


A photograph of a suspension bridge, likely the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol, with a strong red color overlay. The bridge's cables and towers are visible, extending from the top left towards the right side of the frame. The background shows some trees and a hillside on the right.

car Free Bristol

Possible.
Inspiring climate action



Bristol was awarded the title of European Green Capital in 2015 in recognition of its thriving environmental sector, but **many people** who live in Bristol **question its status** as a green city due to its **poor transport system**.

Public transport is expensive, unreliable and does not effectively connect people to employment hubs. **Bus routes** are insufficient to meet the needs of people. **The rail network** does not cover the whole city. Many people don't feel safe **cycling** in Bristol. While some bike lanes in the city separate cyclists from other road users, there is still a lot to be done. People who **walk** in Bristol find that routes are cut off by major roads and pavements are crowded with parked cars.

In short, there's a lot that needs to be improved to help people in Bristol make **climate friendly travel choices**.

Area
110km²

Population
463,400

Average weekly earnings
£600

People who cycle to work
11.35%

Car ownership
1.04 per household

Air quality
10 days of poor air quality in 2019

People from minority ethnic backgrounds
16%

Social Rent population
18%

Somali population (second largest ethnic community)
8,300

Sources:
[State of Bristol](#), [Population of Bristol](#) & [Air Quality Annual Status](#)

At Possible, we want to see a zero carbon society, built by and for everyone, and we want to see this fast.

Our **Car Free Bristol** campaign brings to life a positive case for fewer cars on our city's streets.

We are working with communities currently blighted by traffic and air pollution to co-design changes to local streets, taking space away from cars and giving it back to people and nature.

We recognise that there are many people, including disabled people, who cannot get around without a car. Our aim of fewer cars on the road means more space for those who need to drive – and a better Bristol for everyone.

At the same time, we will encourage and inspire local decision makers to raise ambitions and accelerate change at the city level.



credit: Nathan Riley

Our **Car Free Bristol** campaign

There's so much we'd love to do in Bristol to help shift us away from car dominance.

Here's what we've got planned so far.

Parklets

If streets are lined with parked cars, well, that's just free car storage. What about some space for people to walk, cross the road, sit, rest, socialise?

Parklets are a great way of repurposing car parking spaces. They often host benches and greenery for people to enjoy, and they can lower air temperatures and increase biodiversity too.

We want parklets to become a widely recognised means of creating pleasant spaces for all.

Teaming up with others who share our passion for giving public space back to people, we will campaign for a simple process for residents to apply for temporary and permanent parklets – especially in neighbourhoods where people have the least access to green spaces.

We'll be developing resources to help residents through the process: from a photographic history of parklets, to developing a 'how-to' toolkit for individuals, to showcasing case studies.



credit: Brenda Puech

Who wants the traffic back?

Liveable Neighbourhoods use planters and bollards ('modal filters') to remove through traffic from neighbourhoods.

Residents can still drive onto their road, or receive deliveries, but shortcutting from one main road to the next is harder or impossible. This stops people unnecessarily driving through residential roads, making them quieter, safer, and easier to walk and cycle and play.

The recent implementation of Liveable Neighbourhoods under emergency Covid-19 measures has given rise to a debate about the right to public space and how we use it.

The benefits of these schemes are not immediately obvious to some residents. Change can be a challenge for many people, including those who currently own cars, but over time, people tend to adapt to any perceived inconvenience, and in the end don't want their local modal filters removed.

We plan to test this assumption by surveying local residents who have lived by modal filters that have been in place for a while, and ask, 'Who wants the traffic back?'. We will recruit volunteers to carry out the door knocking survey when it is safe to do so and we will share our findings.



Traffic counting

Although Bristol City Council carries out its own traffic monitoring, we want to gather data on neighbourhoods 'under the radar'.

Our focus will be areas which are not benefiting from existing monitoring, and where occupants are suffering high volumes of through-traffic.

We will support local residents and businesses to install traffic counters in their windows. The data we gather will help to make the case to the relevant local authorities for traffic calming measures where needed.

We will use this experiment and the data we gather to engage new people in climate action and provide an evidence base for street re-designs and changes in how we travel.

Cleaner air

Bath's Clean Air Zone (CAZ), launched on 15th March 2021, means that the most polluting commercial vehicles (lorries, taxis and buses) must pay a daily charge to drive into Bath's historic centre.

Bristol is planning to launch its CAZ in late 2021 which would mean that all drivers of the most polluting vehicles (including private cars) would have to pay a daily charge.

This is a great opportunity to support people in switching to greener transport modes, instead of trading in their existing vehicles for CAZ compliant ones.

We will be starting a conversation around the costs and benefits of different transport choices, and analysing the cost of car ownership.

We want to demonstrate that a car-free life is possible, and we want to support people through this journey. We plan to launch a car-free trial pledge, and we'll be supporting people with advice on how to do a car-free school run, daily commute, and weekly shop.

We will also raise awareness of other transport options such as car share clubs, examine the factors that prevent people from giving up their cars, and facilitate discussions on how these can be addressed.



credit: Kyle Hinkson



credit: Juan Carballo Diaz

Future filling stations

With the UK phasing out petrol and diesel cars, there's a great opportunity to do something amazing with the land currently occupied by petrol stations.

We will first audit Bristol's petrol stations and find out how much land they currently occupy.

We will support local groups to register petrol stations as Assets of Community Value (ACV), which is land or property, nominated as important by a local community group, that then has added protection from development. If an owner of an ACV wishes to sell, they must first inform the local authority. If a qualifying community group wants to buy the ACV, they can have more time (up to six months) to raise the money to purchase it.

We also want to run workshops with local communities to develop ideas for what these petrol stations can be – perhaps a community garden or a space for young people.

Getting people talking

Not talking about the problem with mass private car ownership makes it easier for us all to ignore.

This is why we want to get people talking; sharing their stories and experiences of getting around our city – the good and the bad!

We’d love to showcase these stories in a creative way with local art groups and encourage people to change how they talk, and think, about travel.

Key dates

Key dates in the calendar will provide a focus for our activities, often working in partnership with other stakeholder organisations across Bristol.

Clean Air Day	17 June 2021
Climate Coalition Festival	18–26 September 2021
Car Free Day	22 September 2021
UN climate talks	1–12 November 2021

We’d love to hear your ideas about how we can work together on these events and maximise collaboration.

The **problem with** **cars** in Bristol

We all want to live in a neighbourhood where we can breathe clean air, walk around safely and feel connected to our community.

But Bristol is congested with traffic, choked by fumes and is often dangerous for people who walk and cycle. This affects all Bristolians, but older people, disabled people, children and communities where people of colour, and poor people live are hit the hardest.

1. The climate emergency

To tackle climate change, we need to significantly reduce the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) pumped into the atmosphere each day.

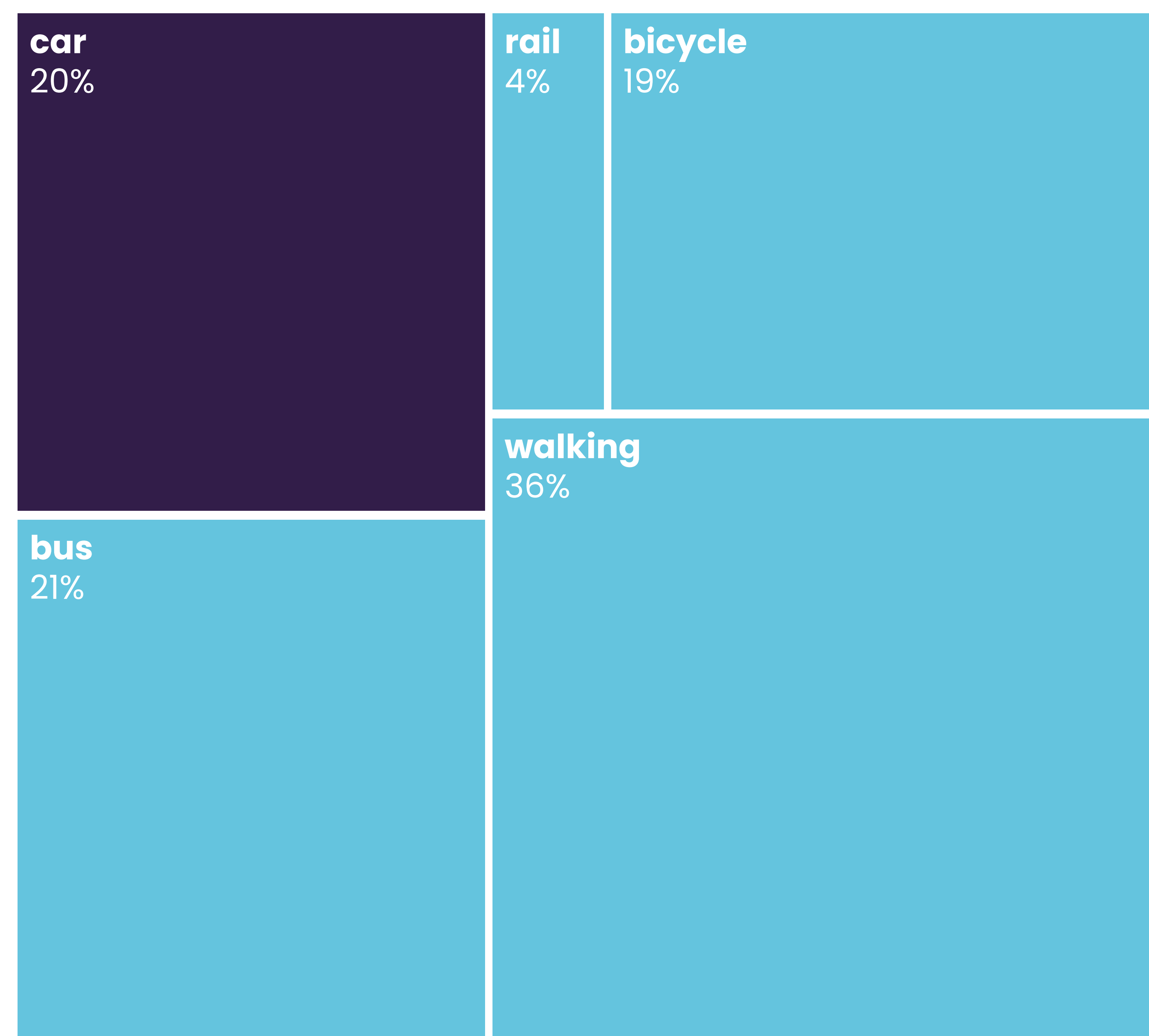
Right now, transport emissions account for around 32% of Bristol's emissions, and private cars are the biggest single source of transport emissions.

Bristol has set an ambitious target of being carbon neutral by 2030, but to meet it, we must reduce our emissions by 88%.

The Cabot Institute recommends reducing car journeys from 55% (present) to 20% of all commuting journeys (see right) to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

To achieve these targets, Bristol needs to make space for low carbon modes of transport – and that means prioritising road space away from cars.

Cabot Institute Modal share estimations for Net Zero 2030



Data: Cabot Institute



Credit: Lucian Alexe

2. Collisions

With 1.3 million people killed each year globally, cars have been termed the world's "deadliest animal".

In 2018, over 1,132 Bristolians were recorded as having been injured in road collisions, including 7 fatalities. This was 107 more than the previous year – an increase of 10%.

Almost all residential roads in Bristol, including main roads that go through residential areas are 20mph, on the basis that this reduces the number and severity of road collisions, saves lives, and take pressure off the NHS.

To further combat road danger, we need motor traffic reduction measures, as well as support for walking, cycling and scooting.

Fewer cars means fewer collisions, and more space for pedestrians to move, play and socialise safely.

3. Toxic air

Motor traffic is a major contributor to air pollution, producing harmful nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and non-exhaust emissions (particles from brake, tyre and road surface wear, known as Particulate Matter, PM2.5 or PM10). These pollutants have both direct and indirect effects on the environment and our own physical and mental health. According to the [World Health Organisation](#), air pollution-related deaths are most closely linked to PM2.5 emissions.

In Bristol, toxic air causes an estimated 300 early deaths in Bristol annually. As of 2019, there were 28 areas in Bristol which have been listed as having illegal levels of air pollution.

In a landmark verdict in January 2021, a coroner ruled that a nine year old child, Ella Kissi-Debrah, died from illegal levels of air pollution – the main source being traffic emissions. Ella, who had severe asthma, lived within 30 metres of London's infamous South Circular Road. The judge is expected to make recommendations for legislation to prevent future deaths.

In March 2021, the UK was found guilty by the European Court of Justice of “systematically and persistently” breaching air pollution limits.



credit: Peter Albanese

4. Noise pollution

Traffic is a big contributor to noise pollution in Bristol – especially for those who live on or near major roads, for whom the exposure to traffic noise is constant.

Noise pollution contributes to an increase in heart and circulatory problems, sleep disturbance, chronic annoyance, physiological effects, mental health effects, hearing impairment, reduced performance and communication and learning effects.

The World Health Organisation recognises environmental noise as the second largest environmental health risk in Western Europe, behind air quality.

5. Inactivity crisis

Bristol is facing an inactivity crisis. Over decades, machines, cars and technology have gradually taken over many of the tasks that used to require physical effort. Almost without realising it, we have engineered physical activity out of our daily lives.

The consequences of this shift to more sedentary lifestyles are severe. Lack of physical activity is now one of the biggest threats to our health, increasing the risk of developing a range of chronic diseases including diabetes, dementia, depression, heart disease and cancer.

We urgently need to design physical activity back into our everyday lives. Walking more, cycling more, using public transport more, are the easiest and most affordable ways for many of us to get more active and live healthier lives.



credit: Rob Bryher

6. Public space

The Covid-19 lockdowns, and the closure of parks and urban green spaces, highlighted how access to outdoor space is a luxury denied to many people, particularly those from low income households living in tower blocks.

The average car sits unused for 95% of the time. In 2011 there were over 190,000 cars and vans in Bristol. This is over 25,000 more vehicles in the city than there had been just ten years previously – and the number continues to rise.

Bristol has 15 million square metres of accessible green space and by comparison cars take up roughly 2 million square metres of space. Imagine if we could use that space for people to meet, play, store their bikes securely or simply sit and read a book.

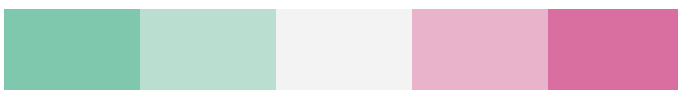
7. Inequality and social justice

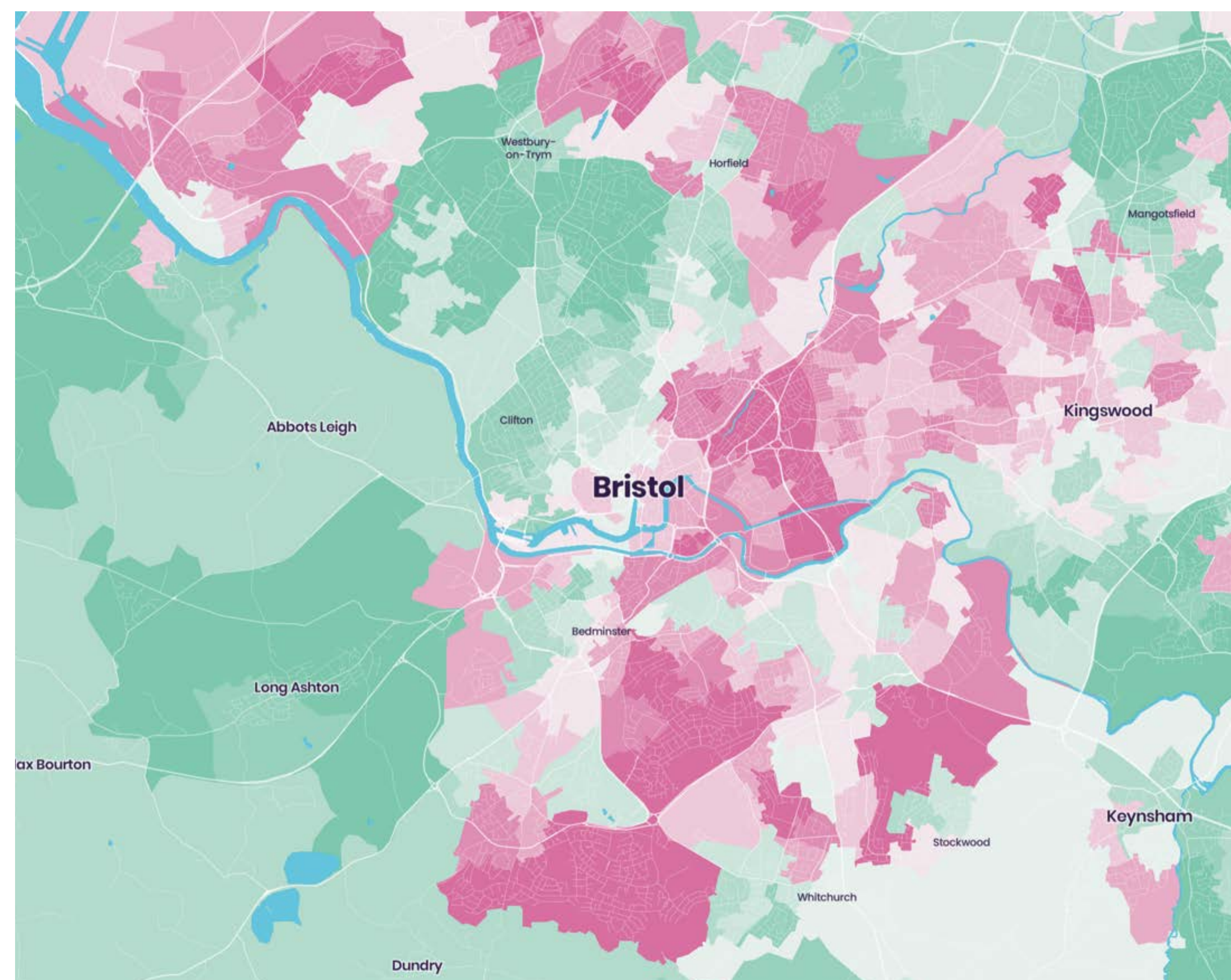
Car dominance is also a matter of social justice. The most deprived areas of our cities have the lowest car ownership rates, yet it is these people who suffer the most from the toxic air, noise, stress, congestion and traffic danger from other people driving through their streets.

The three most deprived wards in Bristol are all in the top seven wards for lowest car ownership. Children in the most deprived areas are six times more likely to be injured in motor traffic collisions than those in the least deprived areas.

Black, Asian and other ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected by air pollution from motor traffic. A large proportion of the workforce of taxi drivers and bus drivers are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and are thus consistently exposed to vehicle fumes for long hours.

UK index of multiple deprivation, 2019

Least Deprived  Most Deprived



Data: Consumer Data Research Centre © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap

8. Congestion

Bristol is the sixth most congested city in the UK. It was not designed to accommodate the vast number of vehicles it currently endures.

Over 20,000 people commute into Bristol each day by car or van. Avoidable congestion affects the speed and efficiency of emergency services, buses and taxis. The spillover into residential streets (shortcutting) causes frustration and aggression towards other drivers and road users.

More than 3 in 4 Bristolians feel that traffic congestion is a problem in their area. This congestion is unsustainable.

9. Social isolation

A major threat to our quality of life in Bristol is the impact of high motor vehicle traffic on neighbourhood social interaction.

Where traffic volumes are high, residents report limited social contact with people on the other side of the road. They have fewer friends and acquaintances than on lower traffic streets. The extent of people's "home territories" also diminishes as motor traffic increases and limits the mobility of people walking and cycling.

People often perceive more road danger in their neighbourhood as a result of traffic conditions on their street, and this affects the degree of independence granted to children.

This all highlights the need to reclaim urban residential neighbourhoods from motor traffic, and that political will is required to make this happen.



credit: Andrew Roberts

Are electric vehicles the solution?

All vehicles – even electric and hydrogen ones – produce non-exhaust emissions (particles from brake, tyre and road surface wear, known as Particulate Matter or PM2.5 or PM10).

These can enter all major organs of the body, not just the lungs, heart, and brain, but also the placenta, affecting life chances of unborn children.

Electric vehicles still cause congestion and road danger, they do nothing to encourage space or transport equity, and they compound the inactivity crisis and social isolation in our communities.

So, no – the answer isn't just newer cars, but fewer cars.

Moving away from car dependency

This campaign brings to life a positive vision for major cities to move away from mass private car ownership – we want to take space away from cars and give it back to people and nature.

Let's be clear, our vision of a car-free city is one free from the dangers caused by mass private car ownership. That's not the same as a city with no cars at all. We recognise there are many people, including disabled people, who cannot get around without a car, and our campaign to reduce the number of cars in cities will make their lives easier too.

Clean Air Zone

Bristol is planning to launch its Clean Air Zone in late 2021 which would mean that all drivers of the most polluting vehicles (including private cars) would have to pay a daily charge.

Residents' Parking Schemes

Parking controls have been progressively introduced since 2007 within the city centre and, from 2013, into residential neighbourhoods. Since 2016, no further schemes have been introduced.

The Cabinet member for Transport has argued that Residents' Parking Schemes *"do little to tackle pollution, do nothing to improve public realm, do nothing to enhance active or public travel, and risk entrenching car ownership within Bristol"*. We want to see parking controls introduced where they are wanted by residents.

Pavement parking

The UK Government consulted on three options for tackling pavement parking in autumn 2020. Once the outcome is known, we will assess how or whether to campaign for more enforcement on vehicles parking over pedestrian footways.

Parklets

Residential streets can be transformed by changing parking spaces into communal spaced to meet, play, relax and store bikes (e.g. parklets, libraries, cycle storage, other greenery, etc.) There is currently no process for people to do this in Bristol and we want to change this.

Electric Vehicle (EV) charging network

There are currently 99 EV charging points in Bristol, although not all are publicly accessible.

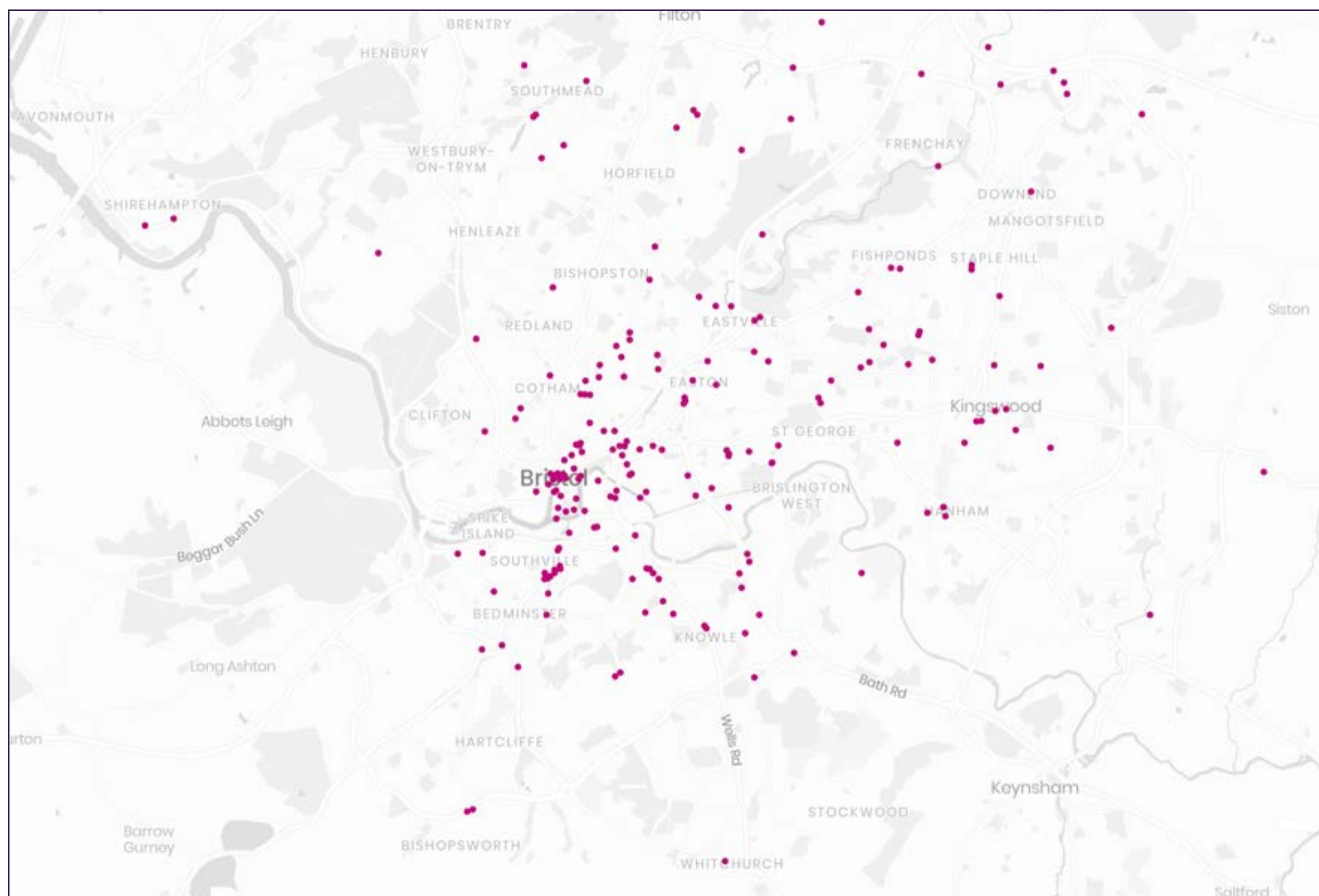
School Streets

School Streets restrict motor traffic at school opening and closing times. They help improve road safety and air quality, and increase the number of children who walk or cycle to school.

Bristol's first school streets were introduced in 2020. Our report found that about half of Bristol's schools may be suitable for a School Street.

Liveable neighbourhoods

This partial map of modal filters shows numerous filters that allow walking and cycling but limit motor traffic. Bristol City Council is consulting on six through-traffic closure schemes, with a further six schemes being proposed. Possible will work with the the Liveable Neighbourhoods campaign to support these measures and call for more.



Data: Joe Dunckley © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap

Car Club parking bays

There are 112 car club parking bays in Bristol, but not all of these have charging points. This does mean Bristol is relatively well-served by car club vehicles, even if more can be done. Further campaigning could focus on investment in charging infrastructure for all of these spaces, one-way trips between parking bays, and identification and implementation of new car club parking bays.

Walking and cycling

Covid-19 has led to a massive increase in walking and cycling, but more needs to be done to ensure greater equity so that Bristolians from all communities can participate. The Government announced funding for walking and cycling in 2020. The Bristol Cycling Campaign is monitoring the progression of these schemes.

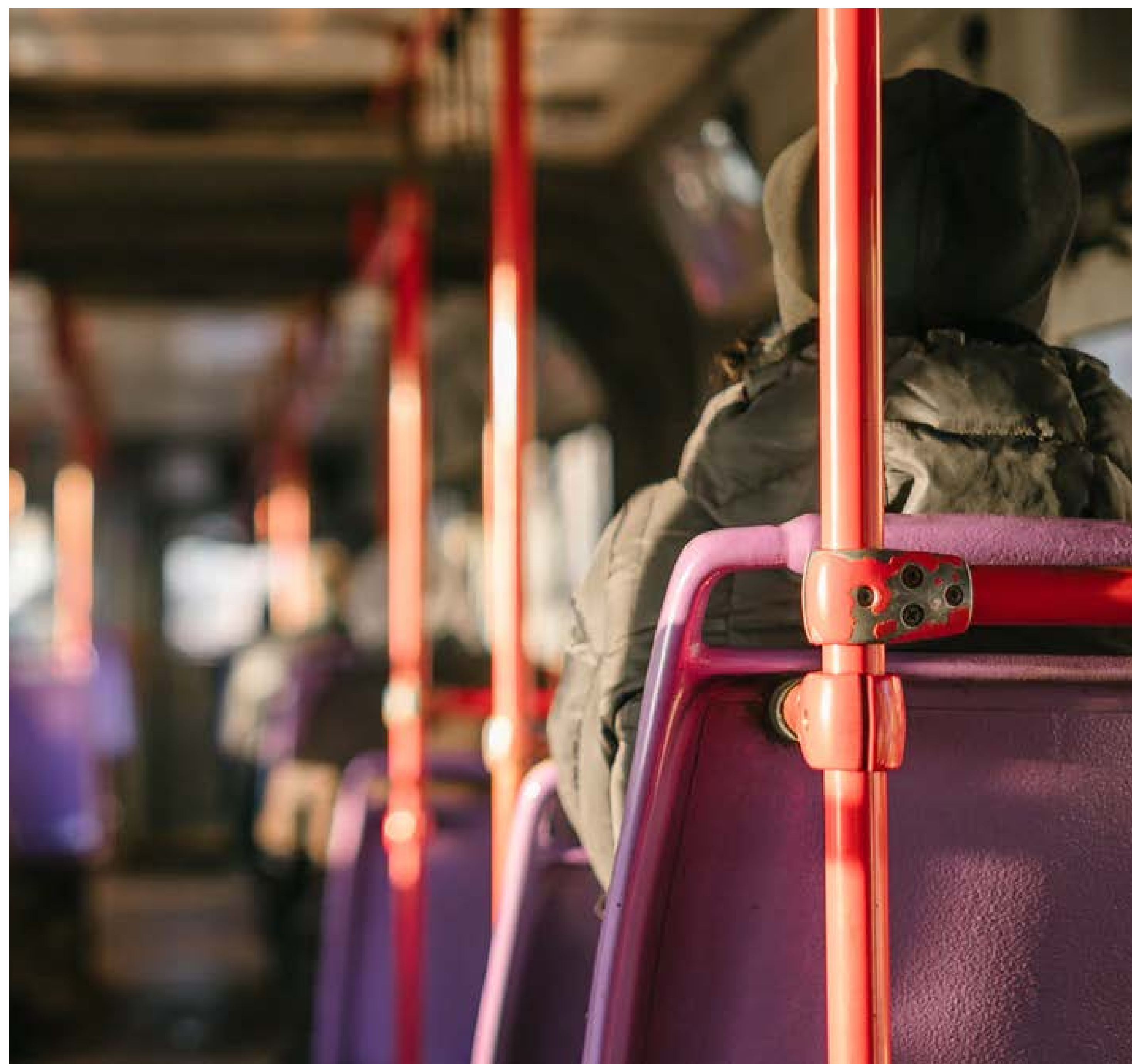
E-scooter trials

In Bristol since the beginning of the 12-month trial in October 2020, there have been more than 50,000 rides taken by more than 14,000 unique riders with more than 127,000km travelled. In January 2021 it was announced that the operation area will be expanded.

Public Transport

The West of England Combined Authority can negotiate new funding deals with the UK Government. Bristol is still on its first funding deal, whereas Manchester has already secured six deals. Further public transport investment is needed and this could be an area for transport campaigners to focus on ahead of the election in May 2021.

The community union Acorn have been running a campaign to bring buses back into public ownership that has received the support of over 1000 people. Possible will support this campaign and continue to work in partnership with groups such as the Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance ahead of the May elections.



credit: Ant Rozetsky



credit: RF_._studio

Collaboration

We want to work with residents, businesses, individuals, campaigners, community groups and other organisations to drive forward the car free vision and re-imagine Bristol as a place designed around people, rather than cars.

We are also keen to work in partnership with other organisations already doing fantastic work in this area, and add value to existing initiatives.

We particularly want to engage with groups and individuals who are most affected by the harms of cars, to amplify their voices and co-design solutions. We want to work with disabled people's organisations, communities of colour, schools, and faith groups as well as local authorities.

If you like the sound of this and want to help us work towards the vision of a Car Free Bristol, we'd love to hear from you!

Find Out More

Rob Bryher, Car Free Bristol campaigner
rob.bryher@wearepossible.org

www.wearepossible.org/carfreecities

