



# SCOTLAND PEDESTRIAN POUND UPDATE



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## Introduction

This Annex sets out the context for public realm and walking improvements to high streets in Scotland, including the geographic and social context, as well as key targets, policies, funding and delivery mechanisms for such schemes. The evidence for greater investment in walkable high streets can be found in the main report which includes examples of case studies from Scotland. The aim of this Annex is to help identify the specific context for Scotland in which those decisions are made and the opportunities and barriers to that investment.

This Annex is for anyone who wants to understand the context and key policies and mechanisms for delivery of public realm and walking improvements in Scotland. This includes people new to the sector and people from other sectors or other nations. There are also recommendations for policymakers in Scotland.

This Annex is informed by the findings of a workshop held with Scottish stakeholders in April 2024, organised by Transport for Quality of Life for this edition of The Pedestrian Pound. Delegates were from the placemaking, transport, regeneration, planning, accessibility and public health sectors; and included policymakers, practitioners, professional bodies, charities and activists.

## Geography and social context

The social context review of Scotland identifies many challenges, but these also present an opportunity for interventions that promote and enable more walking to have a significant positive impact on health, transport poverty and access to opportunities.

Scotland is the second largest nation in the UK, with a population of 5.4 million in 2022 (Office for National Statistics, 2024a). The majority (71%) of residents were living in urban areas (with 29% in rural areas) in mid-2021<sup>1</sup> (National Records of Scotland, 2022a), which means there is plenty of opportunity to improve walking in local, town and city centres. Scotland also has many small settlements: in 2020, there were 514 settlements with a median population of 1,900 people per settlement (National Records of Scotland, 2022b). This means that facilitating walking journeys within compact towns and between settlements, and integrating walking with public transport, are key.

Scotland has generally poor health outcomes, which, as shown in the main report, could be helped by investment in public realm schemes that encourage more walking.

For example:

- Over a quarter (29%) of adults in Scotland were living with obesity in 2021-22 (Bone, 2024).
- Nearly a sixth (17%) of men and a quarter (23%) of women in Scotland were classed as inactive in 2019 (British Medical Association, 2019).
- Scotland has the lowest life expectancy at birth among the four UK nations (Office for National Statistics, 2024b).
- There are also high levels of income and health inequalities in Scotland:
- Inequality in household disposable income has generally been lower in Scotland than in the UK over the last 25 years. However, in 2019, Scotland had the same level of inequality as the UK with London excluded (Phillips et al., 2023).
- Men and women in the most affluent areas (e.g., Orkney Islands) live nearly 26 years longer in good health, compared to those living in deprived areas (e.g., North Lanarkshire) (Public Health Scotland, 2024).

These income and health inequalities mean that there is a particular need for investment in public realm and walking schemes in the most deprived areas of Scotland to help residents benefit from the positive impacts on health and wellbeing, economics and community, as part of levelling up.

## Workshop findings

At the workshop for Scottish stakeholders, it was generally agreed by delegates that Scotland has a strong local identity, communities with a can-do attitude, and an environment and landscape that is a real asset and attraction. However, it was also agreed that community engagement on public realm schemes needs to be improved, and that there are too many short-term projects with limited engagement. Perceptions that (public realm) solutions for cities don't apply in smaller settlements are also a barrier. Additionally, Scottish stakeholders considered that there is a persistent belief, particularly in the smaller towns, that cars are the answer to growth.

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<sup>1</sup> Where rural is defined as settlements of less than 3,000 people. The proportion of people living in rural areas in Scotland would be much higher if using the classification used in England and Wales (settlements less than 10,000 people).

## Policy context

### High streets and public realm

The Scottish Government has a strong policy commitment to placemaking, and for many years its goal for town centres has been much broader than simply supporting retail.

The main strategies, policies and guidance relevant to public realm improvements include:

- A **Town Centre First Principle**, agreed with COSLA (the voice of local government in Scotland) in 2014.
- The **'Place Principle'**, which promotes a shared understanding of place, and the need to take a more collaborative approach to a place's services and assets (Scottish Government, 2019a).
- A Revised Town Centre Action Plan, known formally as **The New Future for Scotland's Towns**. This was published in 2021 (Sparks, 2021). The **Scottish Government response** (Scottish Government, 2022) and supporting toolkit (Scotland's Towns Partnership, undated b) are discussed in the section on delivery and evaluation.
- **National Planning Framework 4**: Scotland's planning and spatial strategy (Scottish Government, 2023a). This includes a commitment to develop **'20-minute neighbourhoods'**, which means people being able to meet most of their essential needs – such as leisure activities, school and healthcare – all within a 20-minute walk. It is centred on supporting people to 'live well locally'.
- Planning guidance on **Local Living and 20-Minute Neighbourhoods** was published in April 2024 following a consultation in 2023 (Scottish Government, 2024).
- **Town Centre Living (TCL)**: a key policy aspiration for the Scottish Government (Scottish Futures Trust, 2023).
- An Accessible Travel Framework to ensure that transport in Scotland is accessible for all, including disabled people (Transport Scotland, 2017).
- A **pavement parking ban**. Scotland is the first of the four nations to make pavement parking illegal nationwide, which came into effect in November 2019 (Transport Scotland, 2023a) and is being implemented in Edinburgh (City of Edinburgh Council, undated) and in Stirling (Stirling Council, 2024). See Chapter 6 of the main report for further discussion.
- **Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011** requires all new developments to include Sustainable Drainage Systems (SEPA, undated).

Many local authorities have public realm improvements as a key part of their regeneration programmes. A wide range of quasi-governmental, private and third sector organisations help to champion placemaking and public realm improvements in Scotland. Some key organisations are as follows:

- **Architecture and Design Scotland** is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body which provides leadership on the Place Principle (Architecture and Design Scotland, undated). They promote good design and collaboration, connect people and organisations, provide advice and skills, and share insights from work across Scotland and beyond.
- **Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP)** is a membership organisation, comprising local councils, businesses and NGOs, whose role is to represent and promote the diversity of Scotland's towns and places, and which is also responsible for Scotland's **Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)**<sup>2</sup> (Scotland's Towns Partnership, undated a). The STP acts as a hub for promoting towns, provides practical support and advice and shares good practice, knowledge and learning. The STP was also part of the review group for 'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres' (see above). See Case Study 4 on Nairn for an example of a BID in the Highlands working to create a more vibrant town centre.
- **Scotland's Regeneration Forum (SURF)** is a membership organisation which acts as a channel for information, consultation and policy proposals to improve the lives of residents in Scotland's disadvantaged communities (Scotland's Regeneration Forum, undated). It runs an annual awards programme for best practice examples of community regeneration projects.
- **Improvement Service**, an organisation supporting local government in Scotland, which has developed its own placemaking tools – see section on delivery (Improvement Service, undated).

## Walking

Many public realm improvements involve active travel schemes. Transport Scotland is the agency of the Scottish Government responsible for walking (and cycling) for travel. It sits within the Economic Development Directorate. Walking (and cycling) for leisure is the responsibility of Active Scotland, a delivery unit tasked with encouraging more physical activity within the Health Directorate and chaired by the Minister for Public Health, Wellbeing and Sport. Support to local authorities has also been provided by active travel delivery partners (e.g., charities such as Paths for All and Sustrans).

As a devolved nation, the Scottish Government has powers over transport (as well as the economy, health, environment and planning), and its own funding streams for public realm improvements.

<sup>2</sup> A partnership between the local authority and local businesses, funded by a levy on business ratepayers in the BID area. The revenue from this is used to develop projects which will improve the local area, such as public realm improvements.

<sup>3</sup> The 11 outcomes include Children and Young People; Communities; Culture; Economy; Education; Environment; Fair Work and Business; Health; Human Rights; International; and Poverty (Scottish Government undated f).

The Scottish Government has a clear statement of its principles and intended outcomes in the Scottish National Performance Framework (Scottish Government, undated a) which sets out the Scottish Government's purpose and values. These include National Outcomes<sup>3</sup>, which link to the UN Sustainable Development goals, and provide a strong emphasis on fairness, equality and climate change. The health and well-being of citizens is an explicit high level policy outcome focus for the Scottish Government. The Scottish Ministerial Health Inequalities Task Force, set up to tackle inequalities in health, makes recommendations to the Scottish Government and monitors a range of health indicators over time (Scottish Government, undated b).

This overarching framework appears to provide better integration and consistency than in England, both within and between policies, on transport, climate, planning and the environment. For example, the National Transport Strategy sets out a vision for transport which is based on the National Outcomes. Key exceptions to this consistency are the six Scottish City Regional Deals, agreed by the Scottish and UK Governments to fund major projects, developed without reference to climate targets and with 70% of the £1.3 billion transport funding to be spent on transport projects which are likely to increase emissions (Transform Scotland, 2024).

The main strategies, policies and targets relevant to walking include:

- The **Second National Transport Strategy**, which has four interconnected priorities: Reduce Inequalities, Take Climate Action, Help Deliver Inclusive Economic Growth and Improve our Health and Wellbeing. The strategy embeds a sustainable travel hierarchy (Transport Scotland, 2020). There are a number of policies under each priority, as well as active travel indicators (Transport Scotland, 2022a).
- **Climate Change legislation**, which sets a target for Scotland to reach net zero by 2045 (Scottish Parliament, 2019). The ambitious 2030 target of a 75% reduction relative to 1990 was abandoned in April 2024 following a critical progress report by government climate advisors (Climate Change Committee, 2024).
- The original 2030 climate target had resulted in a target of a **20% reduction in total car mileage by 2030** relative to 2019 (Element Energy, 2021) which is an ongoing commitment in the Scottish Government's **Climate Change Plan update** (Scottish Government, 2020).
- The **National Walking Strategy**, which aims "to achieve levels of walking on a par with the best performing countries such as the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland" (Scottish Government, 2014). This is due for a refresh in 2025.
- Scotland's **2030 Vision for active travel**, which is that "Scotland's communities are shaped around people, with walking or cycling the most popular choice for shorter everyday journeys" (Transport Scotland, 2014).
- Scotland's **Active Travel Framework**, which brings together the key policy approaches to improving the uptake of walking and cycling in Scotland for travel (Transport Scotland, 2019).
- **Free bus travel** for under 22s (and over 60s), which is also important for encouraging walking and reducing transport emissions (Scottish Government, 2021a).
- Scot Gov **Physical Activity For Health - Scotland's National Framework**



## Workshop findings

At the Scottish stakeholder workshop, delegates generally agreed that Scotland had good policies and targets and that the Scottish Government's Place Principle was a positive achievement. However, implementation of policies was generally agreed to be weak, short-term and very inconsistent, and it was proposed that there should be a mechanism to translate policies into local action and projects.

## Walking levels and mode share

Walking is an important means of travel in Scotland. A 2023 national survey of attitudes to walking and wheeling in Scotland commissioned by Paths for All (56 Degree Insight, 2023) found that:

- Over eight out of ten (85%) Scottish adults walk or wheel every day or several times a week, a slight increase on the levels recorded in 2019 (81%).
- The most common destinations for frequent walking are local shops that sell everyday necessities (44% adults walk to daily or several times a week); local parks and green spaces (35%); and public transport links such as bus stops (29%).
- Most walking takes place in urban places such as roadside pavements (61%) and parks (50%).
- Nearly seven out of ten (69%) Scots would like to be able to walk or wheel more often for leisure purposes and six out of ten (60%) would like to be able to walk or wheel more often for routine purposes.
- Factors that would encourage increased participation included feeling safer at night (34%), better quality pavements (32%) and someone to walk with (31%).

The Scottish Household Survey suggests that walking was the main mode of travel for 22.6% of journeys in 2022 (66% of trips under 1km), compared with 19.8% in 2018. However, trip rates per person may have declined slightly, from 0.37 to 0.34 journeys per adult per day (Transport Scotland, 2024).

A baseline report for the Scottish National Travel Survey 2 (Transport Scotland, 2022a) found that, in 2019, nearly seven out of ten (67%) people reported walking as a means of transport in the last seven days, while over six out of ten (62%) reported walking just for pleasure or to keep fit in the same period.

In 2022, around one in seven (14%) Scottish adults reported walking to get to work or further/higher education (Scottish Government, 2023b).

Academic research highlights the important role played by walking as a mode of travel, with multiple benefits for the economy, health and wellbeing, community and the environment (see the main report). However, workshop delegates highlighted that this needs to be properly recognised in decision-making and funding and more data collected for evaluation. This is especially the case for shorter trips in the vicinity of residential areas which link people to amenities, education, services and social activities. There is also a need to cater for the walking needs of people in rural areas and smaller communities.

## Funding context

There are a number of Scottish and UK Government funds that have recently been or can be used for high street, public realm and walking improvements in Scotland. These are shown in Table S1.

The Scottish Government had previously committed to investing at least £320 million or 10% of the transport budget for active travel by 2024/25 (Scottish Government, 2021b). This represents a spend of £58 per head of population a year, compared with approximately £10 per head in England, £23 in Wales and £30 in The Netherlands (ibid.). In Spring 2024, budget for active travel investment was increased, despite constrained public finances, though it was still £100 million short of the 10% commitment (Howden, 2024). As of June 2024, the future of this funding was unclear as a result of changes in political governance.

The model of funding for active travel is also changing. Previously, most funding came through active travel delivery partners (e.g., charities such as Paths for All or Sustrans) to local authorities and other organisations. The new approach is for funding to go via Regional Transport Partnerships or directly to local authorities. The process is still unfolding, with 2024 seen as a transition year, so it is still not clear where the funding – and how much of it – has been allocated (McCall, 2024).

### Workshop findings

At the Scottish stakeholder workshop, it was agreed that Scotland has some strong relationships between the public and private sector and that the BIDs (see earlier Policy Context section) could help to provide additional funding and support for public realm schemes. However, there was overwhelming agreement that short-term funding was an issue, and that multi-year funding (capital and revenue) was needed, both for schemes and for evaluation.

## Delivery and evaluation

A Town Centre Action Plan Review Group, which reported to the Scottish Government in 2021, reaffirmed the Town Centre First principle and Place Principle and noted that progress has been made at a policy and local level but that more could be done to enhance town centres and reduce inequalities (Sparks, 2021). The report made three recommendations, including highlighting the need to: strengthen the position of towns and centres in national planning; review tax and funding mechanisms to align with Scottish Government priorities (e.g., wellbeing); and funding for more demonstration projects around specific themes. The Scottish Government responded that they were implementing or exploring some of the recommendations, including a possible digital tax and more funding for demonstrator projects, though they stopped short of supporting a moratorium on out-of-town development or a levy on out-of-town parking (Scottish Government, 2022).

The Scottish Parliament's 2022 inquiry into town centres and retail made a number of observations and recommendations relevant to placemaking (Scottish Parliament, 2022). It welcomed the Scottish Government's renewed focus on town centres and retail but was concerned that the 'town centre first principle' was not statutory. The inquiry also recognised that the drive for regeneration should not just be focused on business and council revenue but take a wider and more inclusive approach to value, focused on wellbeing, quality of life and the environment. It also noted a gap in place-based support for towns and communities outside enterprise areas and recommended funding support for community-led groups to develop plans for town centres.

Scottish-specific appraisal and evaluation tools for public realm schemes, town centres and active travel include the following:

- **The Place Framework**, a consistent appraisal framework for all local capital investments to ensure that decision makers are provided with a good understanding of the place in which investment is being proposed (Place Standard Partners, 2024b).
- A Scottish **Place Standard Tool**, a simple framework with 14 themes to structure conversations about places (Place Standard Partners, 2023). This was designed as a discussion tool rather than an evaluation tool and is now widely used by local authorities across Scotland. This tool ensures that public health and placemaking are fully embedded in decision-making and empowers communities to shape local improvement plans (Howie, 2019). For example, see Case Study 10 on Alloa, where the tool was used to create a shared vision for town centre regeneration.
- **USP Your Town Audit**, a web-based tool to measure and monitor the performance of Scotland's towns using a series of economic and social Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (Scotland's Town Partnership, 2015). Scotland's Town Partnership's website has a number of case studies of towns that have used the USP Your Town Audit tool.

**TABLE S1**

**Recent and current funding streams for high streets, public realm and walking improvements in Scotland**

Name Of Fund	Funding (£)	Description	Nation	Reference
Place Based Investment Programme (suspended)	£325 million capital 2023-2028	Fund to links and align all place-based funding initiatives, including the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RGCP) supporting place-based regeneration. Included delivery of 20-minute neighbourhoods.	Scotland	Place Standard Partners, 2024a
Vacant and Derelict Land Investment Programme (round 4 of 5-year programme, now suspended)	£50 million	Low carbon fund to complement the Place Based Investment Programme and support the reuse of persistent vacant and derelict land to deliver new green infrastructure.	Scotland	Scottish Government, 2023c
Scottish City Region Deals	£1.3 billion	Funding for councils to ‘support economic growth, create jobs or invest in local projects’. Only one city region, Stirling, has committed all its transport funding to low carbon transport.	Scotland	Transform Scotland, 2024
Town Centre Fund (closed)	£50 million (2019-20)	Fund to make town centres more vibrant, enterprising, and accessible, in partnership with COSLA.	Scotland	Scottish Government, 2019b
Investing in Communities Fund (round 2, 2023-2026, now closed)	£27 million (2023-26)	Fund that targeted disadvantaged communities to deliver projects, services and activities that address poverty and disadvantage, including developing place-based approaches	Scotland	Scottish government, undated d
Strategic Transport Projects Review 2	Unknown	An integrated fund to inform the Scottish Government’s transport investment programme (2022-2042) and help deliver the Second National Transport Strategy.	Scotland	Transport Scotland, undated a
Active Travel Transformation Fund (ATTF)	£190 million (2023-24)	Fund to help local authorities build up capacity on active travel. A number of the projects supported in 2023/24 include public realm improvements.	Scotland	Transport Scotland, 2023b
Cycling, Walking and Safer Routes (closed)	£35 million (2022/23)	Fund for active travel that went directly to local authorities.	Scotland	Transport Scotland, 2022b
Places for Everyone (closed)	Unknown	Fund for local authorities and other public bodies for active travel infrastructure to create safer, more attractive, healthier, and inclusive places, which has been administered by Sustrans.	Scotland	Sustrans, 2022
K Levelling Up Fund (round 3, closed)	£4.8 billion	Fund for infrastructure including regenerating town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport and investing in cultural and heritage assets.	UK	DLUHC et al., 2021b
Shared Prosperity Fund (final allocation 2023-24)	£2.6 billion	Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including better accessibility for disabled people, capital and revenue spend. All areas of the UK received an allocation via a funding formula.	UK	As above
UK Community Ownership Fund (round 4, final round)	£150 million	Fund to support local facilities, community assets and amenities.	UK	As above

- **A Place and Wellbeing Outcomes** tool developed by the Improvement Service (Improvement Service, undated). The tool has a set of 'place and wellbeing outcomes' and indicators, which can be monitored, and associated data sources.
- **Town Centre Health Checks** (Scottish Government, undated e) and a **Town Centre Masterplanning Toolkit** developed by the Scottish Government in 2015 to help implement its town centres action plan and described in *The Pedestrian Pound* (2018) (Living Streets, 2018). The **Town Toolkit** has since evolved in partnership with Scotland's Towns Partnership (Scotland's Towns Partnership, undated).
- **STAG (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance)**, Transport Scotland's framework to identify and appraise transport interventions, based on the UK TAG, with some differences (Transport Scotland, 2022c). It is used to develop transport related business cases. It aligns with The Place Framework.

More information on evaluation can be found in the Evaluation Briefing which accompanies this edition of *The Pedestrian Pound*.

## Recommendations

The key recommendations to improve the delivery of public realm schemes in Scotland, from delegates from the Scottish stakeholder workshop, included the following:

### Policy

- Scottish Government policies need to be better implemented, and certain policies (e.g., climate targets) should influence decisions.
- Design briefs for projects should be based on national policies and frameworks but retain some flexibility to respond to change and local need.
- Centres of all scales (district, town, city) should be redefined as more than just shopping streets.

### Funding

- Provide multi-year funding (capital and revenue) for walking (and transport generally) and public realm schemes.

## Delivery

- Ensure more joined-up decision-making and funding across policy departments, particularly between transport, planning, housing and health, and across projects.
- Undertake quality-led procurement based on long-term place outcomes (rather than prioritising least cost generic design and build).
- Provide better training for local councillors in factors underpinning regeneration, including the benefits of traffic reduction and walkable places.

## Evaluation

- Ringfence a proportion of funding for a scheme for evaluation.
- Develop better academic research links to help with evaluation.
- Collect and disseminate good practice from abroad and in Scotland.

Delegates also noted the potential conflict between funding streams from their own government and the UK government, which often have different priorities.

Some of the recommendations above, which are common to all three nations, have been included in the main report.

## Case studies

See the case studies which accompany this edition of The Pedestrian Pound for examples of public realm improvements in Scotland – and across the UK – which have benefitted pedestrians.

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