

active travel news

Issue 15



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Local transport in 2009: it's time we planned for health

As we go to press, the Department for Transport is finalising its guidance to English local authorities on their Local Transport Plans, against a background of bad news. The economic situation is dire, the obesity epidemic shows no signs of slowing, each week the news on climate change is more catastrophic, and the underlying trend in fuel costs is still upward.

All of these factors point in one direction – the age of cheap motor travel is coming to an end, whether or not we approve. We can make the most of the changes this will bring, or cling irresponsibly to past car-based transport policies.

Sustrans' view is that this confluence of problems is also a great opportunity. If the DfT encourages local authorities to return public space to people, we could see a great improvement to quality of life, an upsurge in physical activity, lower carbon emissions, improved air quality, less noise and safer streets. We look forward with hope to a transformation in local transport policy.



Malcolm Shepherd
Chief Executive, Sustrans

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.

Active Travel works with policy-makers and practitioners to promote walking and cycling as health-enhancing physical activity.

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Active children, healthy lives

There is a widely recognised need to increase physical activity levels among children and young people. The decline in children's physical activity levels, including travel behaviour for the school journey, is likely to have contributed to the current high levels of obesity.

We are all aware of rising levels of obesity, particularly amongst children, with the lack of everyday physical activity heavily implicated. The potential cost to our economy could be a staggering £50 billion each year by 2050¹, or £833 for every man, woman and child in the UK today.

In England, children's weight is now being monitored through the *National Child Measurement Programme* which measures children's height and weight in Reception and in Year 6. Findings from the 2007/08 report show that in Reception almost one in four of the children measured were classified as either overweight or obese and in Year 6 this rate was nearly one in three².

The Government strongly believes that giving the results to parents is a vital way of engaging both children and families about the importance of a healthy weight in children.

Results from the recent Change4Life *How Are The Kids Survey* shows that almost three quarters (72%) of children are not

participating in the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity outside of school.

Bike It

As part of their child obesity strategies, several English Primary Care Trusts have commissioned Bike It in their areas.

The Bike It project, now in its fifth year, continues to buck all the trends for cycling to school. Around 19,000 pupils at 72 Primary and 17 Secondary schools in England were surveyed as part of the Bike It project and Sustrans found:

- 49% of children wanted to cycle to school
- 8% of children now cycle to school every day (compared to 4% before Bike It)³.





Bike It - Wales

In 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned the appointment of two Bike It Officers for 3 years, each working with 12 schools a year. The programme aims to increase levels of children aged 9–12 cycling to school once a week to 15% and 10–15% of all pupils cycling to school by the end of the first year.

According to *A Walking and Cycling Action Plan for Wales 2009–2013* only 2% of children aged 7–11 currently cycle to school in Wales. The actions within the plan seek to triple these numbers over four years, and specifically mentions Bike It as a way of doing so.

Bike It works directly with pupils, parents and staff. Officers are able to help each group overcome whatever it is that prevents them from cycling to school – by organising cycle training, helping to install new bike sheds, contributing to classroom work and providing information about safe routes to schools. Currently, in England and Wales, Bike It works

with 443 schools, in 55 local authorities with approximately 89,000 children.

Rural Safe Routes to Schools – Northern Ireland

Sustrans has worked with 18 schools in Northern Ireland as part of the Safe Routes to Schools project which aimed to achieve a 10% reduction in car journeys in participating schools and increase levels of walking and cycling by September 2008.

The project includes improvements in and around selected schools to encourage more pupils to walk and cycle and is funded by the EU through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The Project has now been completed with the following results:

- children being driven to school dropped from 64% before the project, to 49%
- 7% now cycle, up from 5%
- walking increased from just 20% to 33%⁴.

“In Northern Ireland, currently around one in four girls and one in six boys in Primary One are overweight or obese. Many of these children are not as physically active as they should be, they do not have a healthy balanced diet and this can contribute to an unhealthy lifestyle. By increasing the amount of physical activity in children now we can work towards improving the health and well being of children through their whole life course.” Dr

Michael McBride,
Chief Medical Officer for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.
Northern Ireland.





National Hands-Up Survey - Scotland

The 2008 National Hands-Up Survey⁶ is the first national dataset to look at mode of travel to school across Scotland.

The survey is a joint project between School Travel Co-ordinators working in Scotland and Sustrans. The 2008 survey was the first time the survey was conducted and all Local Authorities were invited to collect data. The National Hands-Up Survey will run continuously on an annual basis in the autumn of each year.

Data collection was conducted by schools. The question asked in the Hands-up Survey was, "How do you normally travel to school?", with the response options: Walk, Cycle, Scooter/Skate, Park and Stride, Driven, Bus, Taxi and Other.

During 2008, 29 Local Authorities participated. The total sample comprises of responses from 396,377 children across Scotland.

Conclusion

We need more direct interventions such as Bike It to enable more children to be physically active in their daily lives. There are millions of school children of school age who could be walking and cycling to school, and whilst the number of initiatives is so great and the benefits so cost-effective, it deserves to be more highly prioritised.

Further information:

www.sustrans.org.uk/bikeit and
www.sustrans.org.uk/nischools

References

- ¹ **Government Office for Science, 2007**, *Foresight Tackling Obesity: Future Choices – Project Report*
- ² **The NHS Information Centre, 2008**, *National Child Measurement Programme 2007/08 school year headline results*
- ³ **Sustrans, 2009**, *Bike It Project Review 2009*
- ⁴ **Sustrans, 2009**, *Rural Safe Routes to Schools Project Review*
- ⁵ **Sustrans, 2009**, *National Hands-Up Survey Scotland: Report on data collected 2008*

Results of the Hands-Up Survey

Walk	Cycle	Scooter/ skate	Park & Stride	Driven	Bus	Taxi	Other
48.3%	2.8%	0.7%	6.1%	21.5%	18.7%	1.4%	0.5%



Safer roads for active travel

The Government's draft Road Safety Strategy, *A Safer Way: Consultation on Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World*, could increase the possibilities for active travel and its positive impact on public health - by proposing a target to halve road risks to walkers and cyclists by 2020.

The draft strategy says:

"For health, environmental and other reasons, we are keen to encourage more walking and cycling. We wish to reduce the risk to the individual walker or cyclist and take into account expected growth in activity; we are therefore proposing a target based on the rate of casualties:

- *to reduce by at least 50 per cent by 2020 the rate of KSI per kilometre travelled by pedestrians and cyclists, compared with the 2004–08 average. This takes into account performance over the last decade".*

This is an important step. The Government's previous road safety targets, measured purely in terms of numbers of injured pedestrians and cyclists, led many road safety officials to oppose the promotion of walking and cycling. The new target is measured in terms of the risk of a serious or fatal injury per mile walked and cycled, i.e. the actual risks faced by individual pedestrians and cyclists. It also means increased walking and cycle use will help

meet the target, as it has been clear for some time that more walking and cycling make safer streets.

The Department for Transport is seeking views on improving road safety and has proposed to:

- reduce road deaths by at least 33% by 2020
- reduce the annual total of serious injuries on our roads by 2020 by at least 33%
- reduce the annual total of road deaths and serious injuries to children and young people (aged 0–17) by at least 50%.

The plan is due to be published by the English, Scottish and Welsh Governments by the end of this year.

Further information:

www.dft.gov.uk/consultations

The consultation period runs until 14 July 2009. Bodies with an interest in public health may wish to support the pro-walking and cycling elements and proposals for wider use of 20mph limits.



Local Transport Plans: for health or for motor traffic?

The Department for Transport is about to publish its guidance to local highway authorities in England. Will it prioritise healthy active travel, or will the car still be king?

In England, transport funding is allocated by the Department for Transport (DfT) to local authorities on the basis of their Local Transport Plans (LTPs); the current round, LTP3, is for the period 2011 onwards. DfT is about to publish guidance to local authorities on the expected content of their LTPs. This LTP guidance is of critical importance – it may encourage the promotion of healthy, active and environmentally sustainable transport, or it may be business as usual.

It is now clear that a step change is necessary in the provision for and encouragement of walking and cycling by local authorities, to meet cross-governmental objectives on physical activity, climate change and quality of life. The evidence suggests that this will require active intervention to reduce traffic speeds and volumes. This means that the LTP guidance is a key tool. It should explicitly advocate active travel, physical activity and healthy living, and traffic restraint, so that local authorities know to include these in their plans.

The DfT is working towards five main goals (below): as can be seen, a shift to active travel will effectively address all of these, not only that of health promotion and disease prevention.

Climate Change

The transport sector is responsible for over a quarter of all UK carbon emissions and this is increasing. Local journeys under 5 miles produce 19% of transport carbon emissions¹. Walking and cycling can substitute for many of these short motor trips.



Support economic growth

Research in Bristol² found that retailers tend to overestimate how far their customers travel and how many travel by car. Evidence from streetscape improvement schemes around the country demonstrates that local economies are stimulated by pedestrian-friendly design as footfall increases.

Promote equality of opportunity

The most deprived areas are also those most in need of improved walking environments. Major road schemes tend to lead to car dependency and social exclusion³.

Contributing to better safety, security and health

The 2007 Foresight Obesity report identified the scale of the UK's obesity problem. Unless we act decisively and immediately, by 2050 almost 60% of the UK population could be obese, with the economic cost of overweight and obesity reaching £49.9 billion at today's prices. Shifting travel from sedentary to active travel is essential to improving public health.

Improving quality of life

Reducing the need to travel is essential to enable more opportunities for social contact and enhance the sense of community. For example, with average distances for school journeys increasing, busier lifestyles and fears over safety, the number of 5–16 year olds travelling to school by car has doubled since 1985⁴.

Carbon Reduction Fund

The lack of sufficient funding is an ongoing problem that prevents sustainable travel projects and initiatives becoming a reality. That's why Sustrans is working with other organisations to propose that the DfT establishes a Carbon Reduction Fund for transport as a part of its Carbon Reduction Strategy planned for later this year.

The Fund would be created by the reallocation of half of the Government's existing Transport Innovation Fund, expected to total £10 billion over the next decade, and would enable the first real shift to low carbon travel in this country.

References

¹ **Department for Transport, 2008**, *Carbon Pathways Analysis – Informing development of a carbon reduction strategy for transport*

² **Sustrans, 2006**, *Shoppers and how they travel*

³ **Campaign to Protect Rural England, 2006**, *Beyond transport infrastructure; lessons from the future from recent road projects*

⁴ **Department for Transport, 2004**, *National Travel Survey: 2003 (revised July 2004)*.



Raising levels of physical activity in Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government has launched *A Walking and Cycling Action Plan for Wales 2009–2013*, setting targets to increase the numbers of adults and children walking and cycling to work and school.

According to the plan, only 2% of children aged 7–11 currently cycle to school in Wales. The target is to triple this number over the next four years, with Bike It and National Standards Cycle Training playing a part in raising the numbers of children cycling to school on a regular basis.

CTC, the national cyclists' organisation, is rolling out National Standards for Cycle Training and introducing the Bikeability brand to Wales. Sustrans will promote uptake of the National Standards Cycle Training through the Bike It programme and through its work with local authorities.

The action plan also sets targets to increase the percentage of children walking to school from 39% to 46%, increase the number of adults walking to work to 20% and triple the percentage of adults who cycle to work.

DIY Streets in Wales

Somerset Street in Cardiff is to be the first of three Sustrans DIY Streets in Wales to start construction. The project encourages the reclaiming of street space with a view to encouraging active play and active travel.

Further information:
www.sustrans.org.uk/diystreets



Cardiff becomes Wales' first sustainable travel town

Cardiff has been selected to become Wales' first sustainable travel town by the Welsh Assembly Government. The city will receive £28.5m to provide city-wide cycle hire, improve walking and cycling routes, implement free circular bus shuttles in the city centre and build a new park and ride facility in Pentwyn to serve the east side of the city. Cardiff will also introduce Bike It to the city.

The funding will enable projects such as the Pont-y-Werin pedestrian and cycle bridge across the Ely river between Cardiff's Sports Village and Penarth.

If the sustainable town scheme is successful it could be repeated in other areas of Wales.

Health and wellbeing for all

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence is being given an important role in the promotion of health and wellbeing in children and young people... and of all of those in the educational communities to which they belong.

The new Curriculum for Excellence seeks to *'ensure that all the children and young people of Scotland develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need if they are to flourish in life, learning and work, now and in the future.'*

The curriculum takes a holistic approach to health and wellbeing (one of 8 curriculum areas) and promotes the aspiration that all children and young people should be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. The role and importance of active travel education in achieving these aspirations are clear – promoting walking and cycling as health-enhancing and sustainable travel for everyday trips can make a significant contribution to children's physical health and mental wellbeing.

Teaching young children safe walking and cycling skills for physical wellbeing as outlined in the new curriculum, but also educating them about the wider impacts of how we travel on a day-to-day basis, helps them to grow up as more independent, secure and responsible traffic participants. As such, active travel education and encouragement ticks many boxes in achieving the new curriculum's objectives even out with its health and wellbeing expectations for learning and development.

Further information:

www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/

Physical Activity Strategy Review

NHS Scotland has published a Five Year Review of ***Let's Make Scotland More Active - A Strategy for Physical Activity***. The review emphasises that interventions enhancing the built environment can impact on large sections of the population. "There is good recent evidence linking environments to physical activity (e.g. Foresight report on obesity). The review group therefore believes the creation and provision of environments that encourage and support physical activity offers the greatest potential to get the nation active."

The full report can be found at:

www.healthscotland.com/documents/3223.aspx

News in brief

Active Travel Workplace Toolkit

Sustrans has published a UK-wide Active Travel Workplace Toolkit to help organisations encourage their employees to walk and cycle to work, thus helping improve health, reduce absenteeism and increase productivity.

Further information: www.activetravel.org.uk

On-line obesity statistics

A new interactive web-based resource, The National Obesity Observatory e-Atlas, enables users to compare a range of indicators including prevalence of childhood obesity using data from the National Child Measurement Programme with, for example, local area deprivation scores and rates of physical activity.

Further information: www.noo.org.uk

Protecting cardio and vascular health

Led by the Cardio and Vascular Coalition, *Destination 2020* sets out key aims and principles to plan for cardiac and vascular health for the next decade and calls on the Government to plan strategically to prevent premature cardiac and vascular conditions, where possible, and to ensure that the best treatment and care is available to those affected.

Further information: www.cardiovascularcoalition.org.uk

Public health and climate change

Published by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, *Climate Change, Public Health and Health Inequalities - A resource for environmental health practitioners* is a companion volume to the report *Climate Change and its Health Implications*. It sets out the key arguments surrounding climate change and calls upon local authorities, in particular, to take action. The report gives examples of what they can do to combat the impacts of climate change and contains a comprehensive list of further information sources.

Further information: www.cieh.org

Safe routes to play

Children and Parents' Experiences of Recently Improved Play Areas aims to provide some early indications of the likely impacts of the Play Pathfinder and Play Builder investment and to inform the evaluation design and programme delivery. The research, carried out by IPSOS Mori on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families, found that whilst local authorities focused more on safety in the play areas than on safe routes to the sites, parents were more concerned about road safety nearby.

Further information: www.dcsf.gov.uk

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