

# The London Health Inequalities Strategy – Draft for public consultation

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Sustrans submission

December 2009

compiled by Greg King

**Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity.**

Our vision is a world in which people choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment. We work on practical, innovative solutions to the transport challenges facing us all. Sustrans is the charity behind the award winning National Cycle Network, Safe Routes to Schools, Bike It, TravelSmart, Active Travel, Connect2 and Liveable Neighbourhoods, all projects that are changing our world one mile at a time.

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# Introduction

Thank you for sending Sustrans a copy of The London Health Inequalities Strategy – Draft for public consultation. Sustrans welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation.

Sustrans agrees that health inequality is a key issue in London and therefore welcomes the focus on the issue that this strategy provides.

Sustrans believes that the draft strategy includes some important priorities for addressing health inequality in London. However, there are key areas where Sustrans believes the plans must go further. Sustrans believes the strategy should:

- Give greater recognition to the role of transport and active travel in tackling health inequality
- Highlight the current significant demographic inequalities in cycling in London
- Include greenways as a key initiative in facilitating and encouraging a take up of active travel
- Include policy on traffic speeds to improve road safety and improve conditions for active travel and play
- Include a policy to encourage partnership working, in particular between councils and Primary Care Trusts in delivery of active travel initiatives.

In responding to the document Sustrans initially highlights the key elements of the draft strategy that it believes are particularly important. It then puts forward a number of recommendations for the final strategy.

## Key elements of the draft strategy that Sustrans supports

### Recognition of the need to focus walking and cycling measures on those that most need it

Sustrans fully supports the statement made in the draft strategy that to address health inequalities, initiatives to encourage active travel should be targeted at currently underrepresented groups:

*“These initiatives [e.g. Walking Journey Planner, London Cycle Hire Scheme, Cycle Superhighways] aim to achieve mass behaviour change, but there is a risk that universal approaches could exaggerate health inequalities by increasing walking and cycling among those groups who are already active, while having little impact on relatively inactive people. If the shift to active travel is to contribute to reducing health inequalities there needs to be a special focus on groups who would benefit the most.” (page 31)*

Sustrans agrees that take-up of active travel in London is highly inequitable on a demographic and socio-economic basis. Sustrans works on a number of projects to seek to address this, which it believes should feature in the London Health Inequalities Strategy. These are referred to in our recommendations below.

## Focus on spatial planning

Sustrans supports that the draft strategy highlights the important role of spatial planning in improving health outcomes by creating improved conditions for active travel and play:

*“Good planning should promote economic development, create and improve access to green spaces and leisure facilities, support sustainable transport systems (including walking and cycling), create places for children to play and ensure there is a good array of local services”.* (page 76)

Sustrans agrees that integrating transport and land use planning and shaping the pattern of development to influence the location, scale, density, design and mix of land uses is hugely important. Reducing the need to travel and the length of journeys will be beneficial individually and collectively, by tackling congestion and overcrowding and reducing the impact of travel on people’s lives. Enabling Londoners to make more of their daily journeys on foot or bike rather than by car, or other inactive means, will make a valuable contribution to public health.

Sustrans also supports the focus on places for children to play. London currently performs particularly poorly in terms of obesity levels in young children, with London having significantly higher levels of obesity among reception age children than any other English region<sup>1</sup>. Sustrans agrees that facilitating outdoor play through better planning (as well as other measures like slower speed limits noted below) is key to addressing this.

## Recommendations for the final strategy

### Higher priority for transport

There is now overwhelming evidence that transport choice plays a key role in individuals’ health, and that increasing physical activity by facilitating and encouraging higher levels of active travel is the most effective way of tackling some of the most pressing health problems. In addition, increasing levels of active travel in London has further health benefits in terms of improving air quality, reducing traffic noise and improving road safety. Accordingly, Sustrans believes that influencing transport choice should be prioritised in the London Health Inequalities Strategy.

Currently in London one in six adults and one in five of London’s 10-11 year olds are obese.<sup>2</sup> This causes a range of serious and chronic health problems. According to NHS London, low levels of physical activity are a major cause of this, and over 35,000 deaths annually *“could have been directly avoided if the population achieved the recommended physical activity levels”*<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, increasing levels of physical activity would reduce the public financial burden of this aspect of poor public health by tackling the £105 million per year that NHS London estimates current levels of inactivity costs PCTs<sup>4</sup>.

Evidence cited in the precursor to the Health Inequalities Strategy (Reducing Health Inequalities – issues for London and priorities for action, 2007) indicates that active travel is responsible for significantly more physical activity than other initiatives, and has a particular strength in terms of overcoming health inequality:

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<sup>1</sup> Based on data covering the year 2003/04.

*“Research conducted in the London Borough of Enfield found that commuting via walking and/or cycling was responsible for approximately twice as much physical activity as provision of leisure services... It is particularly important for certain groups such as households on low incomes, older people, disabled people, and children.”<sup>5</sup>*

The Chief Medical Officer has said that *“for most people, the easiest and most acceptable forms of physical activity are those that can be incorporated into everyday life”<sup>6</sup>*. Walking and cycling for local journeys are accessible and affordable ways for inactive people to incorporate physical activity into their daily routine.

**Sustrans recommendation: The London Health Inequalities Strategy should further emphasise travel choice as a key determinant of public health and should include facilitating and encouraging an uptake of active travel as one of the Mayor’s strategic objectives to reduce health inequalities.**

## Highlight inequalities in cycling

As noted, Sustrans fully supports the recognition in the draft strategy that initiatives to encourage active travel must be targeted at currently underrepresented groups if they are to adequately address health inequalities.

Following from this, Sustrans believes that the strategy should highlight the very significant demographic inequalities that are observed in cycle journey statistics in London. Roughly twice as many cycle journeys are made by men than women<sup>7</sup>, and whilst levels of cycling rose significantly since 2000 among working-age people, the number of cycle trips made by children and young people declined between 2001 and 2006/07<sup>89</sup>.

Sustrans believes that these are defining issues for cycling in London. Since cycling is a healthy activity and one of the most effective ways of increasing levels of regular physical activity, Sustrans believes that the strategy should promote the importance of addressing inequalities in cycling levels.

**Sustrans recommendation: The London Health Inequalities Strategy should highlight the significant inequalities in cycling in London and promote measures which address this to ensure that the Mayor’s cycling revolution contributes to reducing health inequalities.**

## Inclusion of greenways

Sustrans believes that London’s greenways programme is an initiative which should be specifically highlighted in the strategy since it makes a significant contribution to reducing health inequalities in London.

The development of greenways in London is now an established programme of work, carried out by Sustrans in partnership with Transport for London, the London Boroughs and many other agencies. To date, greenway networks have been identified across almost all London boroughs for development and promotion over the coming years. These networks have undergone consultation with thousands of groups and individuals and their delivery has been prioritised by managing authorities.

Greenways feature in the draft Mayor’s Transport Strategy under the ‘cycling revolution’ theme and the development of greenways in London is included in Proposal No. 53:

*“The Mayor, through TfL, and working with the boroughs and other stakeholders, will deliver improvements to cycling infrastructure and training to support the cycling revolution, including:...*  
c) *Enhanced cycle links to the Olympic Park by 2012 and the development of a wider network of Greenways across London...*” (Proposal No. 53 of the draft Mayor’s Transport Strategy)

The development and promotion of a good quality greenways network across London is particularly important in facilitating and encouraging an increase in cycling in London, particularly among more vulnerable, currently under-represented groups.

Cycling is still a minority activity in the capital, with most Londoners never getting on a bike<sup>10</sup>. The most significant deterrent to cycling is fear of traffic; over two-thirds of Londoners do not think that cycling is a safe way to travel around London<sup>11</sup>. Despite this, research also shows that for a large proportion of non-cyclists, cycling does have an appeal from an environmental, health and enjoyment point of view. About 90 percent of Londoners think that it is healthy and good for the environment and over three-quarters agree that cycling is enjoyable<sup>12</sup>. Because greenways respond to both peoples’ concerns about the safety of cycling in traffic and the positive perceptions of cycling as a healthy, fun activity they are key in facilitating a greater uptake of cycling. In Outer London particularly, where levels of cycling are currently low, but where there is a relative wealth of green spaces, greenways could play a central role in encouraging new people onto their bikes.

Evidence from the National Cycle Network (NCN) is that greenways play a particularly important role in encouraging a greater uptake of cycling, especially among currently underrepresented groups. In 2006 NCN monitoring found that the traffic-free parts of the network carried roughly 80 percent of journeys, despite comprising only a third of the network overall. It also showed 14 percent of cycle trips on these sections were by people new or returning to cycling, as opposed to 2 percent on adjacent road routes. The monitoring found that women in particular were benefiting from access to traffic-free routes; 27 percent of cycling trips during 2006 were made by women who were new to cycling or returning after a break<sup>13</sup>. 2007 NCN monitoring found that the network is enabling children and young people to travel actively, with 15 percent of all journeys that year made by people under the age of 16<sup>14</sup>.

Developing and promoting greenways is a policy which contributes to many of the of the ambitions and principles set out in the draft Health Inequalities Strategy:

- By providing improved cycling and walking connections to parks and green spaces, as well as routes within them, greenways provide improved opportunities for the “*active use of parks*”, which is highlighted on page 31 of the draft strategy.
- Greenways tie in with the vision presented for spatial planning as expressed on page 76, that it should, “*..create and improve access to green spaces and leisure facilities, support sustainable transport systems (including walking and cycling), create places for children to play*”.
- By increasing usage of green spaces, greenways can improve perceptions of safety in these areas, by increasing ‘passive surveillance’. This ties-in with the Mayor’s ambition that people should be able to use their local spaces with confidence, as expressed on page 81. “*...concerns about safety in open spaces limits some people’s ability to benefit. Improving the quality of London’s parks and open spaces is a high priority for the Mayor. He is committed to supporting projects that increase local communities sense of ownership of their public spaces, and confidence in using them.*”

**Sustrans recommendation: The London Health Inequalities Strategy should highlight greenways as one of the Mayor’s programmes which makes a particularly valuable contribution to addressing health inequalities in London.**

## Include policy on traffic speeds

A number of recent reports have shown the very significant role of traffic speed in the incidence and severity of road traffic collisions, particularly involving pedestrians and cyclists. Accordingly, Sustrans believes that the Health Inequalities Strategy should include clear guidance on traffic speeds.

Recent analysis of cycle deaths in London found that virtually all fatal collisions occurred on roads with a speed limit of 30mph or higher<sup>15</sup>. The study also found that the introduction of 20mph limits on residential roads could produce a 50 percent reduction in pedal cyclist killed and seriously injured casualties<sup>16</sup>.

Further research, recently published by the British Medical Journal, found that the introduction of 20mph zones in London over the last two decades have significantly improved road safety for users of all modes. This is especially true for children and young people, with the number of 0 – 15 year olds being killed and seriously injured reducing by half in areas where the speed limit is reduced to 20mph<sup>17</sup>.

As the Draft Health Inequalities Strategy sets out, road safety varies considerably across London: *“Pedestrians in the most deprived areas of London are 2.5 times more likely to be killed or seriously injured in a road traffic accident than their counterparts in the least deprived areas.”*

The draft strategy also cites expert advice in favour of 20mph speed limits: *“The Accidental Injury Task Force identified methods to reduce road accidents such as 20 mph speed limits in areas of higher pedestrian activity, local child pedestrian training schemes and cycle training.”* However, despite this clear safety benefit of 20mph speed limits, neither the draft Health Inequalities Strategy, nor any of the other relevant draft mayoral strategies, contain a proposal to expand 20mph limits in London.

In addition to improving road safety for all, reducing vehicle speeds on more of London’s streets would encourage an increase in active travel. Traffic speed is a key determinant of the appeal of an urban environment for walking and cycling. Reducing the speed of traffic is noted as the second priority for improving streets (after reducing traffic volume) in both Manual for Streets (DfT, 2007) and the London Cycling Design Standards (2005).

Sustrans believes that the strategy should reflect these principles by providing guidance on speed limits in London, including promoting the expansion of 20mph speed limits. Sustrans supports the recommendation of the London Assembly in the recent report, *Braking Point: 20mph Speed Limits in London*, that funding should be made available to pilot borough-wide speed limit reductions on residential streets<sup>18</sup>.

**Sustrans recommendation: The London Health Inequalities Strategy should include a specific proposal for an expansion of 20mph speed limits in London.**

## Accuracy of case study text

Sustrans’ fully supports the inclusion in the Health Inequalities Strategy of project case studies which demonstrate best practice. In particular, Sustrans supports the inclusion of case studies about the Tower Hamlets Healthy Borough Programme and Sustrans’ DIY Streets project.

However, both of these case studies include inaccuracies, which should be resolved in the final strategy:

- In 'Making a difference –Tower Hamlets 'Healthy Town' Project' (page 78), the text includes, 'a Bike it to school' scheme'. This should be worded as, 'Sustrans' Bike It programme'.
- In 'Making a difference - Sustrans DIY Streets Project Initiative' (page 80) the caption text should be worded as follows:  
'DIY Streets works with local communities to help residents develop low-cost solutions to make their streets safer and more attractive. Amongst the main problems it wishes to tackle are inappropriate traffic speeds, high levels of perceived/actual crime and lack of greenery. Three pilot projects in London are complete or nearing completion and Sustrans is in discussion with other London boroughs to establish more DIY Streets projects. Further information is available at:  
[www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)'

## Include a policy to encourage partnership working

As noted, Sustrans supports the inclusion of a case study on the Tower Hamlets Healthy Borough Programme as an example of effective partnership working.

In addition, Sustrans supports the Mayor's priorities for the London boroughs and Primary Care Trusts in relation to their role in supporting the Health Inequalities Strategy. In particular, Sustrans welcomes priorities which encourage partnership between local authorities, PCTs and other organisations, including priorities for the boroughs as follows:

- *"Provide strategic leadership for action to promote well-being and improve quality of life for all, with a particular focus on those disadvantaged in health terms.*
- *Actively contribute to and invest in key strategic partnerships and the delivery of their agreed priorities, including Local Area Agreements.*
- *Ensure all residents have equitable access to environments, opportunities, and services that promote physical and mental well-being and support individuals to make healthier choices."*

However, Sustrans believes that the guidance on partnership working in the strategy should go further and that part three of the document (*'key partners and their responsibilities'*) should include specific proposals for developing partnership working between PCTs and boroughs in the delivery of active travel initiatives.

A good example of this is Sustrans' Bike It programme which has been delivered successfully in London since 2006 in partnership with TfL, London boroughs and London Primary Care Trusts. In 2008-09 Sustrans Bike It officers worked intensively in 45 schools across 10 London boroughs. This saw Bike It actively engaging with over 19,000 pupils, parents and teachers. During the year the programme achieved a doubling in the number of children cycling daily to participating schools.

By delivering against both health and transport objectives Sustrans' Bike It is supported and funded by TfL/borough/PCT partnerships. The expansion of the programme in London has been made possible, in part, by the strength of these partnerships. Sustrans believes that this is the type of partnership working that should be cited and promoted in the Health Inequalities Strategy.

**Sustrans recommendation: Part three of the London Health Inequalities Strategy (*'key partners and their responsibilities'*) should include a specific proposal for encouraging the development of borough - PCT partnerships in the delivery of active travel initiatives.**

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- <sup>1</sup> National Child Measurement Programme: England, 2008/09 school year, National Statistics, Dec 09.
  - <sup>2</sup> Go London! An Active and Healthy London for 2012 and Beyond, NHS London, July 2009.
  - <sup>3</sup> Go London! An Active and Healthy London for 2012 and Beyond, NHS London, July 2009.
  - <sup>4</sup> Mayor and Sports Commissioner outline bright future for sport in London, April 2009 (viewed at: [http://www.london.gov.uk/view\\_press\\_release.jsp?releaseid=21857](http://www.london.gov.uk/view_press_release.jsp?releaseid=21857)).
  - <sup>5</sup> Reducing health inequalities – issues for London and priorities for action, GLA, Aug 2007.
  - <sup>6</sup> At least five a week: Evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health – A report from the Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health, 2004.
  - <sup>7</sup> Travel in London, Transport for London, 2009
  - <sup>8</sup> London Travel Report 2007, Transport for London, 2008
  - <sup>9</sup> London Travel Report 2006, Transport for London, 2007
  - <sup>10</sup> Cycling in London, Transport for London, October 2008.
  - <sup>11</sup> Cycling in London, Transport for London, October 2008.
  - <sup>12</sup> London Travel Report 2007, Transport for London, 2008.
  - <sup>13</sup> The National Cycle Network Route User Monitoring Report: to end of 2006, Sustrans, 2007.
  - <sup>14</sup> The National Cycle Network Route User Monitoring Report: to end of 2007, Sustrans, 2008.
  - <sup>15</sup> Analysis of police collision files for pedal cyclist fatalities in London, 2001 – 2006.
  - <sup>16</sup> Analysis of police collision files for pedal cyclist fatalities in London, 2001 – 2006.
  - <sup>17</sup> Effect of 20 mph traffic speed zones on road injuries in London, 1986-2006: controlled interrupted time series analysis, Grundy et al, British Medical Journal, Sep 2009.
  - <sup>18</sup> Breaking point: 20mph speed limits in London, London Assembly, April 2009.