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£20 solution to multi billion pound transport problem

Four out of five of your local journeys should be sustainable by 2020 to help UK out of recession says Sustrans

An innovative proposal from sustainable transport charity Sustrans could solve the UK's congestion, health and environment problems for the price of just £20 per household.

As the recession bites and the spending capacity of the public purse is stretched to the limit the charity is calling on UK governments to make smarter use of existing transport budgets to establish a UK-wide travel behaviour change programme. The programme, which has been successfully piloted in selected cities for the past nine years, de-bunks the myth that getting people to change the way they travel is difficult. Its results include reductions in car use by 10-14 per cent and notable increases in walking, cycling and public transport use.

By working directly with households, schools and workplaces it gives people alternatives to car use, saving 0.9 million tonnes of carbon per year, the equivalent of taking 300,000 cars off the road¹.

To bring the scheme to households in cities across the UK would cost £370 million. This is a fraction of the price we currently pay for the way we move around, the cost to the economy of congestion and obesity is set to top £34 billion per year by 2020². And its benefit to cost ratio is nearly 8:1, compared to many road-building schemes that have a ratio of 2:1 or less³.

The proposal is part of a call to action that Sustrans is making to UK governments to invest in doubling the number of journeys under five miles made by foot, bike and public transport to four out of five by 2020.

Peter Lipman, Sustrans Policy Director says: “A ‘perfect storm’ of massive cuts in public spending, rising congestion costs and soaring health bills from obesity could overwhelm transport priorities unless action is taken. Traffic levels and congestion are projected to continue rising over the next decade, meanwhile significant reductions in transport spending will place severe pressure on transport budgets and make large schemes unaffordable. We have already seen the cancellation of the £1bn M4 relief road in Wales due to lack of funds and so cheaper alternatives to large road building schemes are needed.

“But a different approach could make a radical difference we currently make two out of every five local journeys by bike, on foot and by public transport – we believe it is possible, and necessary, to double that figure to four out of five. And it is achievable as the majority of local car journeys are less than five miles. The solutions are there and cycling to school, walking to work, having affordable public transport are a start but we need governments to take action to make these options more widely available. What’s currently lacking is real political will and a sense of urgency and we believe that people would support their politicians since they want change too. Our research tells us that up to 95 per cent of those asked were in favour of transport policies that support walking, cycling and public transport even if these disadvantage the private car⁴”

Sustrans’ call to action (insert link to docs on website) outlines the ways to get more people walking, cycling and using public transport:

- Encourage people to change their travel behaviour
- Create safe, attractive walking and cycling conditions
- Increase public transport usage by improving and integrating services and reducing fares
- Ensure that planning policy and practice reduce the need to travel
- Reform taxation and increase spending on sustainable travel

Over the coming months the charity will be using its call to action to target decision makers in central and local governments across the UK.

Further information about Sustrans, including other news releases and detailed online route mapping, is available through our website: www.sustrans.org.uk

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NOTES

- 1 Based on average emissions of 207.5 g CO₂ per vehicle km, from Defra's (2007) Guidelines to GHG Conversion Factors for Company Reporting.
- 2 By 2020 the annual cost to the NHS of obesity will be £26 billion – (Foresight Tackling Obesities: Future Choices Project, Government Office for Science, 2007) and it is estimated by DfT's National Transport Model that eliminating existing congestion on the road network (relative to free flow conditions) would be worth some £7-8 billion of GDP per annum. (The Eddington Transport Study, DfT 2006)
- 3 The benefit to cost ratio is calculated by attributing a monetary value to a number of factors, from public health benefit (ie the cost saving of a healthier population), the savings to employers whose fitter workforce take less time off, and the time saved through shorter journeys, particularly during the school run peak periods. The costs include the investment costs of safe routes, maintenance expenditure, and losses to the Treasury that might result from tax revenue decreases due to reduced fuel sales as people switch from using their cars to walking and cycling.
- 4 Worcester – Sustainable Travel Demonstration Town Travel behaviour research. Final evaluation report for Worcestershire County Council March 2009
 - Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity. Its vision is a world in which people choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment. It is achieving this through innovative but practical solutions to the UK's transport challenges.
 - This year Sustrans is marking the fifteenth anniversary of the National Cycle Network. On 9 September 1995, an award from the Millennium Commission enabled Sustrans to embark on the first 2,500 miles of a 6,500 mile National Cycle Network. The Network now extends to just over 12,000 miles and carries one million walking and cycling journeys every day.
 - There are around 2,500 rangers helping to look after the National Cycle Network.