

The social benefits of climate action

1. Active travel

Reducing carbon is only one part of the climate action story on our route to Net Zero: **multiple other benefits can also be delivered by low carbon measures.**

These benefits come in the form of improvements to the environment, health and wellbeing plus increased economic productivity. This guide provides monetised estimates for a selection of **social co-benefits**, enabling you to meet more statutory duties and provide visible, value-for-money outcomes.



How do we value the social benefits of active travel?

Increasing levels of active travel such as walking, wheeling and cycling boosts our health, leading to better quality of life and longer life expectancy. Reducing car travel also results in avoided costs from fewer road accidents and cleaner air, both of which benefit local communities. These benefits are valued monetarily according to government guidance and don't represent direct financial benefits – they are wider savings and avoided costs for your area. In short, they won't appear as financial revenues in your spreadsheets, but they are important and tangible impacts.

How large are these benefits?

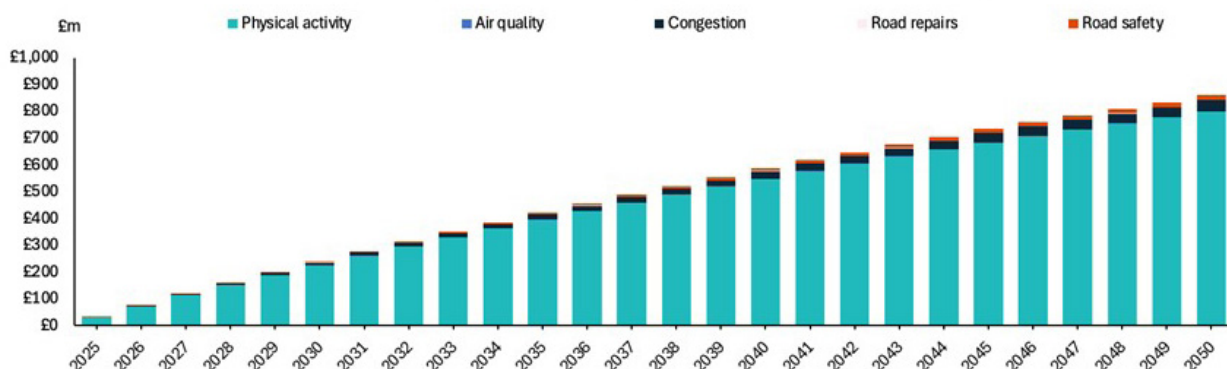
This table indicates estimated total co-benefits that emerge from shifting car journeys to active travel across the time period 2025 - 2050 in the Highland Council area as an example of what we could see at a local authority level, compared to those for Scotland as a whole. The values are modelled based

on advice from the Climate Change Committee (CCC)'s [Seventh Carbon Budget](#) of the deployment of active travel as part of reaching Net Zero in the UK and ECCI analysis; the equivalent of each person shifting just under 1 km from car travel to walking or cycling per week.

Co-Benefit Type	Per person - Highlands (£)	Per person - Scotland (£)	Total Highlands (£ million)	Total - Scotland (£ million)
Increased physical activity	£3,500	£2,150	£833.2	£11,781
Avoided congestion	£34	£34	£8.01	£184.4
Avoided air pollution	£1	£1	£0.23	£5.3
Reduced road repairs	£0.6	£0.6	£0.12	£3.1
Avoided vehicle collisions	£14	£14	£3.3	£76
Total	£3,549	£2,199	£845	£12,050

The figure below shows how these co-benefits ramp up over time, as the shift to walking, wheeling and cycling increases but also as health and other benefits accumulate within the more active population.

Annual co-benefits accruing to society over time from shifting car journeys to active travel in Scotland (2025 - 2050)



These findings illustrate how investments in active travel can help local authorities deliver on **key service outcomes**, while reducing demand on wider public budgets.

It's important to note that the methodology used is compliant with the UK Government [Green Book](#).

This means that the estimates are conservative, as they exclude a wider set of benefits for which Green Book methods are not available, such as **improved mental health** and **enhanced social cohesion**.

How do we start shifting people from their cars to walking, wheeling and cycling?

Interventions are the **actions** your council commits to **delivering** to reach your Net Zero targets – and could include:

- Well-designed active travel routes.
- More bike parking and other facilities.
- Charges that discourage car use.

To unlock the wider social benefits for your local area, the first step in the SCIS journey is the population of the [ClimateView platform](#) with interventions from current plans and identifying additional actions to assist the transition. **Reach out to your local authority climate officer/s to find out how you can support this work.**

Further information

- Visit the [SCIS website](#).
- [Sign up for our latest news and resources](#).
- Explore the social benefits of climate action for your area based on the [UK Co-Benefits Atlas](#).

- To find out more about the figures or request bespoke analysis for your local authority or project, email the CO-BENS team: cobens@ed.ac.uk.