

Has the COVID-19 travel response opened the door to a new direction on climate policy?

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New research has found that during the pandemic people in England and Scotland ditched the car, preferring to walk or cycle.

Data from a survey published by the Center for Research into Energy Demand Solutions (CREDS) shows that following the first lockdown, there was a 20% increase in the number of people walking at least three days a week. Cycling also saw a boost, with the warmer weather, helping numbers to increase two to threefold.

The researchers, who have been tracking how and why [travel patterns](#) have been changing in response to the [pandemic](#) restrictions, also found that twice as many people are supportive of reallocating space for walking and cycling as object to it.

Professor Iain Docherty, based at the University of Stirling, co-authored the report. He said: "Adjusting investment along these lines has the potential to benefit everyone and would support local jobs, neighborhood and town center renewal, as well as carbon reduction goals.

"Before the pandemic our [transport systems](#) were overcrowded, congested, polluting and unhealthy. People had come to accept this as normal and inevitable. There is now a huge opportunity to take advantage of this shift to active travel and meet the UK's net-zero carbon goals."

The researchers are recommending that the Governments' investment plans should be altered to focus on creating high-quality neighborhoods where people can walk and cycle to work, shops and services, and safe routes to schools and town and city centers.

Professor Docherty added: "It was assumed that the switch away from [public transport](#) would mean everyone turned to the car. However, working from home increased fourfold in our survey, to an average of more than two days a week across all workers. This has reduced some car use, and new car sales fell 35% during the past year while traffic

was, on average, 30% down on 2019."

Dr Greg Marsden, Professor of Transport Governance at the Institute for Transport Studies at the University of Leeds, who led the research, said: "Our work shows people have been much more active during the pandemic, particularly walking.

"We need to go even further and faster in our efforts to create really walkable and cyclable environments and better neighborhoods if we are to maintain what has been one of the few positives to result from the pandemic. It will have huge health benefits.

"To make this happen we also need to keep down the levels of traffic on the road. If everyone who has been working from home during the pandemic did so for two days a week that would take 14% of peak period car trips off the roads, equivalent to a school half term. We can channel the money that might have been set aside for new roads to pay for a better, more local and more liveable [transport](#) system that works for everyone."

More information: Report: At a crossroads—Travel adaptations during COVID-19 restrictions and where next?

www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/...transport-report.pdf

Provided by University of Stirling

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