

# active travel cymru news

Issue 7



Obesity: transport has its part to play

Take action on active travel

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# News in brief

## 35 million trips a year on the NCN in Wales

The latest *National Cycle Network Route User Monitoring Report* shows that 35 million walking and cycling trips were made on the Network in Wales during 2007. The report can be downloaded from [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

## Bike It sets off in Wales

Two Bike It officers have recently been appointed to work with Neath Port Talbot and Gwynedd county councils. The aim is to combine Safe Routes to Schools, Eco Schools, Dragon Sports and Healthy School programmes in the overall project. The Bike It Officers are funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, the cycling industry, Sustrans and the local authority. Further information: [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

## The impact of physical activity on women's health

Sustrans' new *Active travel and women's health* information sheet reviews evidence on the benefits of physical activity for women. It concludes that physical activity is vital for women throughout the life course, to improve quality of life and reduce the risk to health from many non-communicable diseases. Further information: [www.activetravel.org.uk](http://www.activetravel.org.uk)

## NICE: Promoting physical activity in the workplace

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has issued public health guidance for employers on how to encourage employees to increase their levels of physical activity. The recommendations include policies to encourage staff to walk or cycle to work and providing information on walking and cycling routes. Further information: [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

**Active Travel Cymru** works with policy-makers and practitioners to promote walking and cycling as health-enhancing physical activity. Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity and works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport to benefit health and the environment.

Photography credits: Sustrans staff

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**More people...more active...more often...in Wales**



## Obesity: transport has its part to play

As government faces up to the threat of obesity, it is evident that our transport and land use policies will have to change. Walking and cycling are now centre stage in promoting healthy living.

The results of the DIUS Foresight Tackling Obesities report were truly shocking. Foresight predicts that by 2050 60% of men, 50% of women and 25% of children may be obese. This would cost the UK economy a staggering £49.9 billion per annum with a seven fold increase in NHS costs alone.

Foresight included “increasing walkability/ cyclability of the built environment” among the top five policy responses assessed as having the greatest impact on levels of obesity.

It is now widely accepted that the form of the built environment is a strong determinant of physical activity levels, with lower development densities and car-focused land use patterns leading to more sedentary travel and lower activity levels<sup>1,2</sup>.

Official guidance is now clearly directing local authorities and others to make the environment more activity-friendly and therefore healthier.

In January the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) published public health guidance *Physical activity and the environment* (see box). This is the first time

NICE has drawn up recommendations aimed at land use and transport planners, and walking and cycling take centre stage.

The NICE *Physical activity and the environment* recommendations include:

- ensure planning applications for new developments prioritise the need for people to be physically active as a routine part of their daily life
- re-allocate road space to support physically active modes of transport (eg. by widening pavements and introducing cycle lanes)
- restrict motor vehicle access (eg. by closing or narrowing roads)
- introduce road-user charging schemes
- introduce traffic-calming schemes to restrict vehicle speeds
- create safe routes to schools
- ensure public open spaces and public paths can be reached on foot and by bicycle
- those involved with campus sites, including hospitals and universities, should ensure different parts of the site are linked by appropriate walking and cycling routes
- ensure new workplaces are linked to walking and cycling networks.



*Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A Cross Government Strategy for England* aims to reverse rising levels of obesity and overweight in the population by encouraging people to be more physically active. This too is explicit in advocating a walking- and cycling- friendly environment.

### Planning a healthy Wales

Welsh transport and planning policy also provides guidance on developing activity friendly environments.

The Welsh Assembly Government Technical Advice Notes 12 and 18 recommend:

- promoting the reallocation of road space to pedestrians
- ensuring that [pedestrian and cycle] routes are coherent, legible, direct, attractive, safe, and unobstructed
- promoting housing development at locations with good access by walking and cycling to schools, local facilities and public transport stops
- encouraging residential layouts that incorporate...home zones, calming measures and 20 mph zones.

In May this year the Welsh Assembly Government launched the first transport

strategy for Wales, '*One Wales: Connecting the Nation*'. The strategy recommends locating developments at sites already well served by walking, cycling and public transport links, developing walking and cycling links in communities and encouraging local authorities to develop 20mph zones.

### Basel: is this our future?

The NICE recommendations relating to transport may seem quite radical in the context of Wales, but strategies such as prioritising walking and cycling, restricting motor vehicle access and creating high quality walking and cycling networks are commonplace in continental Europe. In Basel, Switzerland, 25% of all trips are made by private motor transport, while 75% are by walking, cycling and public transport.

Many Dutch cities have also reined in motor traffic and achieved levels of cycling ten times higher than the UK average; regions such as Nordrhein Westfalen in Germany or cities like Odense in Denmark have intensive and wide-ranging bicycle master plans (and are walking friendly too). What differentiates these examples from UK practice to date is the level of investment – the best Dutch cities spend as much as €26 (£19) per capita per annum on cycling alone<sup>3</sup>.

**More people...more active...more often...in Wales**



target for relatively inactive people.

The Merthyr Tydfil scheme involves building a bridge to create a traffic-free route connecting the residential areas of Merthyr Tydfil to Pentrebach railway station and communities

## Connect2: taking action now

Connect2 will transform 9 communities across Wales by overcoming barriers that prevent walking and cycling for everyday journeys. By building bridges and new crossings over main roads, rivers and railway lines, Connect2 will connect people to the local places they want to go. More than a quarter of a million people live within a mile of a Connect2 scheme in Wales.

## Connect2 schemes in Wales

The Cardiff scheme to open a bridge over the Ely River will complete a 6.5 mile circuit around Cardiff Bay, opening up new commuting options and facilitating walking and cycling for leisure – the scale of the circuit is ideal as a

further south, as well as providing links to local supermarkets and workplaces.

Sustrans has advocated healthy, active and low-carbon travel for the past 30 years. This is now a deadly serious matter and we look forward to cross-government support to create healthier environments for everyone to live in.

## References

<sup>1</sup> **Frank et al, 2004**, *Obesity relationships with community design, physical activity, and time spent in cars*, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 27

<sup>2</sup> **Lopez-Zetina et al, 2006**, *The link between obesity and the built environment. Evidence from an ecological analysis of obesity and vehicle miles of travel in California*, *Health and Place*, 12

<sup>3</sup> **Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, NL, 2007**, *Cycling in the Netherlands*

## The Evidence!

The Evidence is a regular information service identifying research evidence on the benefits of physically active travel.

### Physical activity protects against depression

A recent review of 67 studies examined research of associations between physical activity and depression in adults. The

evidence suggested that both vigorous and low intensity physical activity are effective in reducing the likelihood of depression, and even low doses of physical activity may have a protective effect.

**Teychenne et al, 2008**, *Physical activity and likelihood of depression in adults: a review*, *Preventive Medicine*

Research papers are available to download from [www.the-evidence.org.uk](http://www.the-evidence.org.uk)



# Take action on active travel

The UK's leading public health, transport and planning bodies are calling on government at all levels to invest 10% of transport budgets in cycling and walking initiatives, now, to help fight the UK's obesity crisis.

In 2006-07, spending on cycling in Wales amounted to a tiny 0.4% of the overall transport budget.

Signed by over 75 public health and other bodies 'Take action on active travel' calls on ministers, civil servants, local authorities and all involved to implement in practice what policies already say: invest 10% of transport budgets to walking and cycling, and recreate an activity friendly environment.

Policies and strategies at all levels advocate walking and cycling but motor transport still takes priority in the big decisions and in the allocation of investment. As a consequence the UK lags badly behind many European countries in levels of active travel.

The call to action includes:

- set ambitious targets for a growth in walking and cycling – and ensure they are met
- commit 10% of transport budgets to walking and cycling immediately

- create safe, attractive walking and cycling conditions, with coherent high quality networks linking all everyday destinations
- make 20mph or lower speed limits the norm for residential streets and those used by shoppers, tourists and others, close to schools or public buildings
- tackle bad driving through improved driver training and awareness campaigns, backed by stronger and better enforced traffic laws
- 'health check' every transport and land use decision, focusing on the potential impact on levels of walking and cycling.

Most importantly: do it now!

We hope for a continuation of the sign-up process, as the support of additional significant bodies will help us to influence governments.

**If you would like your organisation to become a signatory to this policy call, please visit the website of the Association of Directors of Public Health – [www.adph.org.uk](http://www.adph.org.uk).**