EVIDENCE BY THE TRANSPORT & HEALTH STUDY GROUP TO THE HEALTH SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The Transport & Health Study Group is the main public health organisation in the transport field. It is a network of health professionals, transport professionals and environmental or community organisations. It organises the Transport Special Interest Group of the Faculty of Public Health and it has published Health on the Move 2, the most comprehensive scientific account of the relationships between transport and health. It sponsors the International Journal of Transport & Health and provides the secretariat to PATH, a collaboration of the major public health organisations and transport organisations.

THSG became aware of this inquiry less than 48 hours before the closing date. We could have produced much better evidence given more time. We would be interested to know what steps were taken to acquaint transport organisations with the inquiry.

The promotion of active travel is one of the most effective ways to promote physical activity because it can be built into people's daily lives. There is evidence from around the world, reviewed in Health on the Move 2, that people who commute by walking or by cycle are healthier than people who commute by car, and that those who commute by public transport have rates intermediate between the two, because of the walk to the station or bus stop.
If physical activity were a drug then the range of its benefits on mental well being,mental illness, heart disease, obesity, diabetes and osteoporosis is such that no politician would dare withhold those benefits from the public.
At a time when the NHS struggles to cope with the pressures of mental illness, obesity and diabetes, it is financially irresponsible to fail to promote physical activity.
Transport has an important role in physical activity and to fully develop that role it is necessary to
- develop walkable neighbourhoods so that people can make short journeys on foot. American evidence has shown a 6lb difference in mean population weight (equivalent to a 1 per 1,000 difference in death rate) according simply to the pedestrian permeability of the street system
- develop cycle networks which allow people to make medium length journeys by cycle without mingling with heavy traffic on busy main roads
- promote the train/cycle combination as a transport mode competitive with the car for longer journeys.

MORE WALKABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS

The walkability of a neighbourhood is a combination of security, aesthetic attractiveness and the distance on foot between different facilities
Evidence from Atlanta has shown heart disease rates to be lower in mixed neighbourhoods where workplaces, housing and shops mingle rather than being widely separated. We have already referred to the American evidence on pedestrian- permeability. There is good evidence that people are encouraged to walk if routes are aesthetically attractive.
Security is also an important aspect of a walkable neighbourhood but in far too many situations the Secure by Design guidance is misinterpreted as requiring the closure of pedestrian linkages rather than as requiring the creation of secure and attractive routes which will attract people. Pedestrian traffic in streets is itself a security feature.
We strongly support the Living Streets concept where streets are not seen just as routes for vehicles but are primarily designed for pedestrian and cycle use and for community activity, with usage by vehicles being permitted but only as a lesser function. We think there should be a legal distinction between throughways which form the skeleton of the road system and streets/ quiet lanes which form its end linkages. In the latter there should be a universal 20mph speed limit and motor vehicular rights should, with a few exceptions, be for access only. Streets should be laid out with the emphasis on them being an attractive environment for walking and community use. There should be plantings (which could include communal fruit trees and vegetable plots), play areas and areas for socialising. There should be a direct cycle route but the carriageway should be merely the gaps between the obstacles. Car parking should be in marked bays, designed to contribute to the traffic calming effect of the street furniture by itself forming an additional obstacle.
This design, which has been very successful in Holland, would not only promote walking but it would also promote community interaction and strengthen community spirit, overcoming the effect observed in San Francisco by Appleyard & Lintell and in Bristol by Hart, that traffic in streets diminishes social networks.

CYCLE NETWORKS

There is evidence that fear about the safety of mingling with traffic is a major obstacle to people taking up cycling. These fears may well be misplaced - when account is taken of age and sex, and like for like comparisons are made between similar journeys, there does not seem to be a great difference in the risk of injury between cyclists, pedestrians and car users, except in young males for whom cycling is safer than driving.
Whether or not the fears are misplaced they are real and cycling out into heavy traffic is likely to remain an unattractive option for many people.
We believe therefore that it is necessary to construct cycle networks and we would urge that some of the resources recently committed to the road programme should be spent in this way.
In this connection we would point out that in a saturated road system there is suppressed demand for relocation which will within a few years fill any new road space and return congestion to previous levels. Construction of new roads to reduce congestion is therefore pointless and a waste of money. In contrast improving alternative modes of travel reduces congestion by raising the trade off point at which it becomes unacceptable. Pigou demonstrated this theoretically in the first half of the last century and Mogridge confirmed it with his empirical study of London traffic speeds over 30 years ago.
It would therefore be sensible to delete from the roads programme all schemes which are primarily congestion focused and transfer the resources to building cycle networks. This would be just as effective at reducing congestion whilst also producing benefits for health.

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the health of the population. It also manag
the Transport Special Interest Group of the
Faculty of Public Health.

We believe that the WHO tools for assessing the health benefits of walking and cycling could be used to justify health service investment in cycling.

THE TRAIN/ CYCLE COMBINATION

The combination of the cycle and the train is a mode of transport which has the potential to compete with the car. In Northern California the commuter rail operator Cal Train puts a cycle van on every train, two cycle vans on some, and has had to cope with the problem that they are often full. In Holland, Denmark and Germany stations have large well used cycle parking areas. In contrast cycle provision on railways in the UK is limited and symbolic and is resented by rail operators as a distraction from their main role.
An action plan is needed to promote this transport mode and in this connection we would draw the committee's attention to the following minute from PATH

14/14 PROMOTING THE TRAIN/CYCLE COMBINATION
There was considerable discussion of the negative attitude of the rail operators to the space occupied by cyclists and the way this failed to embrace the potential of the train/cycle combination as a mode of transport. Members expressed the view that there was no vision of the train/cycle combination as a distinct transport mode and that active travel policy and rail policy operated in silos with neither embracing this concept. Existing arrangements were seriously inadequate and yet capacity pressures were creating pressures for them to be even further restricted.

THSG reported that its AGM had adopted the following resolution

1. THSG believes that the train/cycle combination should be actively promoted as a distinct mode of transport which is a viable alternative to the car.
2. This could be implemented either by cycle carriage on trains or by a combination of cycle parking and cycle hire. Cycle parking alone will not suffice.
3. If the preferred model is to be cycle carriage this inevitably means the provision of cycle vans as part of a capacity expansion.
4. If the preferred model is to be cycle parking/cycle hire than a duty to provide satisfactory standards of cycle parking needs to be laid on station operators and a rail-linked national system of cycle hire needs to be established.
5. Development of policy in this area is restricted by silo thinking in which rail policy and active travel policy are pursued separately and this issue is treated as peripheral by each of them.
6. It may be worth exploring the idea that cycle carriage should be the off peak preferred mode and cycle parking/dual bikes for regular journeys/cycle hire could be the preferred commuting mode. This would mean that cycle vans could provide additional standing room in peak hours.
7. Although folding bicycles might have a short term role, they are too bulky to be the solution at scale.
8. This policy should be submitted to PATH.

Agreed to discuss further when DfT were present.

Regards

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