



The Pilot Cities Project

**Short summary of report 2026
about recycling and transport**

Introduction

The Pilot Cities Project was a two-year research initiative that ran from 2024 to 2026 and received funding from Climate-KIC under the NetZeroCities programme. The project examined residents' habits and behaviours related to transportation and waste management, as well as the barriers that may stand in the way of change. This summary presents the main findings of the research conducted by the University of Iceland. It is a shortened version of a more comprehensive research report.

RECYCLING

Most people in the 2025 survey sample (over 90%) recycle the main mandatory waste types – plastic, paper, food waste. In addition, over 97% recycle beverage containers, and over 60% recycle metal, glass, textiles, batteries, and electronics. In the 2026 survey sample, the habits were similar to the previous year. Between the surveys, a few special categories were added explicitly, and it is now clearer that over half of the respondents also recycle chemicals, medicine, furniture and construction waste (Figure 1).

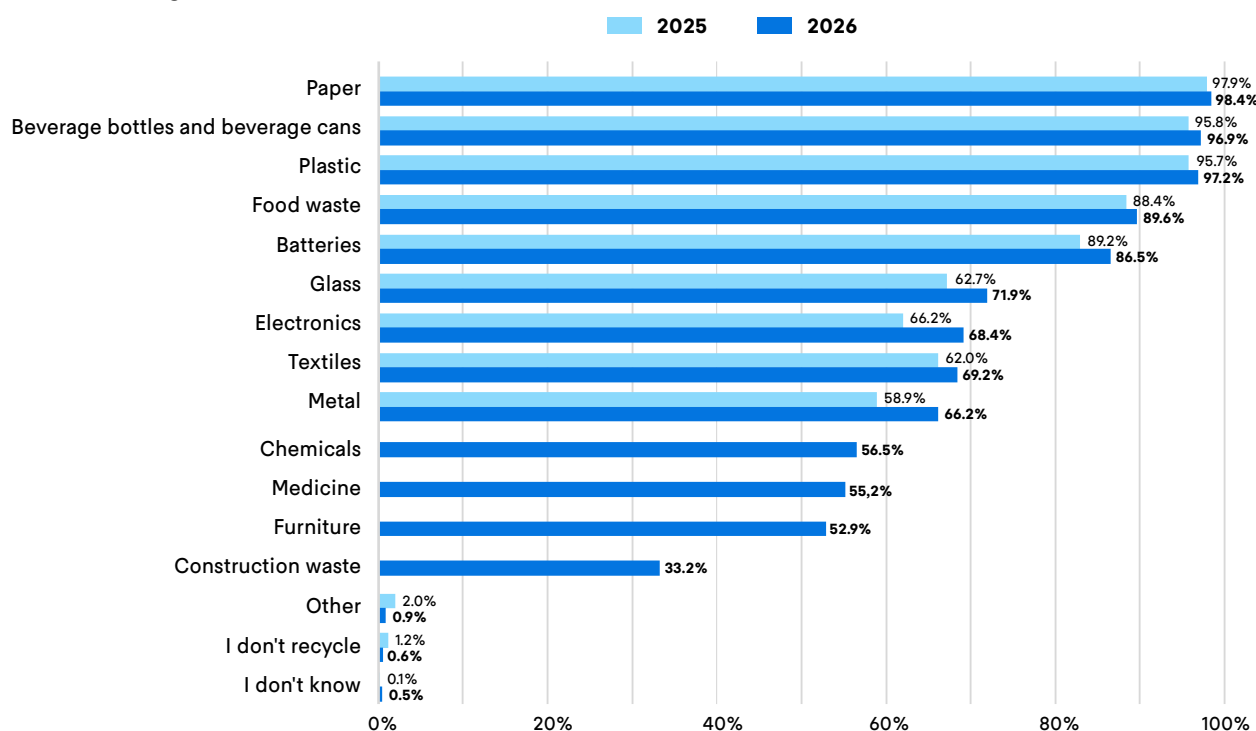


Figure 1. Recycling habits in 2025 (1782 responses) and 2026 (1081 responses). Respondents were asked what kind of waste they sort at home for recycling and were asked to choose all categories they sort.



Recycling can be categorized into four types (confirmed by factor analysis): daily recyclables (paper, plastic, food waste), glass and metal, deposit-based recyclables (beverage bottles and cans), and special categories (electronic, batteries, medicine, furniture, etc.). To participate in recycling beyond daily recyclables, people often need to visit designated stations, but lack of information and infrequent emptying of neighbourhood bins may hinder participation. Also, efficiency is emphasized. If recycling stations are not on the regular route for people, they are less likely to participate in additional recycling practices.

"The recycling stations are in opposite directions from my home, neither on the way to work. And I haven't been able to get into the habit of taking three glass jars on my way to work. I would really love to be that kind of person. Or that someone in the household was like that, but they're not. So maybe I'm missing that, yes, I always want to do better," G4I3F

For daily household sorting, socio-demographic background or other factors had no influence, as the model showed low explanatory power, which suggests that daily recyclables have become a normal part of society due to their mandatory nature and availability of necessary bins by the home. Recycling of additional items is strongly influenced by convenience, accessibility of recycling infrastructure, and available space, with participants relying on multiple systems such as local stations, donation centres, and retail drop-off points. Overall, recycling is both a normalized practice and a value-driven activity, shaped by infrastructure, personal beliefs, and past experiences abroad.

"I grew up with it. Like, I don't know, my parents are recyclers. So for me, it was always just the normal thing to do ... [] ... it's the habit, I guess" G7I3F

Recycling habits among Reykjavík residents mainly stem from available infrastructure rather than demographic or attitudinal factors. Those who recycle one category of waste are significantly more likely to recycle others. Strong associations between sorting similar materials like glass and metal, or electronics and batteries, point to the role of shared disposal methods. Meanwhile, weaker links between, for example, electronics and textiles highlight the need for tailored outreach and joining dedicated facilities.

Participants are generally satisfied with their own efforts and recycling behaviour but exhibit dissatisfaction with the overall system, stating that it limits their ability to recycle effectively and efficiently. Satisfaction comes from regular recycling within a built routine and a sense of responsibility for the environment and the waste they produce. Some even go as far as expressing pride in their recycling habits, while others express annoyance in those who do not do their part.

"I've participated in this with full commitment and it's just very necessary. Well, compared to the people who work around me, I'm very diligent and I'm not bragging about it around those people. But I just sort everything I possibly can." G2I3M

Participants also mention the excess waste they produce and wish there were plastic-free options available in stores. Responsibility should be shifted from the consumer to the producer or retailer in this regard.

"It needs to be easier and cheaper to, you know, go packaging-free." G3I1F

"It's a systemic problem with where this packaging is coming into the house anyway. It's coming from the shops." G8I4F

In addition to information about recycling habits, with the help of the surveys, areas that need attention were pinpointed. For example, in the 2026 survey, residents were able to give feedback on where there are bin types missing or which locations need a new bin or sorting station in the neighbourhood. Information like this is highly valuable for the city to be able to plan recycling facilities (Figure 2).

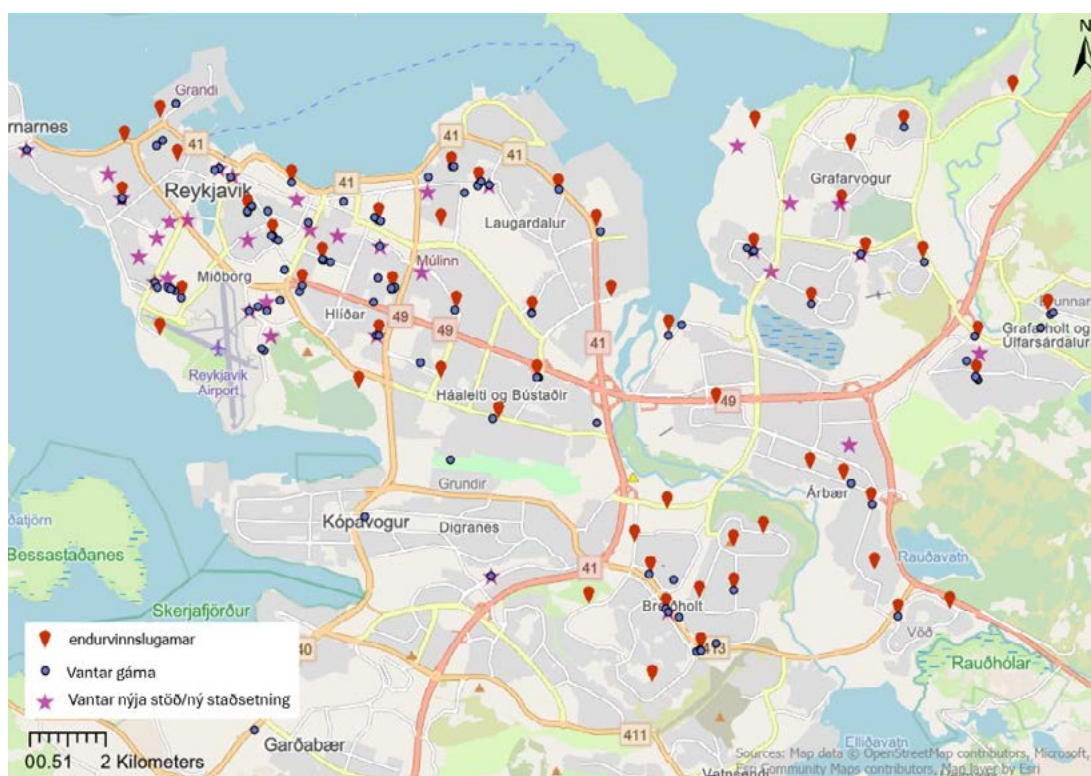


Figure 2. Resident input on missing bin types (blue dot), need for a new bin or station (purple star), compared with existing recycling stations (red marker).

TRANSPORT

Across the 2025 and 2026 surveys, the private car remained the dominant mode of transport in the Capital Region. In 2025, cars accounted for more than half of weekly trips, including among respondents living less than 4 km from their workplace. Similarly, in 2026, respondents reported an average of 48% of weekly trips as a car driver and a further 11% as a car passenger. Public transport use remained relatively low, accounting for less than 30% of weekly trips in 2025 and around 10% of trips on average in 2026. Cycling represented less than 10% of trips in 2025 and approximately 5% in 2026, while walking accounted for less than 10% of journeys outside downtown Reykjavík in 2025 and around 20% of trips overall in 2026.

Car ownership was high in 2025, with 79% of respondents owning a car and a further 9% having access to one. 60% of respondents uses the car daily and 33% several times per week. In both surveys, the car was the most common mode used for commuting to work. However, preferences did not entirely align with current travel behaviour. In 2025, about a third of respondents who currently drive to work would like to switch to alternative modes of transport. Similarly, in 2026, about a third wanted to switch away from the car. Most of those interested in switching would like to use public transport (38%), followed by e-mobility (16%) and walking (11%). Figure 3 summarizes the transport modes that people who want to switch would prefer for their work commutes.

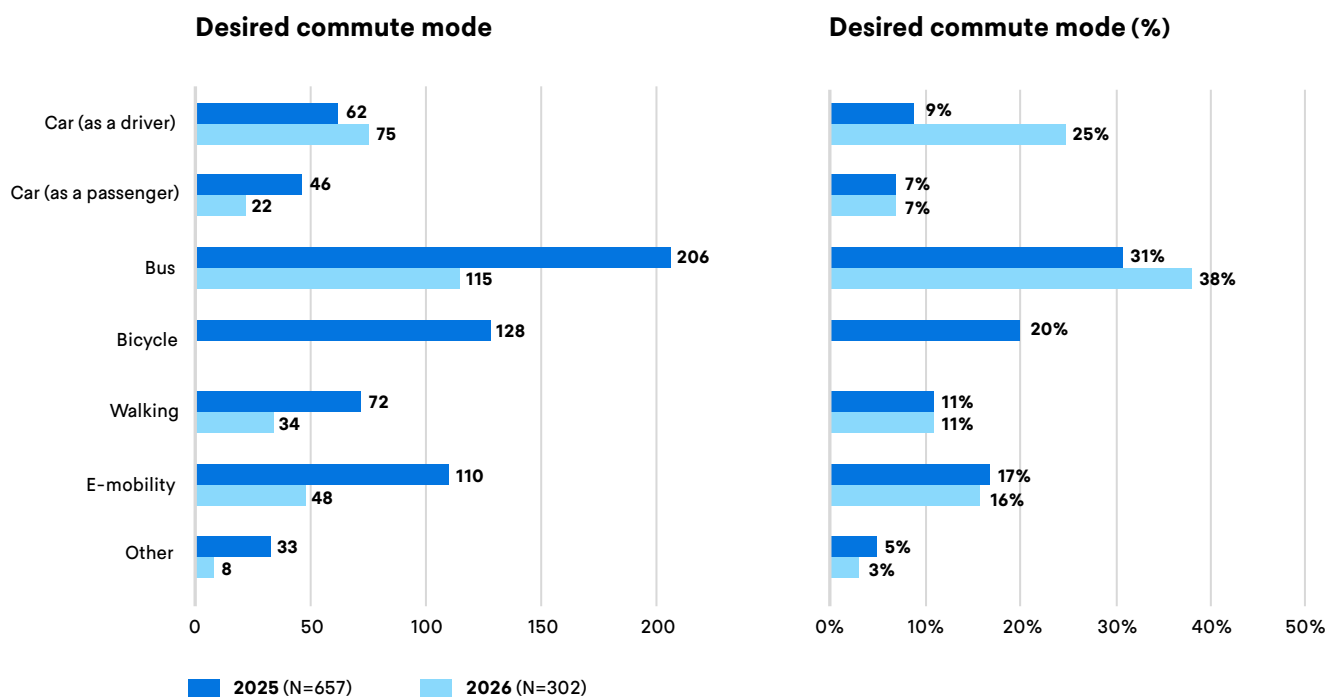


Figure 3. Participants preferred travel mode.

98% of the respondents live close enough to take a sustainable transportation mode to work (Figure 4), highlighting a great potential to use a sustainable mode of transportation to commute to work or school. While current travel patterns remain dominated by private car use, respondents' desired travel modes closely align with the sustainable transportation targets outlined in the Reykjavík Master Plan. The largest share of respondents who wished to change modes indicated a preference for switching to public transportation, followed by biking and e-mobility.

Distances from home to work

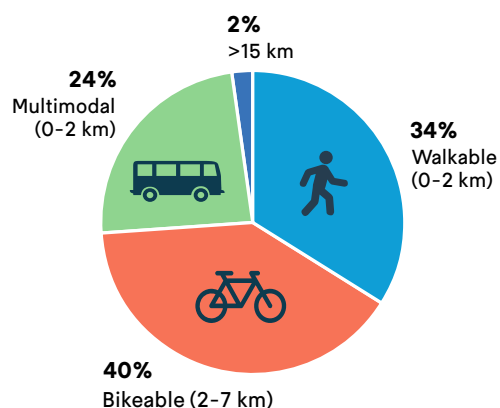


Figure 4: Percent of respondents living within walkable, bikeable, multimodal, or further distances from their home location to workplace.

Higher age, Icelandic citizenship, having children, longer travel distances, and perceiving schedule changes negatively were associated with a greater weekly use of the car. In contrast, stronger climate concern, perceiving public transport schedule changes positively, and higher satisfaction with public transport were associated with lower car use levels. Interestingly, no sociodemographic variable was significant predicting lower car use, hinting that this choice only comes down to personal attitudes.

During commutes, trip chaining is common and other locations tend to be visited on the way to or from work. The most commonly visited locations (number of respondents indicated in brackets) include grocery shopping (495), gym or pool (301), social locations (266), locations related to their children (208), other types of shopping (180) and healthcare (163).

In summary, the main barriers experienced are structural, rather than related to personal biases. Convenience, reliability, and cost are practical everyday considerations in mobility planning and are therefore a top priority for citizens, and hence should also be a top priority for the city. It is important to note that over 60% of respondents used a car for work commutes, but a third of them show willingness to switch modes, which matches well with the city's targets. Modal switch is somewhat hindered by the availability of free parking at work locations, which encourages car use. For many, daily errands still require a car, even if work commutes are done without one. In addition, families with children are more inclined to feel that they need a car Figure 5, shows main barriers to switch their main mode of transport to bus and active transport.

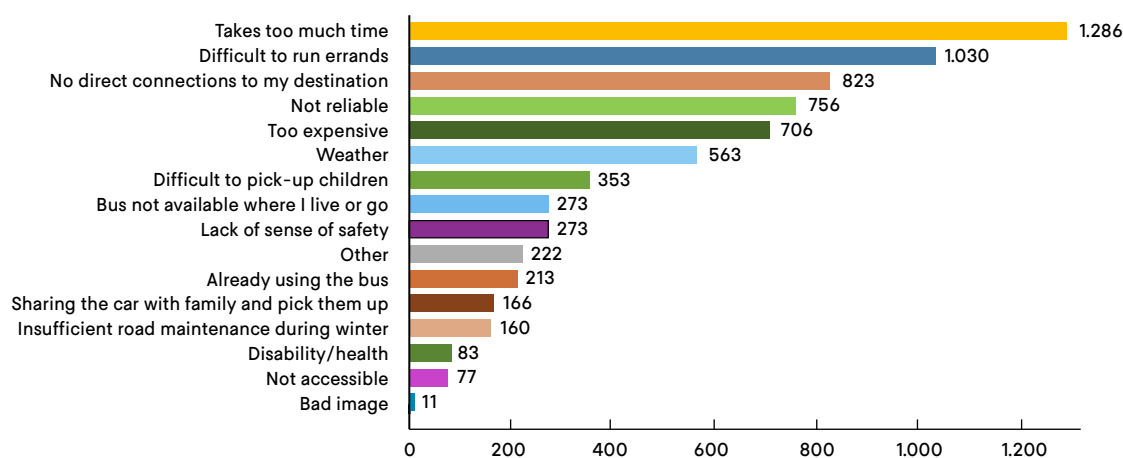
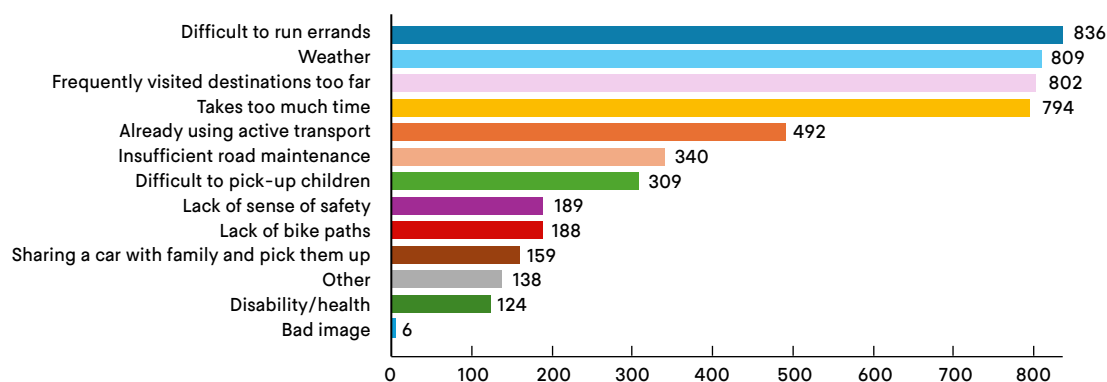
(a) Barriers to switching to public transport (bus)**(b) Barriers to switching to active transport**

Figure 5. Main barriers to changing to (a) public transport) and (b) to active transport as main mode of transportation (survey 2025).

Although public transport frequency increased in autumn 2025, the infrastructure has not changed and still heavily favours the private car. As such, the current system does not compete with the car in any way. Even when people are willing to change, the alternatives are currently not practical and feasible enough.

"I think I was spending two hours a day getting between places that took half an hour combined by car. I just, I don't have two hours a day to just hang around on a bus." G6I6M

"It's just that we're forced to have a car because we have children in preschool. We had children in preschools in two different districts, you see, because the youngest didn't get priority placement in Breiðholt. So, of course, I applied in Árbær and got a spot for him there, so I had to drive between them. And that was an extra 40 minutes just for pick-ups and drop-offs and driving between them in traffic. So we were forced to have a car, but I would have preferred to just use the bus. It just doesn't work when you have kids in school, you see." G5I6F

"I would probably just get rid of the car today. If the bus were cheaper. I think it should be half the price." G4I1F

"I want the freedom to be able to go out, get where I want to go, right at that moment, not have to, yes, you know, wade through these snowdrifts and, and then wait for a bus that might not even come." G6I5M

When mapping respondents' positive and negative mobility experiences, several areas stand out, either as appreciated, depreciated, or associated with both types of experiences. Regarding places linked to positive mobility experiences, the city centre, separated active modes paths (e.g. in Elliðaárdalur), green areas and parks (e.g. Klambartún), and major bus hubs such as Háskóli Íslands and Lækjartorg generally stand out. The city centre was particularly appreciated among the sample for the opportunities for social interaction and access to services it provides. It was also valued for its speed limitations that contribute to smoothen car traffic, its good public transport accessibility, connectivity and frequency, and its overall multi-modal aspect. Respondents highlighted the city centre's urban environment quality and the feeling of safety it provides, especially for active modes users, thanks to its pedestrian streets, clear sidewalks, and visible crosswalks, for instance.

Regarding places linked to negative experiences of mobility, Skeifan emerged as the most frequently depreciated area, being mentioned by respondents regardless of their primary mode of transport. Other locations commonly associated with negative perceptions include the district of Grandi, the fraction of Hringbraut, as well as several busy road segments and intersections. Skeifan and Grandi are two historically car-oriented districts, characterised by sprawled retail blocks with large parking lots, wide roadways, and complex intersections. Respondents criticised car-centric places for focusing on cars users at the expense of safety, comfort, and convenience for active modes and public transport users.

Several major roads and intersections were associated with negative mobility experiences. High-speed roads, such as Sæbraut/Reykjanesbraut and Miklabraut/Vesturlandsvegur, were criticised for their heavy traffic flows, which contribute to congestion and reduced connectivity between neighbourhoods. Respondents also mentioned the limited presence of buffering elements such as trees and vegetation along these roads, the lack of infrastructure dedicated to active mobility or public transport, and the complexity of intersections and access points. Some respondents also reported dangerous driving behaviours, including excessive speeds and limited consideration for pedestrians and cyclists, reinforcing perceptions of a lack of safety and unpleasant environments.