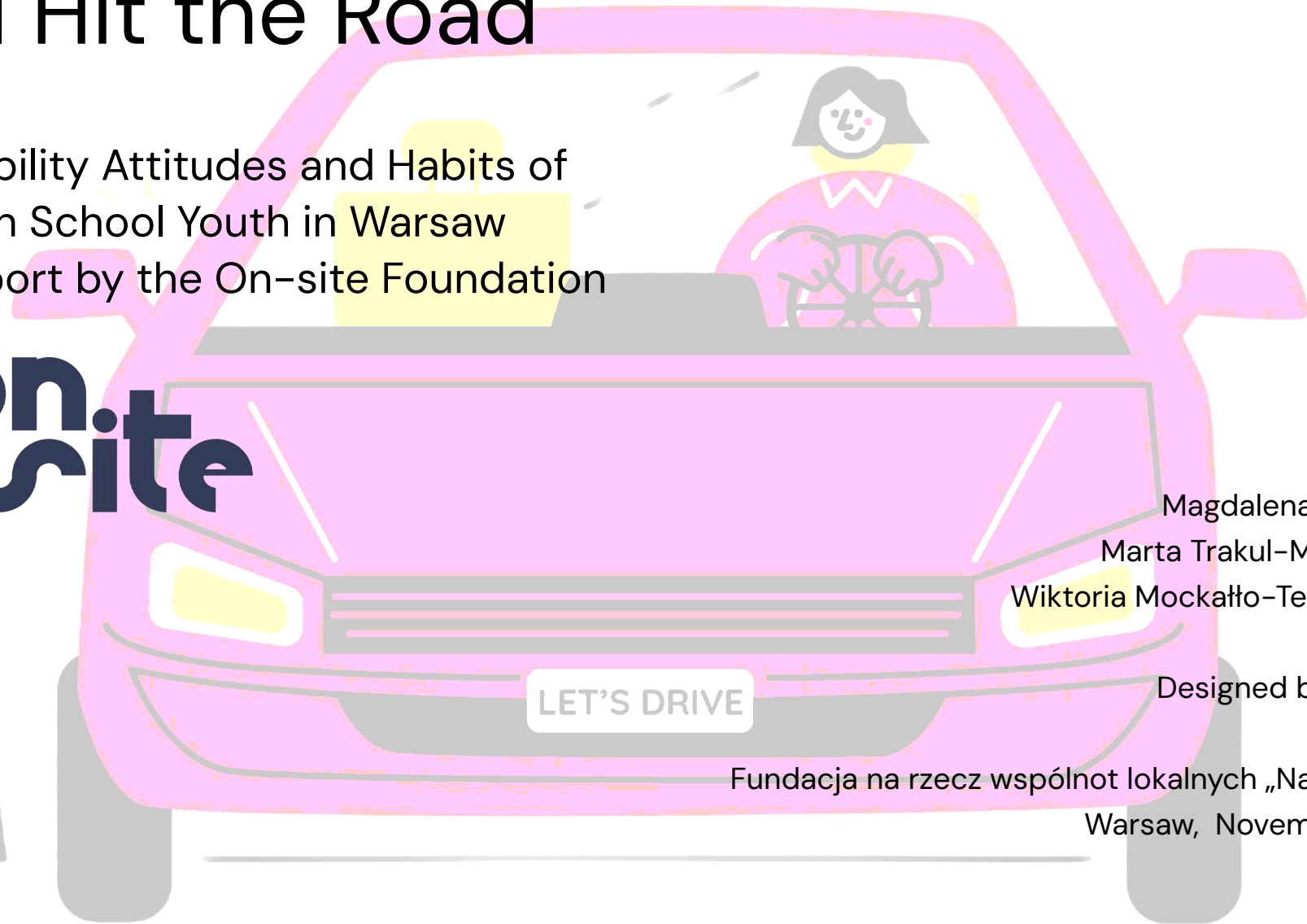


# Once I'm Grown.. I'll Hit the Road

Mobility Attitudes and Habits of  
High School Youth in Warsaw  
Report by the On-site Foundation

**on  
site**



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Fundacja na rzecz wspólnot lokalnych „Na miejscu”  
Warsaw, November 2024



The report is based on the findings from a survey conducted by the research team of the On-site Foundation for Local Communities as part of the "Breathe In. A Story About Clean Air" project. This project is funded by the Clean Air Fund.

**The aim of the study was to explore the attitudes of young people towards different modes of transportation in the city, their transport habits, and their knowledge related to sustainable mobility.**

The survey was conducted in the fall of 2024 with a group of 511 individuals aged 14 to 18, attending 10 high schools in Warsaw. Among them, 292 were female, 200 were male, and 19 individuals identified with a different gender or preferred not to classify themselves.

The survey was made available to students online by teachers during class sessions. The schools invited to participate in the study are involved in the project.

We would like to thank the teachers for their collaboration in conducting the study.



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## Key findings

- Young people frequently use public transportation (over 82%) and value it highly (62% believe it is of good quality).
- At the same time, 44% of young people plan to primarily use private cars in their adult lives.
- It is evident that the marketing of electric car manufacturers is effective. Nearly 40% believe that an electric or hybrid car is more environmentally friendly than a train.
- 54% agree with the statement that there are too many cars in Warsaw.
- At the same time, the study shows that in our culture, the car is associated with freedom and adulthood. At the top of the list of dreams and plans is traveling the world, closely followed by obtaining a driver's license.

The top five also includes buying or receiving one's own car.

- Individuals who do not see the connection between car traffic and air quality in the city are more likely to express a desire to drive a car in the future.
- 33% of respondents are not willing to sacrifice their individual comfort for the greater good of the community. Fewer than 30% of individuals report having such willingness.

# How Students Get to School

## A Long Way to School

As many as 139 individuals (27%) of the respondents live outside the administrative boundaries of Warsaw, within the metropolitan area. Most of them need more than 45 minutes to reach school, with 57 individuals taking over an hour.

How long does it take you to get to school?

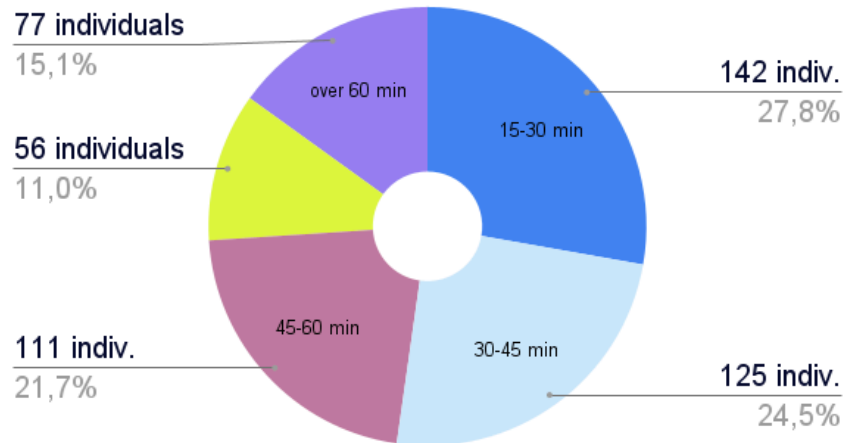


Chart 1: Time Needed by Young People to Get to School

Meanwhile, for the majority of the respondents, this travel time is significantly shorter. Most people take between 15 and 45 minutes to reach school.

The quality of the connection to school and the time needed for the commute are crucial factors in shaping transport preferences and habits within families of teenagers.

At the same time, no clear pattern can be observed where car travel is only chosen by those who live far from school or lack good public transport connections. Only 32 individuals are driven to school by car, and this group includes people both from outside Warsaw, from districts far from the center (and the school itself), as well as from central districts. These individuals indicated that car travel is the main mode of transportation for their parents or guardians. It is they who, on their way to work, drive their child to school.

## On foot, as it's easy

Although only 28 individuals can walk to school due to the distance, young people generally appreciate this mode of transportation in the city. 374 individuals agree with the statement that walking in Warsaw is convenient. Only 52 individuals disagree with this statement, while the rest have no strong opinion. For one-third of the respondents, walking is an attractive option for spending time with peers or for a date. Promoting walking is therefore highly relevant when discussing sustainable transportation with this group.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement:  
Walking in Warsaw is convenient.

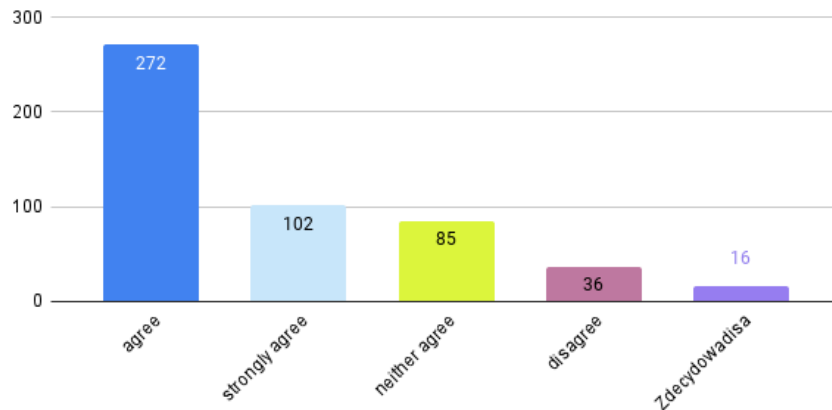


Chart 2: Youth Opinion on Walkability in Warsaw

## Micromobility as a Niche Option

At the moment, only 20 individuals ride a bike to school, and a few use scooters.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement:  
Cycling in Warsaw is convenient.

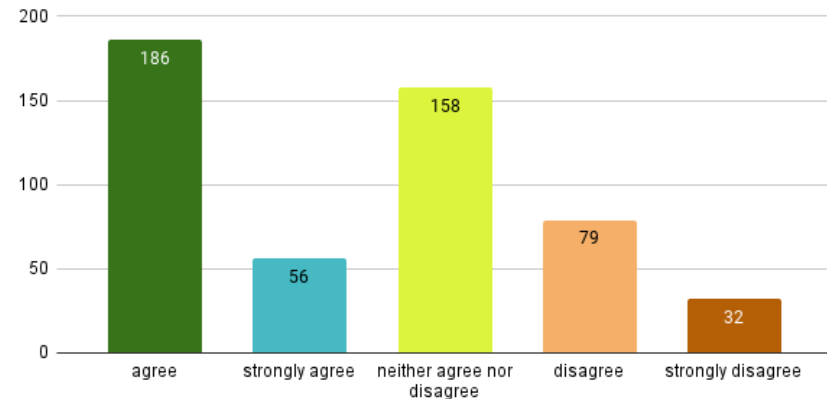


Chart 3: Youth Opinion on Cycling in Warsaw

The experience of young people cycling in Warsaw, compared to walking or using public transportation, is not positive. Less than half of the respondents agree with the statement that cycling in Warsaw is convenient. 111 individuals disagree, and as many as 158 are ambivalent (neither agreeing nor disagreeing), which is often due to a lack of experience cycling or scootering in the city, or reluctance to attempt it.

## The Great Public Transport Experience

We are dealing with a group of highly active public transport users—by choice or necessity. Over 82% (422 individuals) use it on a daily basis. For 88 of them, it is the regional train system (suburban trains) that facilitates travel from the metropolitan area and districts such as Ursus or Włochy. For most (62%), train travel means a longer commute, lasting more than 45 minutes.

How do you most often get to school?

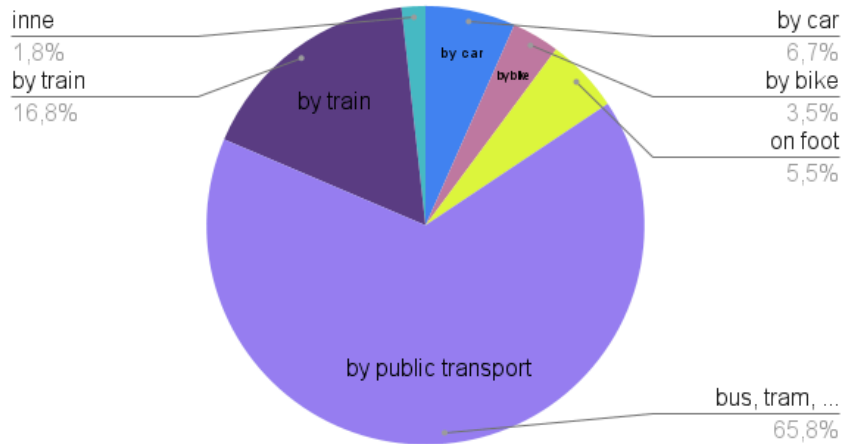


Chart 4: How students get to school

To what extent do you agree with the following statement:  
Public transportation in Warsaw is of good quality.

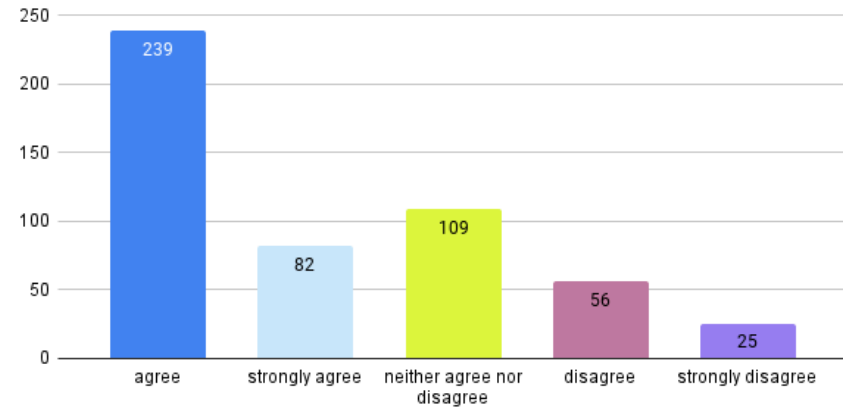


Chart 5: Youth Opinion on Public Transportation

Their opinion on public transportation is positive. 239 individuals agree with the statement that public transportation is of good quality (82 of them strongly agree). 109 individuals are ambivalent about this statement ("neither agree nor disagree"), while 81 individuals disagree with it.

## Plans for the Future

### Public transport is falling out of favor

It might be expected that the widespread and very positive experiences with public transportation would lead young people, once they reach adulthood, to become strong advocates and frequent users of the metro, trams, buses, and regional trains. Indeed, some individuals plan to use public transportation (urban or regional) in the future. However, in our survey, this is less than half of the responses—208 individuals plan to use public transport (urban or regional) in the future, of which 196 consider it their primary or exclusive mode of transport.

For some of them, it might be just a transitional phase: "Until I get a car, [I'll use] public transportation." From their own experience of commuting from outside the city or from areas poorly connected to the center, they know well that a lot depends on where they live. "If I live in Warsaw, I'll use public transport; if not, I'll drive," says one individual.

## The Car's Triumph

Nearly half of our respondents, exactly 239 individuals, plan to primarily use a car to get around the city in the future. When asked, "How do you plan to get around the city as an adult living independently?" only 227 individuals selected the car as their sole option, while 12 people chose cars along with other modes of transportation.

For parents, 93% of them (222 individuals) consider the car to be their primary or one of the most important modes of transportation on a daily basis—for work, shopping, leisure, and visiting friends.

There is a correlation between the transportation choices of parents and the plans of young people regarding how they will get around when they are adults. Young people often mimic their parents' preferences, which may be linked to their experiences and perceptions of available transportation options.

Cycling remains a niche choice for the future. Only 31 individuals select it. It turns out that 21 of the parents of these individuals use a bicycle on a daily basis, either as their primary or secondary mode of transportation.



# Motivations Behind Transportation Decisions

## Time, Cost, and Nature

For young people, among the reasons for choosing a particular mode of transport, time is the most important factor. It was indicated 313 times as a key consideration when making a decision in the multiple-choice question. The travel time depends on many factors, which is why, for some individuals, especially those from the outskirts of the metropolis, saving time means choosing a car, while for others, who can take the metro instead of sitting in traffic, public transportation has a clear advantage. In second place among the reasons for choosing a mode of transport (with 182 responses) is the cost of the trip, which gives public transportation a clear advantage over the car.

Interestingly, in third place on this list is the "positive environmental impact (fewer emissions)," which was selected 137 times. This is a significant number, especially when compared to personal safety, which was indicated only 89 times, and physical activity, which was mentioned 69 times. Others mentioned it as the second or third most

important factor. The environmental aspect appears among those who express a preference for public transportation, cycling, walking, or using scooters.

Individuals who do not see the link between car traffic and air quality are more likely to declare an intention to drive in the future. Of the 55 people who disagree (or strongly disagree) with the statement that car traffic in Warsaw significantly affects air quality, 40 plan to drive a car or motorcycle as adults.

Youth who recognize the negative impact of cars on the environment (e.g., air quality) are more inclined to choose environmentally friendly modes of transportation (bike, walking) in the future. Increased environmental awareness and the availability of various mobility options could influence future decisions regarding urban transportation choices.

## Attitudes Towards Urban Mobility

The study managed to capture the cultural significance of cars and the role they play in shaping one's status. As the young participants themselves mention, the desire to drive in the future is sometimes driven by the need to impress others. One person commented that they would choose a car "because I can show off to my friends that I have an awesome car." The car is a symbol of freedom and independence: "I can turn the music up loud" and "no one will push me around." It is also an object of desire, and people form emotional connections with it: "Why choose a car? Excitement :) I love driving."

Interestingly, the responses to the question: "What are your plans or dreams after turning 18? Please select the three most important ones for you" are also revealing. The most common response (318) was "travel the world," followed closely by "get a driving license" (311). In third place (239 responses) was "find the first job or start an internship," followed by (195) responses for "move out from my family home, live independently or with friends." The top five finishes with (122 responses) for "get or buy the first car." Other responses include (70) for "do something important for the world" and (54) for "relax/rest/do nothing."

## High Awareness Yet Some Ambivalence

Awareness of the connections between transportation, health, and quality of life is relatively high among respondents. A total of 240 individuals agree, and 112 strongly agree, with the statement: "*The way I travel daily affects my health.*" Only 73 respondents disagree (or strongly disagree) with this statement. Furthermore, 64% recognize the impact of their choice of transportation on their environment.

Even greater certainty is observed in responses about the effect of car traffic in Warsaw on air quality—78% of respondents acknowledge this connection. Additionally, 54% agree with the statement: "*There are too many cars in Warsaw.*" In contrast, 21% disagree. Similar proportions are observed in responses to whether car use should be limited for environmental reasons, with over half of the respondents expressing agreement.

The survey posed a question to assess respondents' readiness to adjust their personal behavior for the benefit of society at large. The question asked: *"To what extent do you agree with the statement: I am willing to limit my individual comfort for the greater good of the community?"* The responses revealed a considerable degree of ambivalence toward this idea.

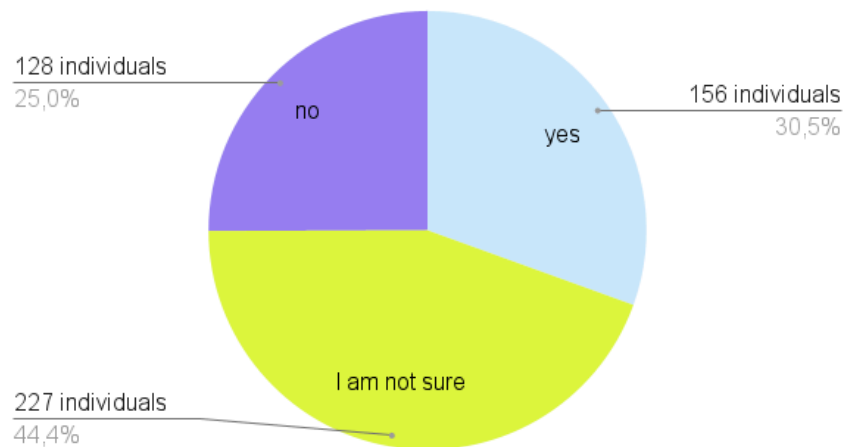
A total of 187 respondents expressed no clear opinion (*"neither agree nor disagree"*). Meanwhile, 33% of participants (171 individuals) disagreed with the statement, including 63 who *strongly disagreed*, indicating a lack of willingness to embrace such changes. Fewer than 30% (153 respondents) agreed with the statement, of which only 35 *strongly agreed*.

These results highlight a disconnect: while there is notable awareness among young people about the impact of cars on urban life and the environment, as well as the influence of individual choices on health, the decision to alter transportation habits in favor of public health or communal well-being remains largely unpopular.

## Level of Knowledge About Mobility

This part of the study aimed to examine the extent to which young people are familiar with the concept of sustainable mobility. While the term *eco-mobility* is neither straightforward nor widely recognized, participants were asked if they had ever encountered it. The results showed that 30% of respondents had heard of the term, while the majority (45%) were unsure if they had come across it before.

Have you ever heard of the term "eco-mobility"?



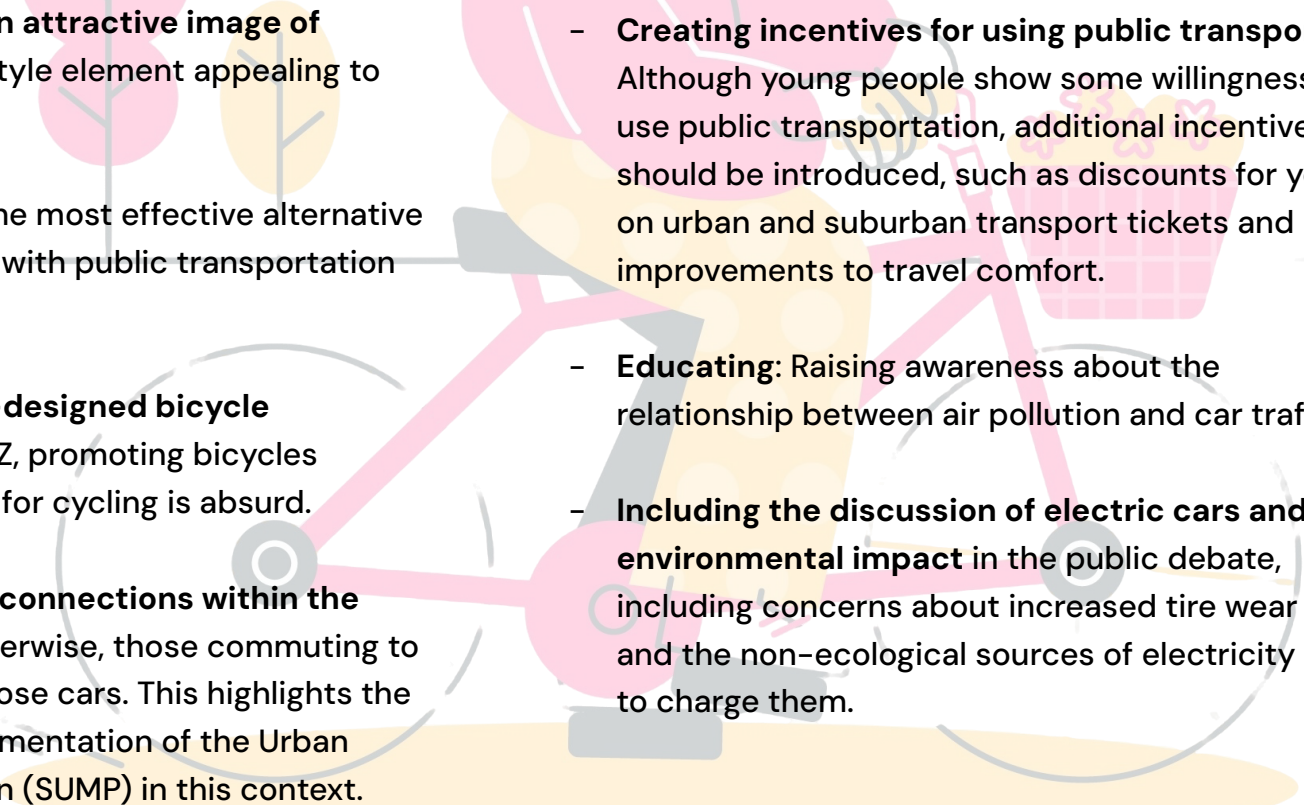
In the question about associations with "eco-mobility," a list of both correct and incorrect responses was provided. The majority of the youth had no doubts that it refers to environmentally friendly transportation (470 responses, the most frequent answer), associated with strengthening public transportation and developing bicycle lanes. Clearly incorrect answers were selected 108 times.

## Electric Cars with Positive Image

The claim that eco-mobility is synonymous with promoting electric cars, while contentious, was included in the survey to explore young people's attitudes toward the issue. After all, experts are divided on the environmental benefits of these vehicles. The response was selected 189 times. Among the youth, there is a lack of knowledge about electric cars and the environmental costs they incur. It appears that the communication efforts of electric vehicle manufacturers are highly effective and have reached the surveyed group. Nearly 40% believe that electric or hybrid cars are more eco-friendly than trains.

## List of Recommendations

How to promote sustainable mobility in a way that supports the ecological choices of young people? Below is a list of recommendations from the On-site Foundation, based on the conclusions drawn from the study.

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- **Building prestige and an attractive image of micromobility** as a lifestyle element appealing to young people.
  - **Promoting walking** as the most effective alternative to cars when combined with public transportation or micromobility
  - **Creating safe and well-designed bicycle routes**—for Generation Z, promoting bicycles without safe conditions for cycling is absurd.
  - **Ensuring the quality of connections within the metropolitan area**—otherwise, those commuting to Warsaw will quickly choose cars. This highlights the need for effective implementation of the Urban Sustainable Mobility Plan (SUMP) in this context.
  - **Creating incentives for using public transport:** Although young people show some willingness to use public transportation, additional incentives should be introduced, such as discounts for youth on urban and suburban transport tickets and improvements to travel comfort.
  - **Educating:** Raising awareness about the relationship between air pollution and car traffic.
  - **Including the discussion of electric cars and their environmental impact** in the public debate, including concerns about increased tire wear dust and the non-ecological sources of electricity used to charge them.