

## **Keeping the NHS Local – A New Direction of Travel Response by Sustrans**

Sustrans – the sustainable transport charity – works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport in order to reduce motor traffic and its adverse effects. We are responsible for development of the UK National Cycle Network, coordinate the national Safe Routes to Schools information programme involving more than 1,500 schools, and run a number of other projects promoting healthy, active and environmentally sustainable transport.

Our Active Travel programme was established in 2001 to collaborate with the health sector. We work with the Department of Health, NHS Estates, the Department for Transport, individual NHS trusts and other bodies to encourage and assist the development of travel plans within the NHS. This programme of work is in line with the Department's policies and strategies including the National Service Framework on Coronary Heart Disease, Controls Assurance Standards, NHS Environmental Strategy and others.

We would normally restrict ourselves to commenting on our specific area of expertise – transport and its social and environmental impacts. In this specific case, I feel we have the right to express a more general view; as individuals we most warmly welcome the general principles expressed in Keeping the NHS Local – A New Direction of Travel. All of us have been made uncomfortable by the increasing centralisation of NHS services on ever bigger, fewer sites, and have seen its impact on relatives and friends. A more local and thus accessible provision of services is common sense, and what all of us wish for. It is also, of course, in line with other themes of Government policy which we also support, such as the emphasis in the Social Exclusion Unit's recent report "Making the Connections" on making services accessible, irrespective of class or wealth, and Planning Policy Guidance from the DfT on land use planning, aiming to reduce the need to travel, especially by private motor transport.

Regarding the report itself, we have only two comments. These are however very significant.

1. The report makes no mention of the benefits to be gained by the provision of services more locally to the patient, in terms of reducing the need to travel and the undesirable by-products of travel to NHS sites, and the converse to this, the dis-benefits associated with the concentration of services at larger NHS sites.

These include, not in any order:

- air and noise pollution caused by motor traffic
- road casualties
- financial cost to the NHS, especially the cost of subsidised car parking
- missed appointments
- inconvenience and disruption to neighbouring communities

- the unintended promotion of sedentary and unhealthy ways of travelling and consequent increased risk of ill-health.
2. There is no mention of the need to ensure, as sites and services are remodelled to meet the recommendations of the report, that the need for motor transport is minimised and the opportunities seized to promote active and healthy ways of travelling wherever possible. This would include:
- implementation of travel plans at all sites – taking advantage of support from local authorities and others, such as the DfT’s TransportEnergy BestPractice programme
  - financial systems to ensure that the full cost of transport and parking generated by the site is reported and managed
  - inclusion of transport plans into the corporate strategy for the site
  - close liaison with local authorities and other strategic partners, such as through Local Strategic Partnerships, to optimise access to the site by walking and cycling.