## Lifestyle

## **Policy Brief: Transport Systems**



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# Shifting towards more sustainable, healthier transport systems in Europe

#### Learnings & policy recommendations from PSLifestyle

PSLifestyle is a pan-European research project funded by the European Union. It has developed a <u>Lifestyle Test</u> to help individuals adopt positive, sustainable, and healthier lives and to reduce their climate impact. By taking the Test, individuals can see how their daily activities impact their carbon footprint. They also receive personalised tips to help reduce their footprint through lifestyle changes that can be tailored to fit their needs and capabilities. Additionally, the test collects anonymous data on the reasons why people may be unwilling or unable to adopt certain lifestyle choices, providing valuable insights to promote sustainable lifestyles more effectively.

This policy brief draws on over 410,000 responses to the Lifestyle Test. Based on the actions people are willing to take, and on the challenges people face when adopting such actions, it presents a series of policy recommendations on 'Shifting towards more sustainable, healthier transport systems in Europe'. These recommendations aim to address structural barriers to meeting Europe's climate neutral goals and help make sustainable, healthy choices easier and more accessible for everyone.

This brief is one in a series of four, that respectively focus on: transport, food, housing, and purchases. The other three policy briefs can be found <u>here</u>.



# What is the situation?

Transport systems, which include the network of infrastructure, vehicles, and services that enable the movement of goods and people, are essential to modern societies. They facilitate daily commuting, visiting family and friends, tourism, and the proper functioning of global supply chains, **making mobility a cornerstone** of our economic and social life.

In the European Union, the transport sector is central to the single market, ensuring free movement of people, services and goods, while enabling economic and regional integration. It is also the **second-largest expenditure for European households, accounting for 5% of the EU's GDP** and providing direct employment to around 10 million workers<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, the transport sector is a leading source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, **accounting for approximately one-fourth of global energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions**. In Europe, transport contributes around 25% of the EU's total GHG emissions, with road transport being the predominant source, responsible for approximately 73% of the sector's emissions in 2022<sup>2</sup>. While aviation and maritime transport produce smaller shares, they have disproportionately high environmental impacts due to their inefficient energy use.

Tourism-related transport further increases emissions. A 2019 report by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the International Transport Forum (ITF) found that transport associated with tourism accounted for approximately 5% of all human-made CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2016, with projections rising to 5.3% by 2030. In Europe, tourism plays a significant role in transport emissions, with international visitors contributing to increased aviation and road traffic, particularly in major tourist destinations. Efforts to mitigate these impacts include investments in sustainable transport infrastructure, the promotion of low-emission vehicles, and initiatives to encourage rail travel as a lower-carbon alternative to short-haul flights.

The transport sector significantly affects public health, primarily through air and noise pollution<sup>3</sup>. In urban areas, vehicular emissions release pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide  $(NO_2)$  and fine particulate matter (PM2.5), which are linked to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. According to the World Health Organisation, **ambient air pollution causes approximately 4.2 million premature deaths, with a substantial portion stemming from transport emissions**<sup>4</sup>. Noise pollution is another critical health concern: in Europe, about 20% of the population—over 100 million people—are exposed to unhealthy levels of road traffic noise. This exposure contributes to at least 12,000 premature deaths annually and is associated with **increased risks of cardiovascular diseases, sleep disturbances, and diminished mental well-being**<sup>56</sup>.

While transport systems present challenges, they play a crucial role in reducing social inequalities. Efficient, safe, and affordable public transportation enables individuals to reach workplaces, schools, and healthcare facilities, thereby improving quality of life and economic opportunities'. However, access to these services remains uneven across regions and populations, with rural areas and economically disadvantaged communities often facing limited public transport options, exacerbating social exclusion<sup>8</sup>. This phenomenon, often referred to as transport poverty, affects people who cannot afford or access adequate transport, further limiting their opportunities and participation in society<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, inefficiencies in transport systems-such as reliance on individual car usage over public or shared transport options-result in congestion, economic losses, and wasted energy. Across the EU, traffic congestion alone is estimated to cost nearly €100 billion annually in lost productivity<sup>10</sup>.

The European Union has taken several steps to address the challenges and harness the opportunities presented by the transport sector. The European Green Deal and the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy set the vision for a climate-neutral, digitalised, and resilient transport system. These initiatives aim to reduce transport emissions by 90% by 2050, improve public transport accessibility, and shift more freight to rail and inland waterways". The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) policy further supports the development of highquality, interoperable infrastructure across Member States<sup>12</sup>. In her political guidelines<sup>13</sup> and the Competitiveness Compass<sup>14</sup>, President Ursula von der Leyen reiterated the importance of clean and connected transport systems as key enablers of Europe's strategic autonomy and industrial competitiveness. She highlighted the need to invest in zero- and low-emission mobility solutions, strengthen public transport, and accelerate digital innovation in logistics and infrastructure.

The environmental, social, and economic costs of current transport systems highlight the urgent need for sustainable solutions. Ultimately, a transition to more sustainable transport depends not only on policies and infrastructure but also on **enabling behavioural changes**, **such as choosing lower-emission modes and rethinking consumption patterns** that drive transport demand.

The pressing question, then, is: **How can transport systems be reimagined** to support public health, equity, and sustainability, while addressing environmental and societal challenges?



# What needs to change?

A comprehensive package of interventions is needed to minimise the need for transport, reduce emissions across all modes, transition to cleaner energy sources, and promote sustainable mobility at all levels. Policies should aim to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, invest in efficient public transport systems and urban planning, improve infrastructure for walking and cycling, and encourage the adoption of low-emission vehicles. While policy action is crucial, **individuals also have a vital role to play.** Small but meaningful changes, such as reducing flying, choosing staycations, using public transport, or adopting active travel modes like cycling, can collectively make a significant impact. Individual decisions like switching to electric or biogas-powered vehicles and rethinking location choices to reduce commuting needs further contribute to more sustainable transport habits.

Addressing the challenges of transport systems requires a structural approach to understanding why and how people and goods move.





## The evidence from PSLifestyle: what sustainable actions are people willing and able to take?

People can significantly reduce their carbon footprint by making informed and sustainable transport choices. The data presented in the graph **"Annual CO<sub>2</sub> reductions from Action Plans"**, derived from the Lifestyle Test (see box **"What does the Lifestyle Test do?"**), highlights the actions with the highest cumulative impact, meaning the highest CO<sub>2</sub> reduction based on respondents' willingness to adopt them.

#### Annual CO<sub>2</sub> reductions from Action Plans (tonnes of Co<sub>2</sub>/year)

Reduce flying Make your holiday a staycation Give up flying Choose an electric car Use biogas in your car Use public transport If you move think carefully about location Ride an electric bicycle Give up your car Reduce driving



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#### Actions we can take

Among the identified actions, reducing flying stands out as the most impactful change, offering substantial potential for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction. Choosing staycations (a holiday spent in one's home country rather than abroad, or one spent at home and involving day trips to local attractions<sup>15</sup>) or alternative modes of transport for leisure travel, such as trains, can further amplify this impact by reducing reliance on aviation. Other high-impact actions include adopting electric vehicles, using biogaspowered cars, and shifting to public transport for daily commutes. Engaging in active mobility, such as cycling or walking for short distances, and carefully considering where to live to reduce commuting needs, also play a critical role in lowering emissions.

It is important to note that these actions are not necessarily the most impactful in absolute terms but **reflect a balance between potential environmental benefits and individuals' willingness to adopt them**. For instance, giving up flying altogether has a higher environmental benefit than reducing flying, yet it requires a much greater effort, which fewer individuals are willing or able to undertake. Similarly, individuals giving up their cars has a high impact on reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, but a low uptake. Choosing a staycation is important in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and the fact **that many people are willing and able to take this action increases its impact even further.** 

#### What does the Lifestyle Test do?

The <u>Lifestyle Test</u> is a tool designed to inform individuals about the climate impact of their daily activities and inspire them to reflect on their habits, encouraging change through practical actions.

The data presented in this brief, collected between 19 December 2023 – 21 November 2024 in eight European countries (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Turkey), illustrates the impact of these actions in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, linked to individuals' willingness to adopt them. It also highlights the main barriers individuals face in adopting certain actions, with respondents able to select between "too expensive", "not available where I live", "not popular where I live", "not possible in my life situation", "I don't know how", "I don't have the support I need", and "it takes too much time and effort". Their answers highlight the need for structural changes in infrastructures, business models, marketing and advertising messaging, and policies.

By analysing this data, the Lifestyle Test helps to identify actions that decision makers can prioritise to maximise societal acceptance and uptake of more sustainable choices, while pinpointing the key challenges that need to be addressed to further promote these actions across society. Data collection is still ongoing. A new interactive policy and business insight platform providing access to real time data from the Lifestyle Test can be found <u>here</u>.



#### **Barriers to overcome**

Several barriers hinder individuals' ability to change their transport choices. **Among the biggest challenges is cost**, particularly for highimpact changes such as purchasing electric or biogas-powered vehicles. According to the Lifestyle Test, 72% of respondents cited expense as the primary barrier to adopting electric cars, while 48% said the same for biogaspowered vehicles. Reducing or eliminating flying are perceived as "not possible" by 62% of respondents, highlighting current lifestyle constraints and the lack of practical alternatives. For actions like "making your holiday a staycation," **cultural norms, preferences for travel experiences, and a lack of affordable local activities also play a role**. Again, 16% of respondents cited cost, while 8% pointed to an unavailability of alternatives as limiting factors.

These findings highlight the need for systemic policy interventions to address barriers, such as affordability, accessibility, and convenience. Investments in public transport, subsidies for green vehicles, and urban planning strategies that prioritise active and shared mobility can make sustainable choices both feasible and attractive.

By tackling financial and practical constraints, policymakers can empower individuals to take meaningful actions and harness collective power to drive the transition toward sustainable transport systems.



# Policy recommendations: how can policymakers support and enable sustainable change?

The transition to sustainable mobility requires both structural policy changes and individual action. While behavioural shifts are crucial, they must be supported by policies that remove barriers and make sustainable choices the most practical and attractive options.

This means shifting away from car dependency and fossil fuel reliance toward environmentally sustainable, healthier, and more inclusive transport solutions. To achieve this, policies should be designed to support and empower individuals in making sustainable mobility choices by addressing barriers and enhancing accessibility.

The following policy priorities are essential:

#### Reduce emissions from air travel and promote local tourism.

Reducing air travel is challenging due to its convenience and affordability. Promoting local tourism and staycations presents a meaningful opportunity to lower emissions from leisure travel while supporting local economies. Encouraging people to explore nearby destinations accessible by low-carbon transport options, such as trains, can help shift preferences away from carbon-intensive activities like flying.

Key actions include promoting ecofriendly accommodations, launching awareness campaigns on the benefits of local and sustainable tourism, and investing in highquality domestic tourism infrastructure<sup>16</sup>. In addition, subsidising train travel could make it a competitive and attractive alternative to air travel. Enhancing cross-border rail connections and expanding high-speed rail networks can also provide efficient options for long-distance travel across Europe, supporting a sustainable shift in mobility habits<sup>17</sup>.

These actions echo the priorities outlined in the Competitiveness Compass that call for greater investment in sustainable transport infrastructure as part of a broader commitment to clean, affordable, and connected mobility across Europe.



### Reduce car dependency and promote active mobility.

Reducing car dependency requires making sustainable mobility the default choice for daily activities, such as commuting for work or leisure.<sup>18</sup> Policymakers must prioritise strategies to rethink urban and rural spaces to bring essential services—such as workplaces, schools, and healthcare closer to where people live.

Key actions include expanding and electrifying public transport to improve accessibility and sustainability across urban and rural areas. At the same time, public spaces must be redesigned to prioritise active mobility by reallocating space from cars to walking and cycling. Developing dedicated cycling infrastructure, including protected bike lanes and interconnected routes, is crucial to providing safe and attractive alternatives for shortdistance travel.<sup>19</sup>

Reducing travel demand is essential for building sustainable transport systems and addressing emissions. One option to achieve this is the concept of 15-minute cities, where residents can access essential services within a short walk or cycle ride.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, incentivising hybrid working models can complement these efforts by reducing the frequency of commutes and alleviating overcrowding in public transport during peak hours. Encouraging remote work and flexible schedules not only decreases travel demand but also improves work-life balance.<sup>21</sup>

These approaches should be fully integrated into the upcoming Sustainable Transport Investment Plan, which offers a key opportunity to channel funding and policy support towards clean, accessible, and inclusive mobility solutions across all territories.

Establish robust regulatory frameworks. Strong regulatory frameworks are essential to drive meaningful change in the transport sector. Voluntary action alone is insufficient.

Key policy actions include:

- Phasing out fossil fuel vehicles: Implement bans on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars, as is foreseen under EU law from 2035,<sup>22</sup> and progressively restrict the use of non-electric company cars to accelerate the transition to cleaner mobility options.<sup>23</sup>
- Rethinking road expansion: Redirect resources from road expansion projects to public transport infrastructure and integrate nature restoration activities into urban planning. These measures promote sustainable mobility, enhance biodiversity, and improve the quality of urban spaces.<sup>24</sup>
- Regulating car advertising: Mandate and ensure implementation at national level of the inclusion of environmental impact information in car advertisements to raise public awareness and encourage sustainable transport choices.<sup>25</sup>



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## **Case studies**

#### Turkey – Shared vehicle initiative

The municipality of Izmir is encouraging residents to participate in a shared vehicle initiative. The project, 'Moov by Garenta Vehicle Sharing Model,' developed in collaboration with the car rental company Garenta, allows users to rent vehicles by the minute. Using an app, users can locate the nearest available vehicle and rent it for however long they need. Izmir Municipality provides incentives such as allowing vehicles included in the system to use its parking lots free of charge. 200 shared vehicles have been put into service. The initiative is also active in Istanbul. Find out more here.





Portugal – Taking a bike train to school CicloExpresso is an initiative enabling a group of children to cycle to school, accompanied by adult monitors. The CicloExpresso has a fixed route and timetable, like a regular train. It promotes sustainable mobility and contributes to children's health. The project, run by the bicicultura cooperative, exists in Lisbon as well as in other cities in Portugal. Find out more here.

## **Find out more**

Check out the other three policy briefs here: https://pslifestyle.eu/policy-briefs

Find out more about the PSLifestyle initiative here: <u>https://pslifestyle.eu/</u>

Take the Lifestyle Test here: <u>https://pslifestyle-app.net/</u> and help us to share the word!



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