

CAR FREE DAY AND PLAYING OUT

Motion by Cllr Martinico to The City of Edinburgh Council

Thursday 29 October 2026

Transform Scotland supports the reintroduction of Car Free Days in Edinburgh as a practical way to demonstrate the benefits of reducing traffic and reclaiming public space for people. Edinburgh has a history of such events, including the Car-Free Festivals on George Street in the early 2000s. The City of Edinburgh Council should build on this tradition by committing to an annual city-wide Car Free Day, supported by more frequent events in individual neighbourhoods. These events should showcase how streets can become safer, healthier and more welcoming when space is made available for walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and community activities.

The Council should establish a programme of Car Free Days in partnership with residents, community organisations, local businesses, public transport operators and active travel groups. The programme should include a prominent event in the city centre, alongside neighbourhood events in residential areas, allowing communities across Edinburgh to participate. The Council should identify suitable streets and public spaces for temporary traffic restrictions, prioritising locations where closures can create connected areas for people to walk and cycle, support local businesses and host community activities. Events should be free to attend, accessible to disabled people and people with limited mobility, and designed with appropriate exemptions and arrangements for emergency services, essential deliveries and residents who need vehicle access.

Car Free Days should be used to encourage lasting changes in travel behaviour and to build support for practical measures to reduce car dependency throughout the year. The Council should use events to promote public transport, walking, wheeling and cycling, provide information on alternative travel options, and invite residents to identify barriers that prevent them from making more journeys without a car. Lessons from each event should inform decisions on permanent and trial street improvements, including safer crossings, protected cycle routes, wider pavements, improved public transport priority and measures to reduce through-traffic in residential areas. The Council should also work with businesses to assess how pedestrian-friendly streets can support local trade and improve the experience of visiting the city centre and neighbourhood high streets.

We would note that Living Streets' 'Pedestrian Pound' (2024) report found that weekend pedestrianisation in Shrewsbury led to 25% more sales, and TfL (2018) found people walking, cycling and using public transport spend 40% more a month in local shops than drivers. We would also suggest that attention be given to Transform Scotland's 'Open for Business' (2022), which highlighted the experience from Oslo in delivering people-first streets.

To ensure that Car Free Days deliver measurable benefits, the Council should publish an annual programme in advance, establish clear objectives and report publicly on the results. Evaluation should consider participation, public satisfaction, walking and cycling activity, public transport use, local business feedback, air quality where measurable, and the accessibility of the events. The Council should consult communities before and after events, publish lessons learned and explain how these will influence subsequent decisions. Car Free Days should be integrated into Edinburgh's wider transport and climate policies, including its traffic-reduction objectives, such as the City Mobility Plan's target of a 30% reduction in car kilometres by 2030, rather than treated as isolated

celebrations. By committing to a recurring programme and linking temporary street closures to practical, year-round improvements, Edinburgh can use Car Free Days to build public support for a healthier, more accessible and less car-dependent city.

Transform Scotland calls on The City of Edinburgh Council to:

- Commit to an annual Edinburgh Car Free Day, with a prominent city-centre event and a programme of supporting neighbourhood events.
- Identify and close suitable streets to general motor traffic, prioritising locations where closures can create attractive, connected public spaces for walking, wheeling, cycling and community activities.
- Work with communities, businesses and transport operators to design inclusive events, maintain accessibility and promote alternatives to car travel.
- Use Car Free Days to advance permanent change, identifying opportunities to trial and introduce lasting improvements to streets, public transport priority and active travel infrastructure.
- Set clear objectives and publish an annual evaluation, reporting on participation, accessibility, public response and lessons for future transport and public-space policy.
- Integrate Car Free Days into Edinburgh's wider traffic-reduction strategy, using the events to build public support for sustained reductions in unnecessary car journeys.

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Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport

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We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).