

Cargo Bike Schemes:

A Regional Snapshot 2026

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CONTENTS

OVERVIEW.....3

GOALS.....3

KEY FINDINGS.....4

I. 17 borrowing schemes identified across Edinburgh and the Lothians.....4

II. Cargo bike provision is concentrated primarily in Edinburgh.....4

III. The dominant model is a free-to-access, centralised library scheme.....5

IV. Primary target audience is individuals and families.....6

V. Data collection varies markedly between schemes.....6

RECOMMENDATIONS.....7

THE BIKE STATION'S ROLE.....8

TAKEAWAY.....8

DIRECTORY OF SCHEMES.....9

MAP OF SCHEMES.....11

Proposal for coordinated sector development (2026–27).....13

OVERVIEW

Cargo bikes are becoming an increasingly familiar sight in towns and cities across Edinburgh and the Lothians, supported in large part by the growth of local borrowing schemes. While the benefits of cargo bikes for everyday journeys (carrying children, shopping, or bulky loads) are well established, high purchase costs and the practical challenge of storing large bikes mean ownership remains out of reach for many households. These barriers were compounded by the recent closure of the Energy Saving Trust's cargo bike grant fund that had helped to offset the cost of buying cargo bikes, further reducing access for individuals and families on modest incomes.

Borrowing schemes therefore play a crucial role in increasing the availability and visibility of cargo bikes, allowing residents to experience the convenience of cargo bikes without the financial or spatial commitment. This shared approach is helping to reduce the barriers to active travel, encouraging people to replace short car journeys with pedal-powered alternatives and to rethink how everyday journeys can be made. In doing so, cargo bike schemes are not only changing individual travel habits but also contributing to a broader cultural shift towards more sustainable, active, and inclusive transport across the region.

This report presents an overview of cargo bike borrowing schemes across the region, pulling together key information to map the current landscape. It is intended to give stakeholders a clear, shared understanding of what schemes exist, how they operate, and what data they collect for evaluation and learning.



GOALS

1. Map cargo bike borrowing schemes across Edinburgh and the Lothians.
2. Connect organisations offering similar schemes to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing.
3. Look at what data is being collected with a view to standardising this across organisations in the future.

KEY FINDINGS

I. 17 borrowing schemes identified across Edinburgh and the Lothians

- *The research identified 17 organisations* offering cargo bike loans across Edinburgh and the Lothians. These schemes varied in scale, operating model, and target users, showing an established but fragmented landscape.
- *Of these, 14 schemes are currently active and open to the public*, excluding those intended for internal use only.
- The following analysis examines their geographical distribution, operating models, and approaches to data collection and impact measurement.

II. Cargo bike provision is concentrated primarily in Edinburgh

- *The geographical distribution of schemes is uneven across the region.* Of the 17 organisations identified, seven are based in Edinburgh, with the remaining ten located in surrounding areas: four in West Lothian, four in East Lothian, and two in Midlothian (one of which is staff-only).

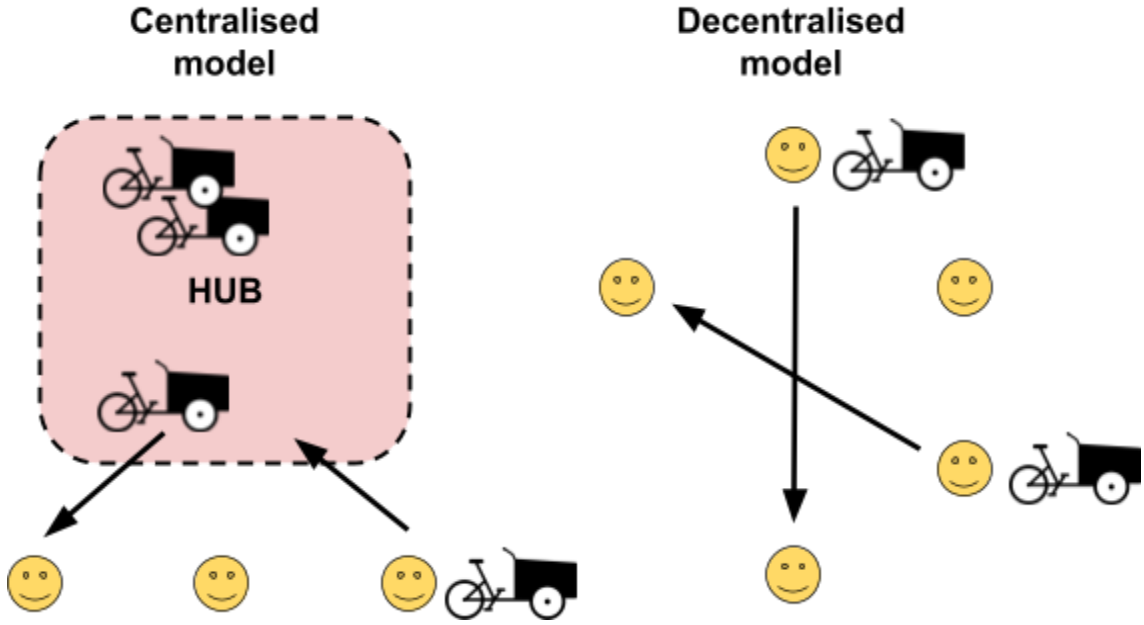
Local authority area	Total borrowing schemes	Active public schemes
Edinburgh	7	6
East Lothian	4	3
West Lothian	4*	4*
Midlothian	2	1
Total	**17**	**14**

- *Borrowing schemes are concentrated in the city*, with more limited provision in less densely populated neighbouring areas. Midlothian, in particular, has only one publicly accessible scheme.
- *Access to cargo bike borrowing schemes is shaped by location*, with implications for equity of access and opportunities for cross-boundary collaboration.

** both Forth Environment Link and Recyke-a-Bike operate across the Forth Valley hence their inclusion here.*

III. The dominant model is a free-to-access, centralised library scheme

- *Fifteen schemes were free to use* (one inviting optional donations), while two charged hire fees to support overheads. This indicates that most schemes prioritised reducing financial barriers through grant funding, with a small minority adopting cost-recovery models for sustainability.
- *Most schemes operate a centralised "library" model*, with bikes stored, maintained, and loaned from a central hub. This simplifies logistics, servicing, and oversight, while increasing local visibility.



- *Sustaining North Berwick uses a decentralised peer-to-peer model*, where users arrange handovers directly via WhatsApp. This reduces staffing demands and builds community connections but can make fleet management and servicing more complex.
- *Fleet insurance is a challenge for some schemes.* The cost of insuring cargo bikes reflects a broader challenge in the sector. In a departure from other models, Sustaining North Berwick requires users to arrange their own insurance. While this reduces organisational burden, it may create an additional barrier to participation.

IV. Primary target audience is individuals and families

- *Cargo bike lending schemes primarily target individuals and families* seeking low-carbon, flexible transport for everyday trips, though many also offer loans to community groups, local organisations, and small businesses to encourage shared mobility and emissions reduction.
- *Uptake among groups and businesses has generally been lower*, potentially due to barriers such as short loan periods, limited awareness, logistical challenges, and uncertainty about operational fit. Addressing these barriers could widen participation and increase environmental and social impact.
- *Usership may be biased towards more affluent demographics*, leaving some groups underrepresented. Perceived cost, storage constraints, and unfamiliarity with cargo bikes may limit broader participation, and tackling these issues could improve accessibility and equity of access.

V. Data collection varies markedly between schemes

- *Monitoring and evaluation approaches vary markedly* between organisations. While most collect basic data about users and loans, some go further by recording mileage and using post-loan surveys to assess user experience, confidence, and future intentions. Only a small number systematically examine barriers to uptake (commonly identifying cost, storage, and maintenance) while others rely on informal, ad hoc feedback. This variation reflects differing capacity, reporting requirements, and organisational priorities.
- *A more unified evaluation framework is needed*. Agreeing on a shared set of core indicators such as user demographics, frequency of use, mileage, trip purpose, modal shift, and perceived barriers alongside a standardised post-loan survey would improve comparability, strengthen the collective evidence base, and reduce reporting burdens.
- *A more coordinated approach would enhance the ability to secure funding and shape policy decisions.* Clear, consistent data on environmental, social, and economic outcomes (including modal shift, and health benefits) would provide more robust evidence of impact, supporting long-term sustainability of these schemes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Creation of a network of related organisations, supporting one another to encourage cargo bike use.**

   Establish a formal or semi-formal network to provide a platform for sharing knowledge, resources, and best practice. This would enable collaboration on fleet management, maintenance, joint events, and funding bids, while reducing duplication of effort and strengthening the visibility and growth of the wider cargo bike community.

2. **Develop robust, standardised evaluation procedures to assess the impacts that cargo bikes have for people and organisations.**

   Implementing consistent, rigorous methods for measuring outcomes and impacts is essential to demonstrate the value of cargo bikes. A standardised evaluation would enable comparison across schemes and regions, strengthen the evidence base for funders and policymakers, and inform improvements in service delivery.

3. **Broaden the definition of 'cargo bikes' to include trailers, tagalongs, and other cargo-capable, pedalled vehicles.**

   Expand current definitions to include other load-carrying accessories and pedalled vehicles to better reflect real-world usage. This would improve accessibility for a range of users (including families and those with limited storage space) and ensure that data collection captures the full diversity of low-carbon, human-powered transport options.

4. **Publish a coordinated annual impact summary for the sector.**

   Develop a shared annual report that pulls together key data, outcomes, and case studies from across schemes. By clearly communicating achievements this would help demonstrate collective value to stakeholders. An annual publication would also support advocacy, attract new partners and funders, and strengthen the public profile and credibility of cargo bike initiatives across the region.

THE BIKE STATION'S ROLE

Given its established presence, practical expertise, and regional relationships, The Bike Station is well placed to act as the delivery agent for the next phase of development. In a lead role, The Bike Station could convene partner organisations, support the introduction of shared monitoring tools, and oversee the production of a combined impact report. A central point of coordination would help maintain momentum, align priorities, and ensure that proposed improvements are implemented in a coherent way across the region.

SPOKES' ROLE

This work has been supported by Spokes, a non-party-political group campaigning for safer and more pleasant cycling conditions at Edinburgh, Lothian and Scotland levels. Spokes' objectives are to promote cycling for everyday purposes and to ensure that local councils and government actively do the same.

Spokes is keen to see more cargo bikes in Edinburgh and the Lothians towns, to demonstrate that environmentally positive methods of transporting goods (and children) are possible – and are coming! We therefore offer grants to community organisations, microbusinesses, and very occasionally to households, to help with the cost of purchase. The grants, usually 4 or 5 a year, are funded by kind donations from our members. Recipient organisations have included a nursery, cafes, couriers, a plumber, and the Cycling Gardeners of Edinburgh.



TAKEAWAY

Cargo bike lending schemes are becoming an increasingly common site in the region. Most schemes are free and operate from centralised hubs, reducing financial barriers to users and providing a simple system for borrowing and returning bikes, although a decentralised, peer-to-peer model does show benefits as well. Monitoring practices vary widely between organisations; while many schemes track basic usage and collect feedback through post-loan surveys, only a few systematically gather information about barriers to adoption or broader social and environmental impacts. This inconsistency limits the ability to evaluate effectiveness, demonstrate benefits, or identify areas for improvement across the sector.



Looking forward, there are clear opportunities to strengthen and expand cargo bike schemes (subject to successful funding). Developing a network of related organisations could facilitate knowledge-sharing, joint initiatives, and mutual support, helping schemes grow more efficiently. Standardising evaluation procedures would provide a robust evidence base to measure impacts on users, communities, and the environment, supporting funding and policy decisions. Finally, broadening the definition of cargo bikes would ensure schemes are inclusive, adaptable, and reflective of real-world needs.

Taken together, these steps could enhance the visibility, accessibility, and effectiveness of cargo bike schemes, supporting a shift toward more sustainable, low-carbon transport options.

DIRECTORY OF SCHEMES

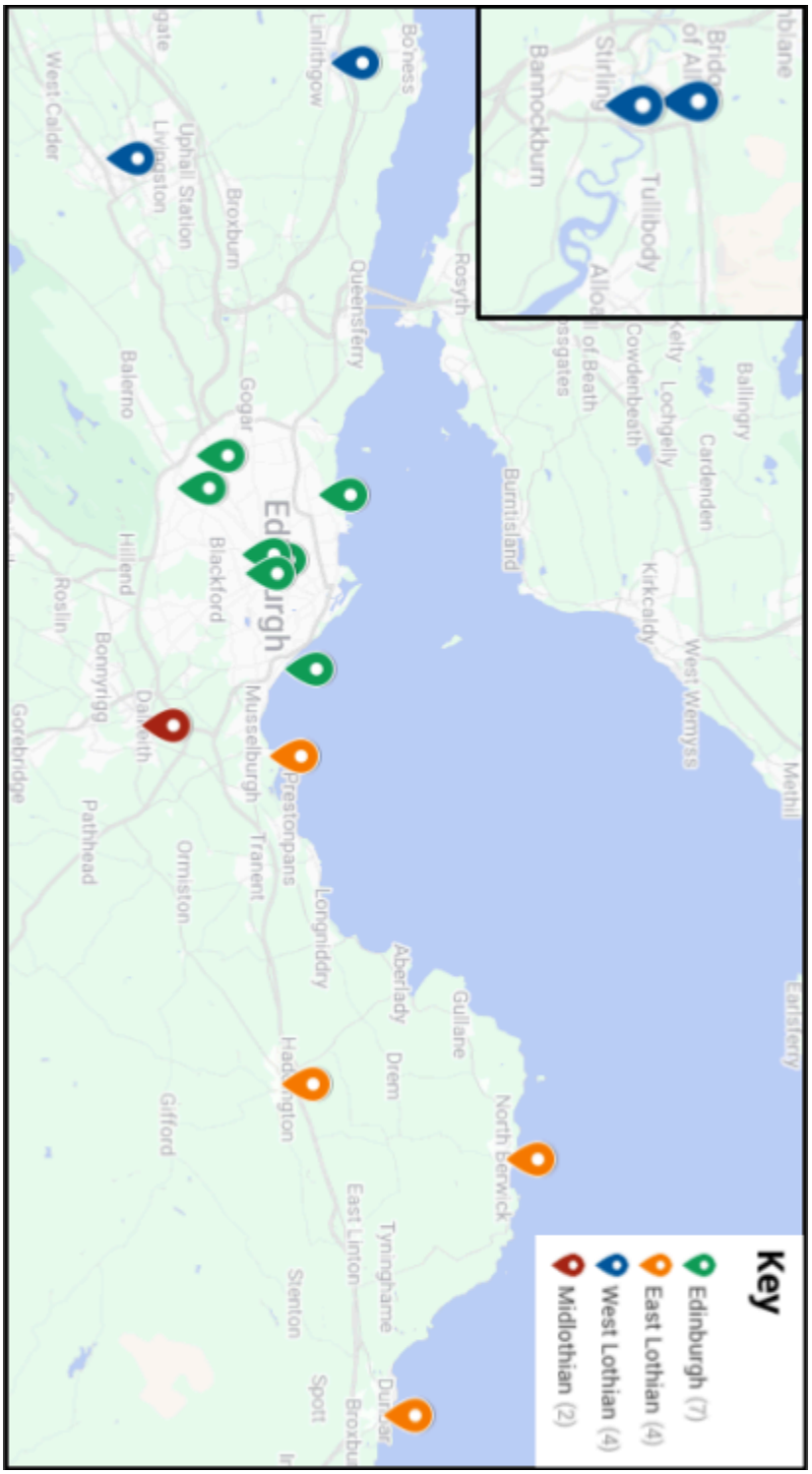
Scheme	Description	Target audience	Model	Cost	Loan period	Cargo bikes
EDINBURGH						
Wee Bike Library (Bike Station)	Free community bike-lending programme from The Bike Station, including cargo bikes. The scheme aims to remove barriers for families and individuals.	Individuals / families	Centralised library	Free	1 day - 1 month	15
BANZAI Cargo Bike Library	Free community library from Bruntsfield Area Net Zero Action Initiative. The scheme aims to encourage low-carbon travel and make cargo biking accessible.	Individuals / families, organisations	Centralised library	Free	1 day	2
Porty Cargo Bike Library	Community cargo bike library from Porty Community Energy. It forms part of a wider active travel hub that promotes sustainable and low-emission transport.	Individuals / families	Centralised library	Free or donation	1 day - 1 week	5
Colinton Community e-Cargo Bikes (SW20)	Free community e-cargo bike lending service in southwest Edinburgh. The scheme prioritises first-time users with short loans and aims to encourage greener travel.	Individuals / families	Centralised library	Free	1 day	1
Wester Hailes Mobility Hub (inactive)	Community hub providing access to e-cargo bikes and other shared transport options to support affordable, sustainable movement. The scheme is not yet active.	Individuals / families	Centralised library	Free	n/a	n/a

NEA Lending Bike Library	A community-focused scheme providing a range of bikes, including cargo bikes, for short-term loans to local residents.	Individuals / families	Centralised library	Free	1 - 3 hours	2
Edinburgh Festival of Cycling	Cargo bike hire provided by EFoC aiming to promote cycling as a form of sustainable transport.	Individuals / families	Centralised library	Paid	4 hours - 1 month	1
WEST LOTHIAN						
West Lothian Bike Library	A bike library with a particular focus on e-bikes. The cost (hire or lone) is assessed on a case by case basis.	Individuals / families, community groups	Centralised library	Free (case by case)	1 month	1
Recyke-a-Bike Library	Social enterprise that refurbishes donated bicycles for loan, including cargo bikes. It focuses on affordable, sustainable transport and reducing waste through reuse.	Individuals / families	Centralised library	Free	1 month	5
Move for Good	Active travel project within Linlithgow Community Development Trust. Offers cargo bikes and conventional bikes for short-term loans.	Individuals / families	Centralised library	Free	2 weeks - 1 month	1
Forth Environment Link	Environmental organisation operating across the Forth Valley area. Provides cargo bikes as part of wider environmental and sustainable transport initiatives.	Individuals / families, organisations	Centralised library	Paid (free available)	1 day - 3 months	5
MIDLOTHIAN						
Midlothian Council	Fleet of cargo bikes for staff use only.	Staff	Centralised library	Free	?	1
Cycling UK (Midlothian)	Lending library part of the Connecting Communities project with a wide range of bikes.	Individuals / families, organisations	Centralised library	Free	1 month	6

EAST LOTHIAN						
East Lothian Council Cargo Bike Loans	Council-run programme that provides e-cargo bike loans to households and businesses to support greener transport choices.	Individuals / families, organisations	Centralised library	Free	1 month (families); 1 - 4 months (organisat-ions)	6
Sustaining Dunbar	Community organisation offering access to e-cargo bikes as part of its wider mission to support low-carbon, resilient local living.	Individuals / families	Centralised library	Free	1 month	2
Sustaining North Berwick	Community cargo bike sharing scheme supported by East Lothian Council. Uses a peer-to-peer model to reduce operating requirements.	Individuals / families	Decentralised peer-to-peer	Free	1 week - 1 month	2
Cycling UK (East Lothian)	Lending library part of the Connecting Communities project with a wide range of bikes.	Individuals / families, organisations	Centralised library	Free	1 month	4

MAP OF SCHEMES

[Interactive map link]



Proposal for coordinated sector development (2026–27)

This proposal sets out a light-touch, collaborative approach to strengthening and connecting cargo bike borrowing schemes across the region. It focuses on regular coordination, improved evidence gathering, and clearer communication of collective impact. *The following recommendations are contingent on successful funding.*

1. Quarterly Cargo Bike Network meetings

- Establish quarterly meetings for all cargo bike schemes and interested partners. Rotate hosting responsibilities with central coordination to ensure continuity.
- Provide a structured forum for knowledge-sharing, peer support, and updates on funding or policy developments.
- Facilitate collaboration on joint initiatives and shared challenges (e.g. insurance, maintenance, storage).

2. Development of a shared monitoring and evaluation framework

- Co-produce a standardised framework for data collection across schemes.
- Agree a core set of indicators (e.g. user demographics, usage, mileage, trip purpose, modal shift, perceived barriers, and selected wellbeing measures).
- Develop simple tools, including a post-loan survey template and reporting spreadsheet, to minimise administration.
- Provide guidance and light-touch support to ensure consistent implementation.

3. Annual cargo bike impact report

- Compile and publish a sector-wide annual impact report, drawing on agreed monitoring data and selected case studies.
- The first report would be published in October 2026, covering the preceding year's activity.
- The report would summarise environmental, social, and economic outcomes, highlight good practice, and identify priorities for the year ahead.

Together, these actions would create a more connected, evidence-led, and visible cargo bike sector, supporting sustainable growth and long-term impact.