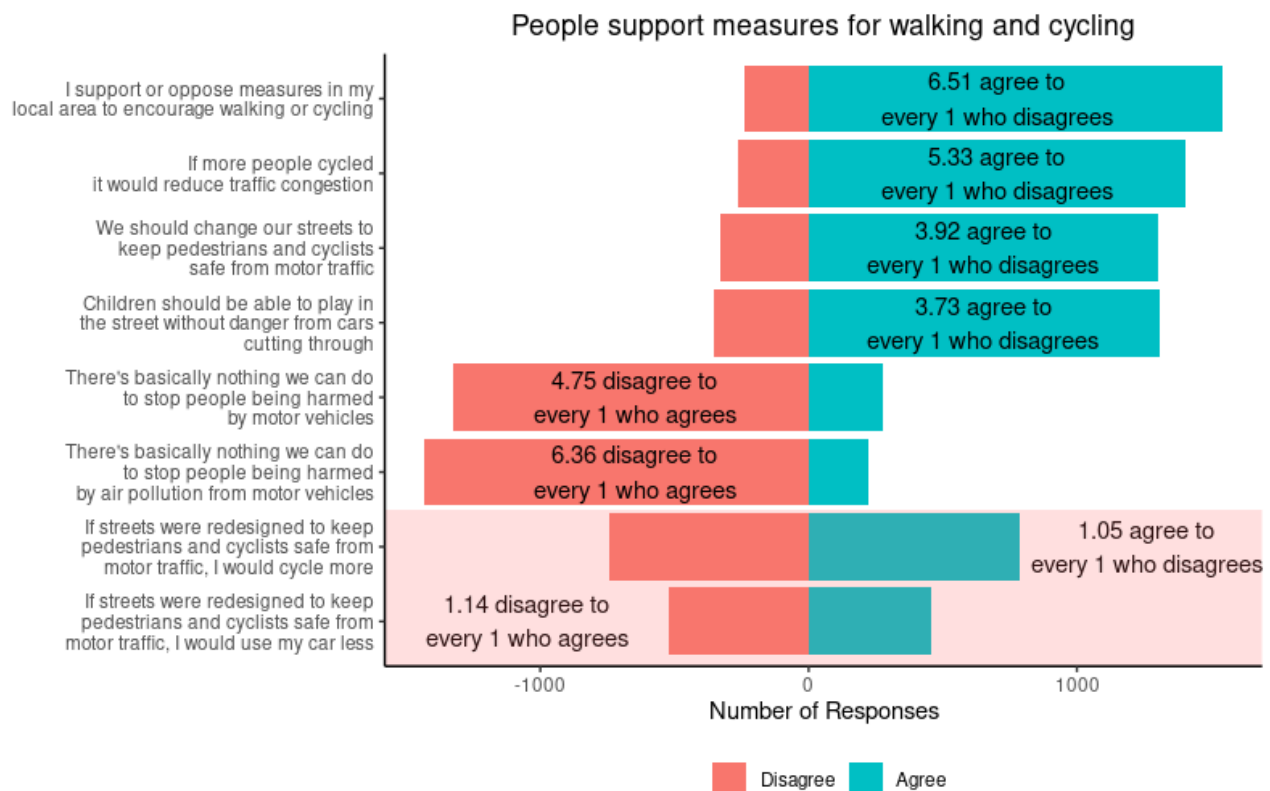
Take-home messages

- The British public strongly support changing our streets to reduce the dominance of motor traffic and to support walking and cycling
- There is support for making these changes even among people who personally would not change their own travel behaviour
- The British public think more cycling would be good for the nation – but underestimate how much other people agree with this and overestimate how much other people disagree.
 - This tendency to overestimate other people's dislike of cycling might partially explain why minority opposition to active-travel schemes is often given undue weight

The findings in more detail

People want to change our streets to support walking and cycling

The online survey shows overwhelming support among the British population for changes in their local area to encourage walking and cycling. For every person opposed to changes in their local area, there are as many as 6.5 people who support those changes (i.e., of the people who expressed a view, 77% were in favour of local measures to support walking or cycling). It is clear, then, that any opposition to active travel schemes does not reflect the views of the majority.



People are not fatalistic about the negatives from motoring

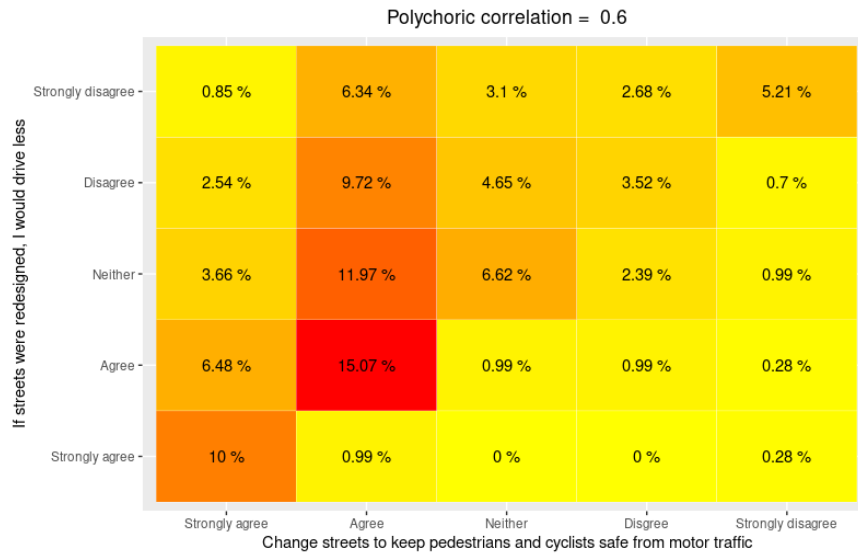
The plot above shows just how much British people do not accept the harms of motor traffic as inevitable. For every person who agreed that motor danger or air pollution are essentially outside our control, there were many more who disagreed.

The nation supports changing our streets for active travel, even when they don't personally benefit

The data show that around 2 in 5 people said they would cycle more, and around a third who use a private or shared car to travel said they would drive less, if streets were redesigned to make them safer for non-motorists. On the one hand, this suggests a large suppressed desire for active travel: if around half of British adults walked more or drove less in response to street changes, this would be enormous change. On the other hand, it is clear that agreement with these statements is lower than for the questions about support for active travel in general. This can be interpreted positively: a lot of people must support changing streets to encourage walking and cycling *even though they personally would not be the ones cycling more, or driving less.*

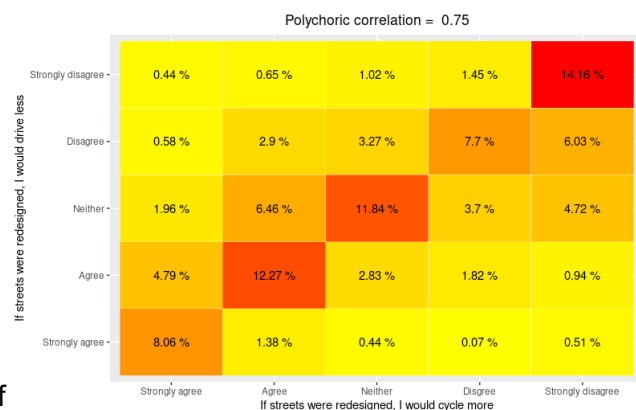
More direct support for this suggestion comes from the plot below, which shows how people *who drive alone for their commute* answered both the question "Should we change streets to keep

pedestrians and cyclists safe from motor traffic” and the question “If streets were redesigned, I would drive less”:



This plot shows that there is clearly not a one-to-one relationship here, and there are quite a few people who agree with changing our streets without also saying they would drive less. This further supports the suggestion that people should support street reallocation to keep vulnerable road users safe even if they will not personally benefit and even if it has a knock-on effect on their own car journeys.

As an addendum, there is some overlap between the people who said they would drive less and the people who said they would cycle more, but the overlap is not entire. The plot on the right shows how people responded across the two questions on personal behaviour change. While a lot of people fall along the diagonal on this plot, showing that they would cycle more to the same extent that they would drive less, there were quite a few people who said they would drive less, but not cycle more, if streets were redesigned.



The top-right cell of this table is worth particular attention. These are the people who strongly said they would neither drive less nor cycle more if streets were redesigned. In close agreement with the data above, it is clear that only a small minority of people – 14% – fall into this group. Again, this shows that strong opposition to active travel measures appears to be found in only a small minority.

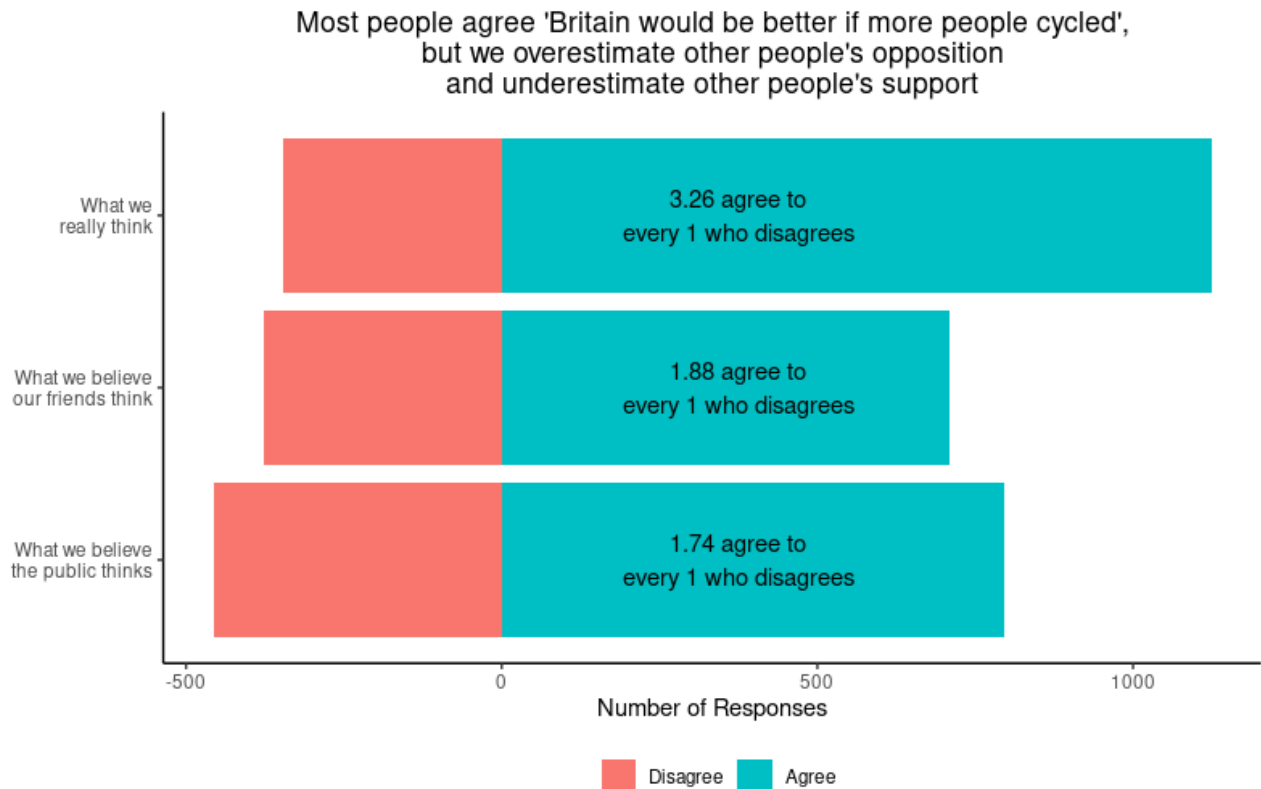
People think cycling is a good thing for the country, but misjudge everybody else’s level of agreement

This consistent finding that most people agree with active travel measures, and only a few disagree, raises the question of why opposition to active travel schemes has so often been successful in the real world.

The survey included three questions designed to look for evidence of *pluralistic ignorance*. This is a social psychological phenomenon in which most people privately disagree with an idea,

but go along with it because they wrongly assume they are in a minority, and that most other people support the idea.

Something akin to the pluralistic ignorance phenomenon is visible here in the specific context of cycling. Most people agree that Britain would be a better place if more people cycled. Indeed, three-and-a-quarter people actively agree with this idea for each person who actively disagrees (77% agreement). However, it is clear from the plot that respondents underestimated how much other people agreed that more cycling would be good for the country and overestimated how much other people disagreed with this.



This pluralistic ignorance-like effect might possibly help explain the success of opposition to pro-cycling measures. First, this kind of effect might embolden the minority who oppose active-travel measures, as they overestimate the number of other people who feel the same way. In addition, it is possible that there is a second effect: when opposition to active travel measures is voiced, perhaps people who support active travel misjudge the public mood and assume there is more opposition than there really is. This might lead them to accept the opposition, and not counter it, more than should otherwise happen.

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21 July 2020

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2010 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 16th - 17th July 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

All calculations have been processed by Dr Ian Walker, Environmental Psychologist, University of Bath