
Will slowing down traffic in built-up areas speed up public health?

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Background



- 20mph/30kph speed limits are becoming more widespread across the island
- Policy
 - Road safety
 - Sustainable travel
- Legislation
- Debate: limits or zones

Public health benefits: an overview



- Injuries
- Active travel
- Liveability
- Environmental pollution

Injuries

- A reduction in speed from 30mph to 20mph reduces the number of accidents and the severity of injuries. A recent synthesis of five systematic reviews concluded that 20mph zones and limits are effective in reducing accidents and injuries (Cairns et al 2014)
- Studies indicate that children, the elderly and those living in deprived communities are most vulnerable to road traffic injury

Active travel

- The environment becomes safer and more appealing for pedestrians and cyclists with ensuing health benefits of active travel and physical activity - Walking and cycling rates increased by 23% and 20.5% respectively following the introduction of 20mph limits in Bristol (City Council monitoring report 2012)
- Ireland's first Physical Report Card for Children – Active Travel (D)

Liveability

- Residential streets become safer places for children to engage in active outdoor play and more conducive to community and neighbour interaction. In Edinburgh, the proportion of older primary school children allowed to play unsupervised in the street outside their home rose from 31% to 66% following the introduction of 20mph speed limits (Turley 2013)

Environmental pollution

- A modal shift towards active travel would have a positive effect on air and noise quality
- Emissions are highest in slow moving traffic however traffic conditions, road design and driver behaviour influence this

Public health advocacy



Reducing the default speed limit in built-up areas: Highlighting the health benefits of 20mph

Position Statement:

Areas with slower vehicle speeds are associated with increased opportunities for walking and cycling. Taking into account the wide health benefits of physical activity, including protection against various risk factors of cardiovascular disease, the National Heart Forum supports a reduction in the default speed limit for built-up areas to 20 miles per hour (mph).

A National Heart Forum position statement supported by



Transport & health

Position statement

Background

Transport includes road, rail, water and air. This statement focuses on road transport as this is where the greatest opportunities for improving public health lie. Road transport includes the moving of people and goods via a range of means including private cars, public transport, freight vehicles, walking and cycling. Roads are not all solely used for transport but also as places for living, working and leisure, creating a complex system which both beneficial and deleterious effects on health can arise. Road transport provides access to opportunities for education, work, social contacts and leisure. It can facilitate physical activity as part of everyday life through walking and cycling, enabling people to maintain good health and to help prevent conditions including obesity, coronary disease, diabetes and some cancers.

Conversely, motorised road traffic threatens health both directly, through injury and pollution, and, more insidiously, by promoting inactivity, limiting independence, reducing greenhouse gases and disrupting social networks in heavily-trafficked streets.

Transport and planning policies can also be a barrier to good health, making it harder or more dangerous for people to be physically active and interfering with access to healthcare and other essential services. **Changes to transport policies at a national and local level have huge potential to improve the health of the population and reduce health inequalities.**

The current road transport system in the UK contributes to a number of health hazards and health inequalities, particularly in urban areas; poverty is strongly correlated with air pollution, noise and injuries. More disadvantaged areas tend to have a higher density of roads and traffic, leading to impaired air quality, higher noise levels and higher pollution rates. Transport can also influence access to education, employment, housing and green space – all important determinants of health and wellbeing. Social exclusion, due to dependence on public modes of transport where there is an infrequent or expensive service, adds to the inequitable impact of community severance, injuries and pollution.

What we think

The underpinning principle of a public health approach to tackling the complex health issues relating to transport should be a **major shift away from cars in favour of active travel: walking, cycling and public transport.** This would reduce the harms of the road transport system, enhance the benefits to individuals, society and the environment, and help reduce carbon. To achieve this, increasing proportions of the population would need to consider the most convenient, pleasant and affordable option for short-journey stages to be walking and cycling, and for longer-journey stages to be cycling and public transport use.

What we can all do

- Advocate for a **major shift towards walking, cycling and public transport.**
- Advocate for a **major shift away from cars.**
- Advocate for the reallocation of road space in urban areas away from parking and the movement of private vehicles towards people on foot, bicycle and public transport.
- Advocate for policies which discourage private car use in urban areas, eg. on-street parking restrictions and selective congestion charging.
- Advocate for 20mph limits and, where possible, 20mph design speeds for streets used by pedestrians and cyclists.
- Advocate for public transport which is accessible for all and integrated with other transport modes.

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FURTHER READING

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BRIEFING NOTE

TRANSPORT

Decisions made now on our transport system will determine our transport infrastructure for the next 20-50 years. Unfortunately most of those made so far commit us to continue spending mainly on an unsustainable roads system based mostly on using fossil fuels.

Investment in public transport per capita in Northern Ireland is less than half that in the other UK regions and in the Republic of Ireland. Recent investment has led to substantial increases in Metro and Ulsterbus passengers since 2005 and rail passengers on local Northern Ireland routes.

Domestic transport emissions in Northern Ireland now account for 25% of our total greenhouse gas emissions. A move away from reliance on personal hydrocarbon-fuelled cars may soon become an economic as well as an environmental necessity. Transport is the only sector that is utterly reliant on a single source of primary energy. The emission reductions required can only be achieved by promoting active and public transport and in the longer term through major co-ordinated changes to land-use policies.

Northern Ireland's transport policy requires revolution not evolution to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Government must show leadership, reconsider investment priorities, embrace new technology and promote behavioural change. Reducing the energy used should be a central aim of the new transport policy for clear economic and environmental benefits for all of Northern Ireland's people.

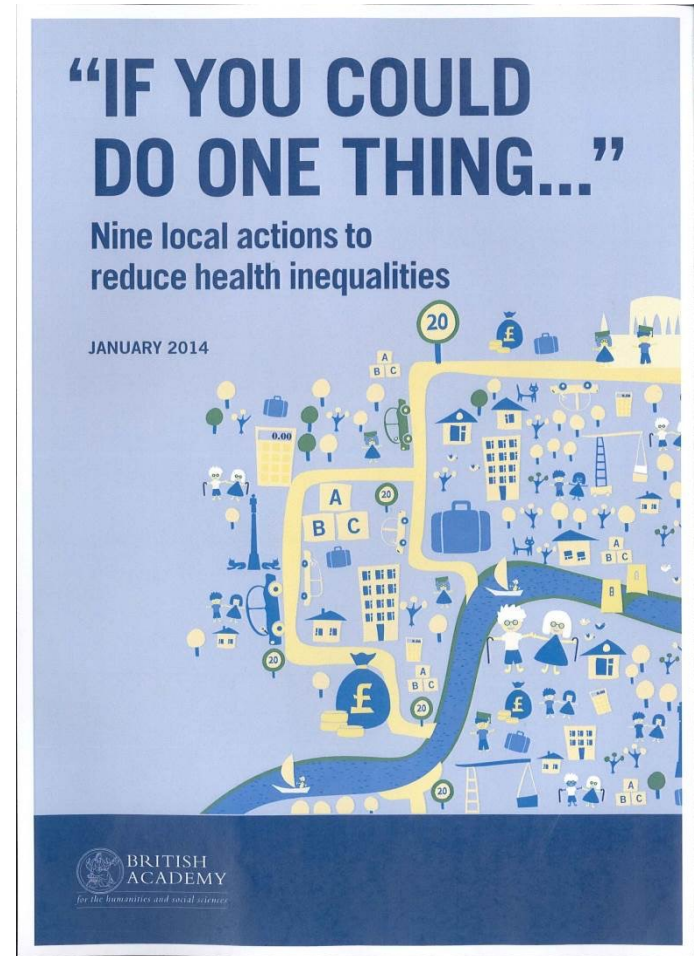
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Plan to eliminate the use of fossil fuels for transport by 2030.
- Provide the infrastructure to make most journeys possible by active/public transport (including rapid transit) and promote car sharing for other journeys.
- Introduce taxation schemes and a 20 mph urban speed limit to promote active/public transport and constrain or remove motor vehicles from residential areas.
- Ensure every child can travel safely to school by active or public transport and reduce risk exposure for vulnerable road users.
- Develop local goods and services to reduce freight transport needs.
- Set up transport nodes linked by fast, frequent, accessible and affordable public transport.
- Use vehicles powered by renewable energy and introduce 'intelligent' vehicles fit for future requirements.
- Use the Planning Service to design settlements around sustainable transport and local services.
- Promote working from home and technical solutions such as teleconferencing to minimise business travel.
- Enforce responsible and lawful use of the roads.

Action on health inequalities

Action 3: 20mph speed limits for cars in residential areas, by shops and schools

Introducing 'sign only' 20mph areas is relatively easy...changing perceptions of appropriate driving speeds will be a long-term challenge (Danny Dorling 2014)



Suggestions for action



- Leadership/ joint action
- Advocate for broader measures of effectiveness
- Better understanding of which interventions work best for various outcomes and different groups
- Changing the car dominant culture to one of shared space

Further information



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