MANCHESTER UNPAVED

Creating space in the city by turning grey to green

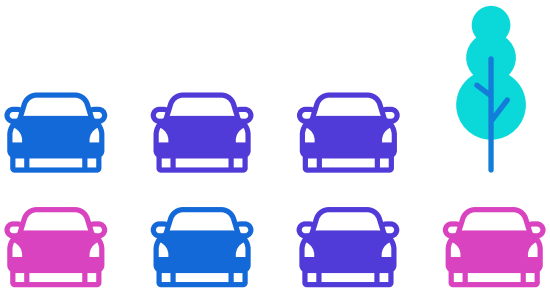
Manchester has ambitious climate goals that it is not on track to meet, and has some of the most toxic air in the country. Polluting vehicles are a huge contributing factor to both problems, yet we continue to allow the city centre to be dominated by cars rather than making space for the things that we really need.

Reallocating car parking can unlock the city's potential

Parking is a key policy lever that local councils can control in order to contribute towards improving air quality, reducing carbon emissions and creating spaces that are healthier, greener and more pleasant for residents and visitors to spend time in.

Car parking should be reviewed and reallocated to create

- **Space to breathe:** convert off-street car parks to community green space, and convert on-street spaces to trees and seating.
- **Space to move:** remove kerbside parking to create dedicated bus and cycle lanes, and use on-street car parking bays for cycle hangars or other types of bike storage.
- **Space to innovate:** use current car parking space to make our transport system fit for the future. The space for electric vehicle charging points and micro mobility parking will increase hugely.[1,i] It's essential that these are not placed on the pavement where they cause accessibility issues, but on space reclaimed from road space or parking.



IN THE CITY CENTRE, WE CURRENTLY PRIORITISE SPACE FOR CARS OVER GREEN SPACE BY A RATIO OF 7:1

"Effective modal shift requires a change in the way we view urban space predominantly used for parking"

WSP report for the Climate Change Committee[2]

i According to the MCC EV charging strategy, Manchester will need an additional 2098 public chargers by 2030.

Manchester's problem

Decades of car-centric design in cities has resulted in issues relating to congestion, air pollution, high transport emissions and lack of space for alternative modes of transport. Since space in cities is limited, authorities must be more proactive about how space is used if they are to achieve ambitions related to healthy urban environments.

Our research into space allocation in Manchester shows that the issues are particularly pronounced here. Cars dominate through both roadspace and parking space, hindering progress towards the city's ambitions on climate, transport and greenery.

1. Dominance of cars

- In the city centre approximately 28% of space is already taken up by roads, and an additional 8% by car parking. This compares to less than 5% of the city that is green space. Between 2013 and 2023, there was a growth of over 31%[3] of the total number of licensed cars in Greater Manchester (GM). If that trend continues over the next decade, there will be an additional 437,030 cars on the road in GM. We would need the space equivalent to around 190 Mayfield Parks to park them all[ii]. Considering that cars are also increasing in size, there is simply not enough space in the city to accommodate so many cars whilst also creating the greener and fairer city region that we need.

- There are approximately 30,000 car parking spaces in the city. That's more than 10 times the number of available bike parking spaces, despite Manchester's goal to have 90% of all trips to the city centre in the morning peak to be made by active travel or on public transport before 2040.[4]

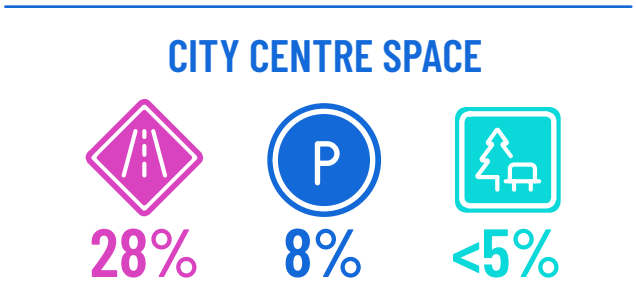
- Three out of four people in Greater Manchester think that their street is dominated by parked or moving vehicles.[5]

2. The climate and air quality challenge

- The 2022 update to Manchester's climate change framework noted that "Urgent action is needed to reduce direct emissions from our buildings and ground transport (...) if Manchester is to stay within its carbon budget" and that "decisive action is needed to assess the city's vulnerability to climate change"[6] noting that changes to infrastructure will be essential to make Manchester more resilient to the changing climate.

- Ground transport accounts for 24% of Manchester's direct emissions.[7]

- Manchester has some of the most polluted air in the UK. Levels of nitrogen dioxide are reported higher here than anywhere else in the country, and well over the UK legal limit.[8]



3. Lack of space for alternatives

- As part of the public consultation on the Tree and Woodland Action Plan, 94% of respondents reported that it is extremely important to them to have trees as part of the urban environment[9]. Currently, average tree canopy cover in the city centre is 3.68%[10], whereas the Urban Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee Network advised that 20% tree canopy cover is a good aspiration for towns and cities.[11]

- 83% of Greater Manchester residents would find more parks or green spaces close to home useful in helping them to walk or wheel more.[12]

- The lack of suitable cycling infrastructure and furniture – particularly secure bicycle storage and lighting – is a key barrier to people taking up cycling, and yet there is a lack of cycle storage both at destinations in the city and secure storage for people near to their homes. On-street cycle storage is a quick and relatively cheap way to make cycling more accessible for more people.

ii Mayfield park is 6.5 acres. The average car parking space in the UK is 11.52m2.

Policy Recommendations

In light of the evidence about current car dominance, and the challenges that Manchester faces in both carbon emissions and air quality, rethinking the way we use limited space is essential. We ask that the following steps are quickly undertaken in order to create a more balanced approach to parking in the city centre and beyond.

- **Produce a kerbside strategy** looking at how kerbside space is currently used, set targets to reduce the dominance of vehicles on the kerbside and instead convert it to more sustainable uses, such as bus lanes, cycle lanes, greenery and space for people.
- **Introduce a sustainable parking policy** that ensures parking tariffs, capacity and enforcement contribute to climate targets and health outcomes.
- **Set a target and action plan to increase the amount of greenspace in the city centre** by reallocating parking to accessible greenspace.
- **Set a target and action plan to reallocate 25% of kerbside parking across the borough** to more sustainable uses, such as active travel or public transport infrastructure, EV charging points or community space.
- **Increase the cost of parking**, particularly for the most polluting vehicles. In Bath, for example, parking charges in all council-run car parks are based on emissions or engine size, with more polluting vehicles paying more. In Paris, charges are higher based on weight, with diesel, petrol and hybrid cars above 1.6 tonnes, and all electric cars above 2 tonnes paying the higher fee.

A note on methodology for land use stats

The statistics on green space, car parking and road space have been collated from our research using a combination of OpenStreetMap and free data layers available from Ordnance Survey.

You can see the data included in the following maps:

- Greenspace data
- Road length data (with road areas calculated using an average width for each road type)
- Car Parking data, with spaces tagged as streetside by OpenStreetMap removed, but with roadside parking from the Council's website included. Number of spaces was calculated by dividing the area used for car parking by the average UK parking bay size (11.52m2). This suggests approximately 27,791 spaces, but undercounts those in multi storey car parks, of which there are approximately 7000 spaces in the city. (According to NCP data for city centre spaces.)
- Bike parking data for the city centre is taken from OpenStreetMap. For bike parking features that were mapped but missing a capacity count, we took the average capacity for that type of parking across GM to add to the mapped total. So our total is based on a count of 1899, plus an estimated additional spaces of 482.
- Tree canopy coverage average for the city was calculated using data from Friends of the Earth, taking an average of the LSOAs within the city centre.

References

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12 Sustrans (March 2024), Greater Manchester Walking and Cycling Index 2023, retrieved August 29th from https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/13267/greater-manchester-walking-and-cycling-index-2023.pdf

About the Clean Cities Campaign

Clean Cities is a European coalition of organisations hosted by Transport & Environment. We build public support for cities to shift from polluting cars to active, shared and electric mobility.

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