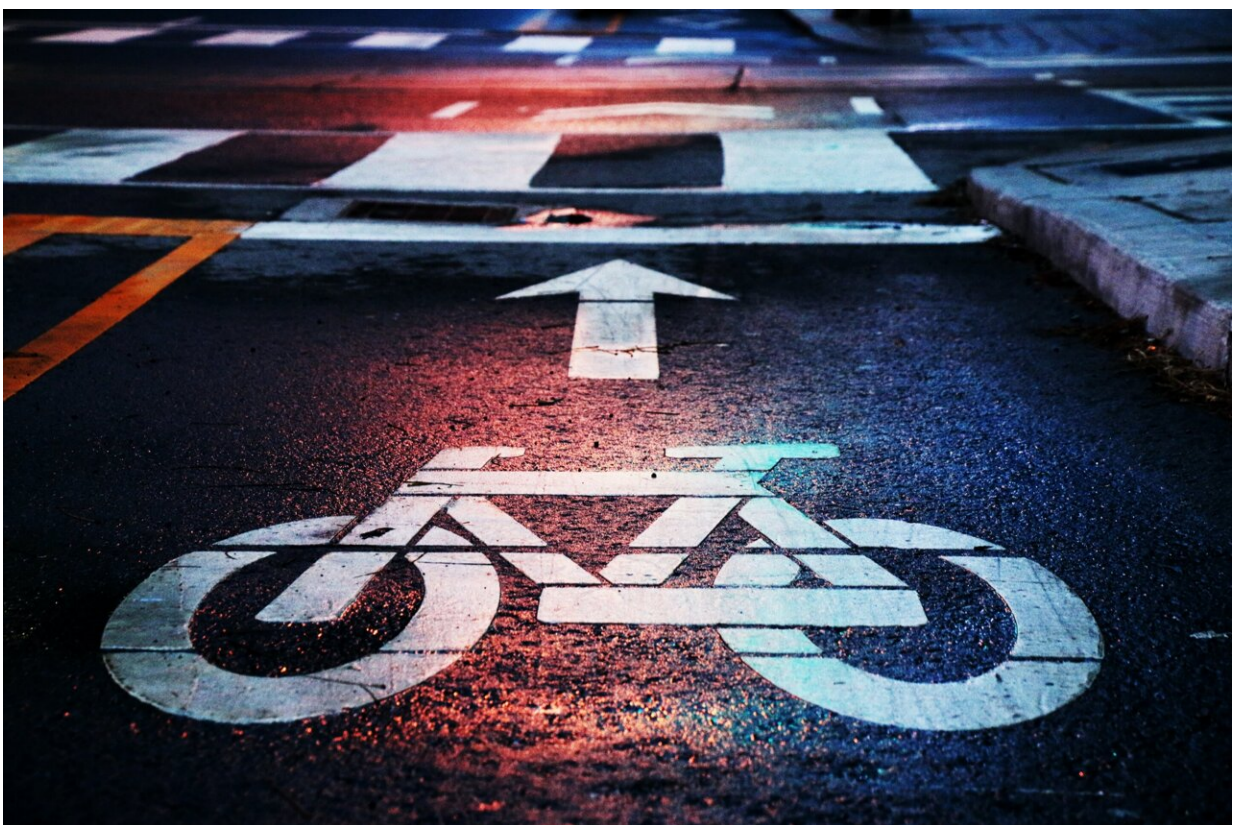


Are New Zealanders 'sick and tired' of spending on cycleways? Not according to this survey

September 10 2024, by Sam Crawley and Matthew Gibbons



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Many more New Zealanders now choose to get around by bike than a few years ago. A Ministry of Transport survey reports 36% of people say

they have [cycled in the past 12 months](#), and Christchurch City Council tracking shows bike journeys are [up nearly 40%](#) over the past few years.

Councils across the country have responded to this change by building more bike lanes, as anyone who lives in a larger city will have noticed.

But the increase in cycleways is not without its detractors. All three parties in the governing coalition were [critical of spending on cycleways](#) before the 2023 election, arguing money should instead be spent on improving roads. NZ First's [manifesto](#) went the furthest, promising "not one more cent on [...] new cycle lanes."

The recently released [National Land Transport Program](#) gave effect to those promises. Funding for existing cycleways was cut in half and no money was made available for new cycleway projects.

Transport Minister Simeon Brown [justified these changes](#), in part, by claiming "New Zealanders are sick and tired of the amount of money going into cycleways." But the picture of public support for cycleways is much more complex than the minister suggests.

Even split on cycleways

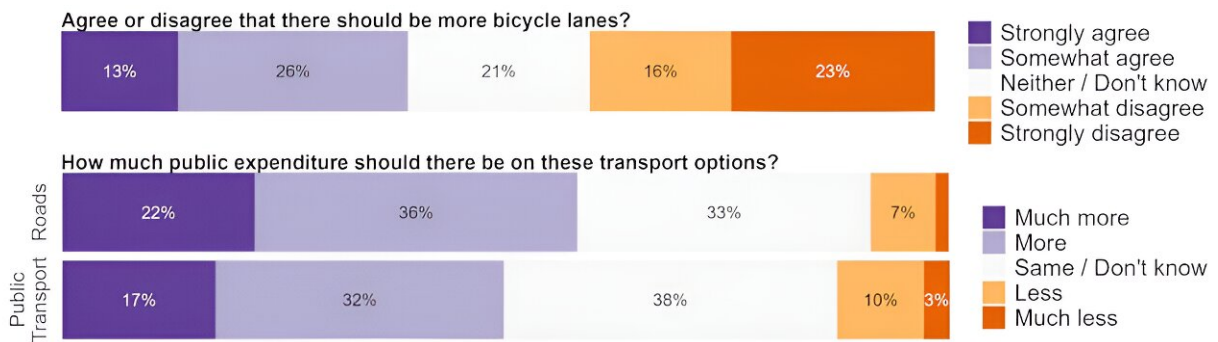
The most recent [New Zealand Election Study](#), conducted after the 2023 election, included a question asking participants how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement "There should be more bicycle lanes on roads."

The study is a representative sample of nearly 2,000 eligible voters, and provides a reliable picture of New Zealanders' political views.

As the graph below shows, New Zealanders are evenly split on their support for cycleways: 39% would like more bike lanes, while 39% do

not want them. Among those opposed to more bike lanes, however, most are strongly (rather than somewhat) opposed.

For or against cycleway investment



Credit: Author provided. Data source: NZES (2023), [CC BY](#)

Compared to support for spending on roads and [public transport](#) (also shown in the graph, although the question was worded differently), New Zealanders are fairly evenly divided on the value of bike lanes.

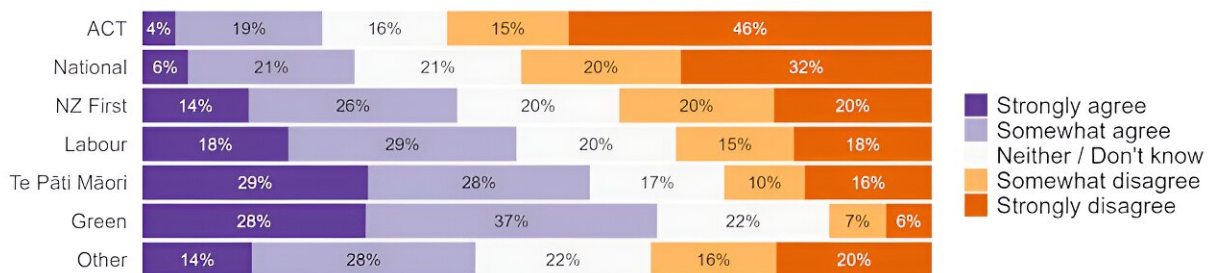
The attitude divide becomes more apparent when looking at support for cycleways by party vote (see graph below). A majority of Te Pāti Māori and Green voters are in favor of more cycleways, as are 47% of Labor voters.

In contrast, 60% of Act voters and 52% of National voters are against having more cycle lanes on roads. Despite NZ First taking the strongest anti-cycleway stance of the government parties, its supporters are evenly split.

These figures don't support a blanket statement that New Zealanders in general are in favor of funding cuts to cycleways. As the election survey data show, the issue is divisive, but many New Zealanders do want more bike lanes.

In fact, a significant minority (27%) of National supporters—the transport minister's own party—would like more cycleways.

Cycleway support by party vote



Survey participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement: There should be more bicycle lanes on roads. Credit: Author provided. Data source: NZES (2023), [CC BY](#)

Cycles and culture wars

There are many arguments made for and against cycleways. Supporters argue they reduce cyclist injuries, that active commuting has physical and [health benefits](#), decreases emissions, and can [reduce congestion](#). Opponents argue they create traffic hazards for [motor vehicles](#) and [hurt businesses and local residents](#) by reducing space for car parking.

Politicians therefore face a difficult task of navigating the arguments, evaluating the evidence, and making decisions in a way that helps bridge divisions rather than widening them.

The sharply partisan differences over cycleways, and the antipathy the current government has shown towards funding them, shows how they have become [a highly politicized issue](#), not unlike the [culture wars](#) seen in other issues such as abortion, Māori co-governance and climate change.

People's strongly polarized opinions on culture war issues are usually driven by distinctly different worldviews, and the debate is often divided by party affiliation, generation and education level. It's why the debates can become so heated.

Once an issue becomes part of a culture war, policy decisions are in danger of being driven more by politics than evidence and research. Politicians, media commentators and influencers can stoke the fires, or they can choose to forge a middle ground that could work for a majority.

The transport minister's minimization of public support for cycleways suggests—at least on this issue—the current government prefers to lean into the culture war.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Are New Zealanders 'sick and tired' of spending on cycleways? Not according to this survey (2024, September 10) retrieved 10 September 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2024-09-zealanders-sick-cycleways-survey.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.