

# Ride Side-by-Side Report



## Background

The Ride Side-by-Side (RSBS) cycle taxi service was **funded by the Department for Transport** (DfT) under a one-year scheme to explore **tackling loneliness and social isolation** through transport, as part of the government's wider Connected Society Strategy (HM Govt 2018).

Bikeworks was **one of twelve successful bids** nationwide, **out of more than 500** submitted, and **the only cycling project to be funded**. The service operated across the communities of London, working with groups and organisations to identify isolated people who experienced feelings of loneliness.

Six Ride Side-by-Side cycles with trailers were purchased, with a seventh brought in from the pre-existing Bikeworks fleet. Two Managers, fifteen Cycle Pilots, one Cycle Pilot Mentor, and three Researchers were recruited, working part-time over the duration of the service.

The RSBS cycle picked up people from home, or a chosen location, to attend appointments, go shopping, for exercise, as an alternative form of transport, or as a leisure ride.

The cycle is **designed to support people with restricted mobility**, including older age, and can be used in all weather conditions. Alongside our trained Cycle Pilot, with additional e-assist, **passengers could choose how they wanted to join in**.



**Dr Kay Inckle**

Kay is a social scientist with research interests in **intersectional and social justice aspects of mental health** and disability and she has published widely in these fields including research with disabled cyclists (Inckle 2020; 2019). She is also a handcyclist, swimmer, Pilates instructor and research/evaluation consultant and was recognised Cycling UK's 2023 100 Women in Cycling.



**Bikeworks**

Established in the heart of London's east end in 2006 as a social enterprise. Bikeworks uses the cycle as a tool for good to address inequalities. As an **agile and responsive organisation**, the team responds to the societal needs evidenced across London's communities, using innovation and by actively collaborating with partners to **scale impact year-on-year**.  
[www.bikeworks.org.uk](http://www.bikeworks.org.uk)

# Overview & Methodology

3358

Journeys Completed

Data collection for the evaluation consisted of **semi-structured qualitative interviews** with twenty-two participants, along with **quantitative data** collected from all participants when they booked their first journey. The parameters of the quantitative data was set by the Department for Transport (DfT) and consisted of demographic details, alongside frequency of use.

871

Passengers Engaged

For the qualitative component of the evaluation, twenty-two participants took part in semi-structured interviews with one of two trained researchers hired to conduct the interviews.

30

Community Groups Engaged

The interviewees were self-selecting from the wider pool of RSBS service passengers. Interviews took place over the phone, by video call, or face-to-face, according to the participants preference.

15

Staff Trained

Interviews lasted between sixteen and sixty minutes. The length of each interview was largely determined by the participant and how much they wanted to say. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai. Written transcripts were manually checked and anonymised before being saved as documents for analysis.

7

Ride Side-by-Side Cycles

**Four main themes**, with a number of sub-topics, emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data. These were **social contact**, **mobility**, **health and wellbeing**, and **inclusivity and accessibility**.



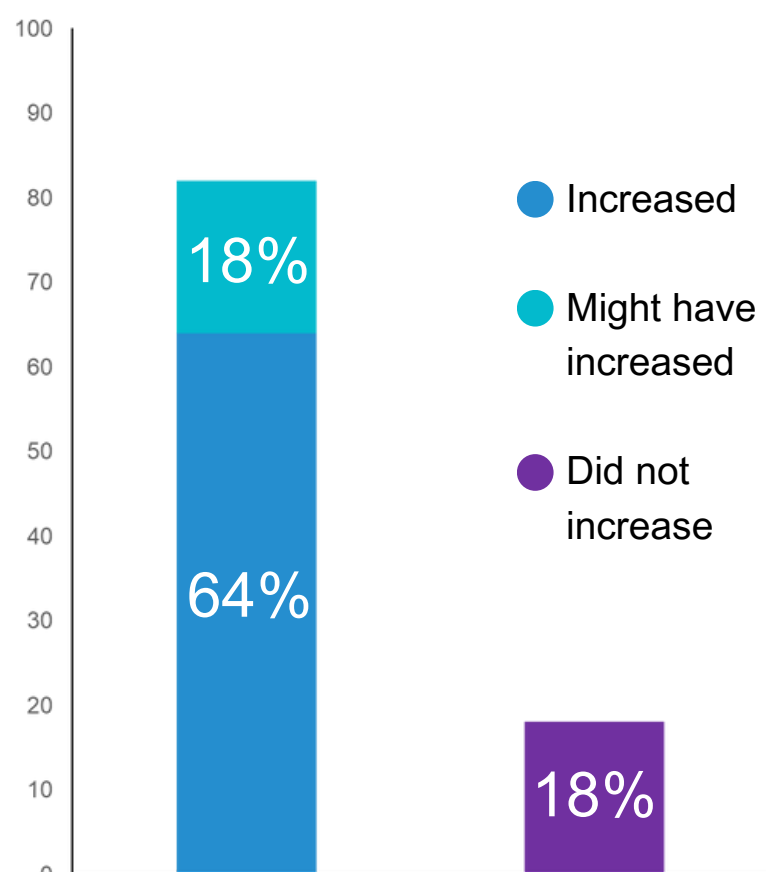


# Social Connectedness

Passengers using the RSBS service reported increased levels of social contact and described a range of ways in which their **social connectedness had improved** as a result of using the cycle taxi. This included social contact with pilots and other riders/participants, family and friends, the wider community, and their local environment. Participants also reported that their experience with the cycle taxi **increased their confidence**, enabling them to go into the community and socialise in ways that they would not have previously felt able.

In addition to the social interaction, the **Cycle Pilots** were also appreciated for their openness and flexibility in working with people with complex situations, and **adapting the service** to fit their specific needs. This ensured that the service, and the social connectedness it facilitated, were **accessible for people who often experienced significant barriers** to mobility and social contact.

## Effect on Social Connectedness



### Family and Friends

Being able to meet and share an activity with family and/or friends was a key element of how the service **reduced the social isolation** and/or loneliness experienced by many of the passengers - especially disabled people, and people with a health condition or life situation which presented **barriers to mobility** and social contact.



### Community

For passengers with limited mobility, simply being able to go outside and travel in the community and/or visit new places gave them a **feeling of connection with the wider world**. One participant described the RSBS service as an opportunity to “Open up or like, kind of like, **reconnecting to the society**”, whilst others reported new friends and connections made with those in their community as a **direct result of the cycle**.



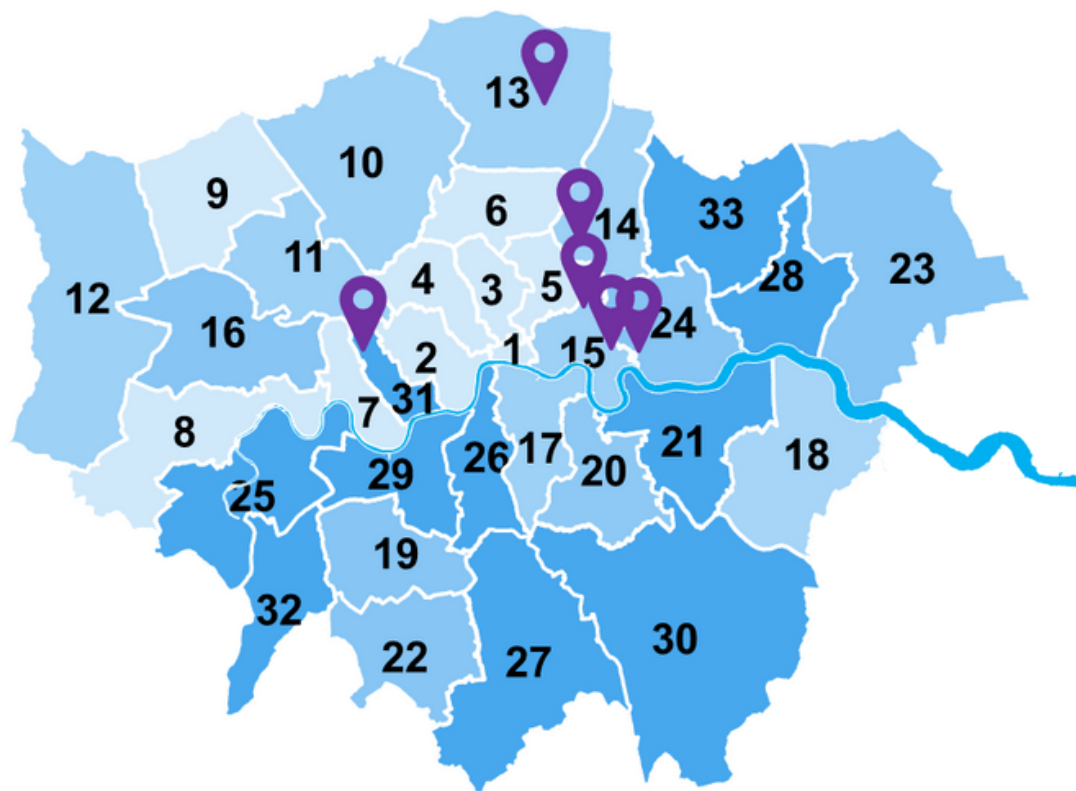
### Local Area/Environment

The opportunity to travel around and explore the local area using the RSBS offered participants unique opportunities that served both **practical and emotional purposes**. A number of passengers described how the RSBS journeys **boosted their confidence** to undertake additional activities that they would have not otherwise considered.



# Mobility

Using **7 RSBS cycles** the service connected with passengers across a number of Boroughs using **6 Hubs**



“““

*It's the **freedom of getting out and about**, I don't get out very often. They're limited [options] for me to get out. And so it does give me a **freedom** for a couple of hours when I'm actually outside, enjoying what's going on and looking at places I haven't seen for many years.*

The service provided essential mobility/ transport for people who otherwise face significant barriers to getting out and about. Transport and mobility inequalities are a significant feature of older, disabled and low-income people's lives across the UK.

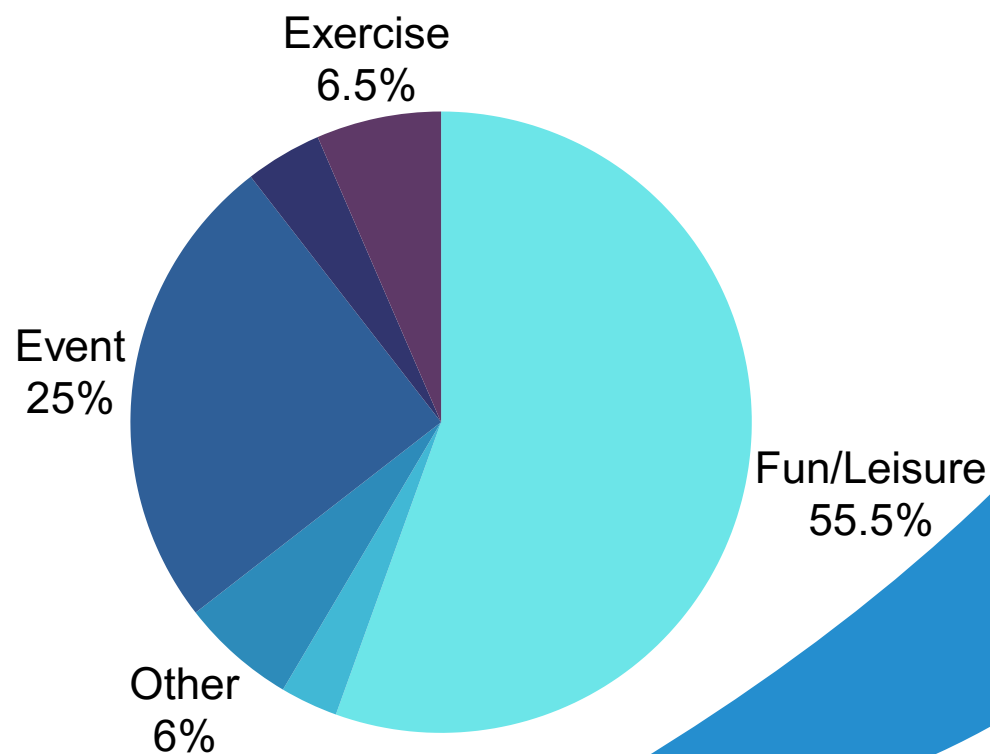
**More than 90% of mobility impaired people do not have an appropriate mobility aid to complete a 1km journey.**

The RSBS service provided “a lifeline” for many passengers who highlighted a range of barriers to transport and mobility in their local area. People used the service for a variety of leisure and utility journeys – often increasing the diversity and purpose of their trips as their engagement with the service continued. In this way, the RSBS provides passengers with essential mobility, independence and freedom, as well as active travel, experiences which are essential to health and wellbeing, in addition to social participation.

“““

*“With [the RSBS cycle] coming to pick people up and drop people off, it can be the difference between that person coming to the club or not. Because sometimes getting on **public transport is too much** for them. The walk is too far. So **if the bike is not coming, then they might not leave their house**. So it's quite a lifeline really (staff member).”*

## Purpose of Journey





# Health & Wellbeing

*“I tried it and love it. [I feel] **euphoric**. 30 minutes I am talking on my lightwriter to my hubby [about] how wonderful I feel. I think cycle taxi is the **most wonderful thing in the world**.”*

*“I feel so good, I actually feel refreshed when I come back, believe it or not. Even if I've done almost 15 miles. I feel better. **My body feels refreshed**. I really do, I just feel like **I don't want to stop** when I come back home kind of thing.”*



*“I mean, I could have been in **all the therapy sessions in the world**. But only for five weeks, **this has helped me much more**. ...This is, this is the **best mental health I've had**, going on the bikes. It's done me good.”*

Health and wellbeing is intrinsically connected to physical activity, social contact, accessing the outdoors and nature. The RSBS offered participants a unique means to access all of these health promoting impacts in just one journey.

Passengers reported **strong mental health benefits**, both immediately after their ride and over the longer term. They also highlighted the **physical health benefits** of exercise, and the importance of being able to get outdoors into nature and the fresh air. The service is particularly important in providing these health and wellbeing benefits to precisely the social groups who face the most barriers to accessing them, and who experience the highest levels of social isolation and the most **significant health inequalities**.

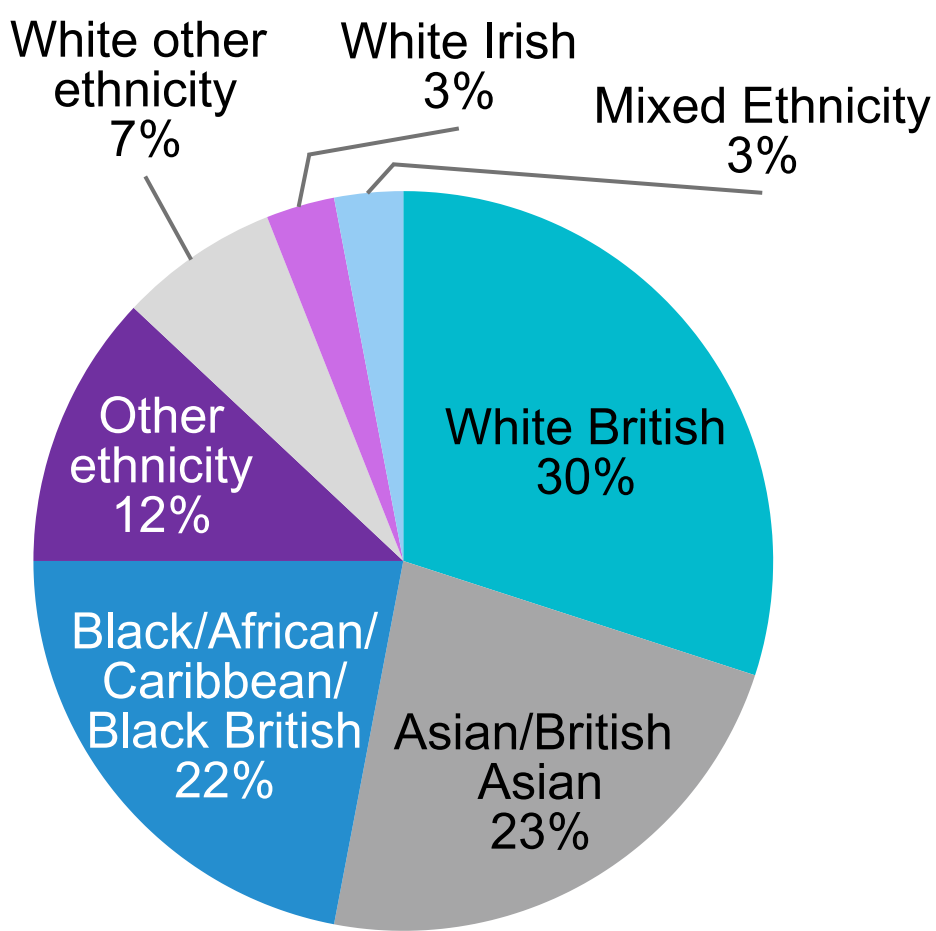
The RSBS had **instantaneous mental health benefits**, participants reported a wide range of uplifted feelings after their ride, including being exhilarated, joyful and energised for the day/tasks ahead.

The immediate joy and uplifted feelings the service engendered are unequivocal. Importantly participants noted **longer and deeper mental health benefits** too. Over time many noticed an improvement in their mental health, demonstrating how the RSBS provides a means for people living with long-term mental health needs to engage in social and leisure activity.



# Inclusion & Accessibility

## Passenger Ethnicity



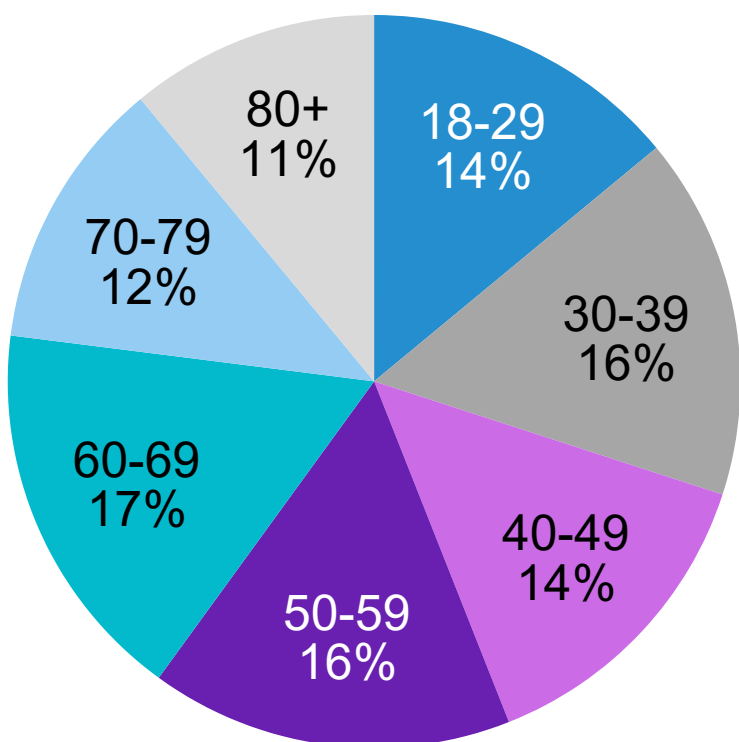
Passengers whose circumstances meant they often experienced **barriers to social participation**, mobility and health, found the RSBS to be accessible and beneficial for them.

The design of the cycle, the skills and adaptability of the Cycle Pilots, and free usage, all contributed to the accessibility. Passengers were acutely aware of the benefits they experienced and keen for others to experience the opportunity, recommending the service to people in their networks and **asking for the service to be more widely available**. Many participants were anxious for the service to continue, without it being dependent on intermittent funding streams, wanting to ensure those in positions of power and/ or decision-making were aware of the service and its benefits.

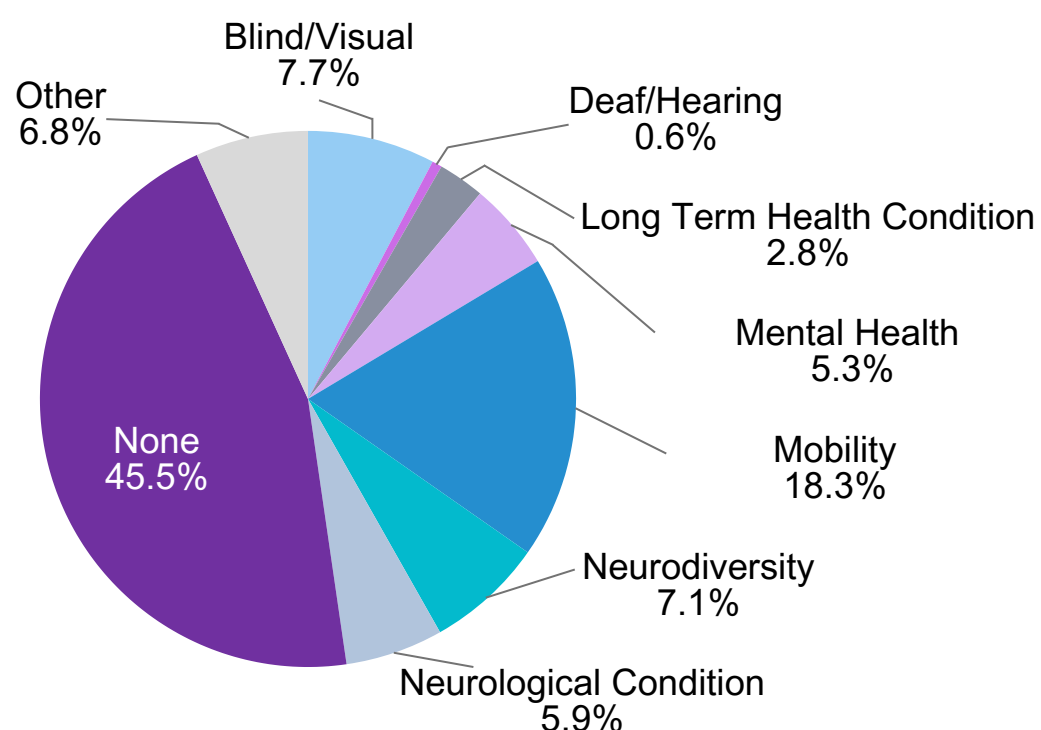
**Disabled and older people, those who are unemployed or socially marginalised are at disproportionate risk of social isolation and loneliness.**

These groups tend to experience mental and physical health **inequalities**. There is also an established relationship between the lack of physical activity, social isolation and loneliness for older people. Health inequalities for older and disabled people, and people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds have been further impacted by both the pandemic and the cost of living crisis. Access to cycling is also limited for these groups. The quantitative data indicated the RSBS had a **wide reach of engagement** across these groups, providing a much needed, free source of mobility, exercise and social contact.

## Passenger Age



## Disability Engagement





# Conclusions

## Dr Kay's report on the Ride Side-by-Side service reached the following conclusions



The service should be **funded on a consistent and ongoing basis** to ensure disadvantaged communities continue to experience the social participation and health **benefits of active travel**.



The service should **remain free and available on a referral basis**, including self-referral.



**Information and awareness** about the service and its health, wellbeing, and social participation impacts, should be **disseminated widely** across health, social and public services, to **open up funding sources**.



The service, or a similar version, **should be rolled out across a wider geographical area**. Including nationwide. To ensure **equitable access** to the benefits.



**Developing the service**, should include **special excursions** and supported **employment opportunities** for people from marginalised groups. This could also significantly impact on the widen the health, wellbeing, and social participation benefits.



### For more information

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