

ACTIVE TRAVEL AND HEALTH



The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) has drawn together its learning on transport and health, with a specific focus on active travel. This term refers to all active forms of travel, including walking and cycling for all or part of a journey (for example, combined with public transport). Increasing active travel is important for health because it can help increase regular physical activity, manage weight and improve mental wellbeing. Less reliance on cars will also help improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions. Improving the walking environment and enabling more people to walk in their neighbourhood, can help increase social contact and build more connected communities. Active travel has been described as both a 'best buy' for transport investment and as a 'wonder drug' for health. It is frequently cited by health experts as a key part of any strategy to improve health.



Despite policies that support and advocate for more active travel almost all travel trends in Scotland are static or moving in the wrong direction in terms of increasing active travel and improving health. For example:

- Car use is increasing, and walking and public transport use have been, at best, static over the last ten years among both children and adults.
- Air pollution is a growing concern; this is a health risk for everyone but particularly for children, older people and those with existing respiratory problems.
- Scots are increasingly physically inactive and overweight or obese, which increases the likelihood of future ill health.
- Transport contributes between a quarter and a third of CO₂ emissions worldwide, playing a major role in climate change.

The factors that influence how people choose to travel include:

- safety concerns
- traffic speed
- how neighbourhoods are designed
- convenience, time efficiency and cost
- cultural and social norms.

The following actions are needed to increase the number of people who travel actively.

STRONG LEADERSHIP AND A SHIFT IN INVESTMENT



European cities similar to Glasgow, and starting from a similarly low active travel baseline, have developed joined-up, safe infrastructure for active, sustainable travel and achieved high levels of walking and cycling.

The key ingredients for success in increasing active travel are:

- strong visionary leadership (from politicians, civil servants and Council officers)
- sustained investment over several years and sometimes decades
- pedestrian and cycle-friendly zones which give greater priority over motorised transport, particularly private cars.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



In order to ensure that new active travel infrastructure meets the needs of local communities, it is important that there is early and proactive community engagement, provision of clear and accessible information and timely dialogue about local transport infrastructure plans. There is a compelling need to increase safe, active and sustainable travel, but plans should be jointly agreed with communities following a process of engagement and deliberation.

INTEGRATED INFRASTRUCTURE

Appropriate, affordable, convenient and connected infrastructure can make an important contribution to encouraging and enabling more people to use more active forms of transport more often, for all or part of their journey.

The highest levels of cycle and pedestrian commuting in Glasgow are found in the areas with the best active travel infrastructure, and where there are connections to other routes and public transport hubs.

One example is Glasgow's public bike hire scheme which has contributed to a rise in cycling in the city overall, with commuters forming a high proportion of users. Along with accessing bikes from hire stations across the city, bikes are also located at public transport hubs meaning users can easily combine cycling with public transport to complete their journey.



CULTURE AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE



What people consider to be 'normal' influences their transport choices and behaviours. High levels of car ownership and the belief that cars provide the most convenient and safe mode of travel contribute to a culture of car dominance and dependency. In a city like Glasgow where car ownership sits at around 50%, there is a risk that such a culture may influence planning decisions, further isolating and disadvantaging vulnerable people and communities with more limited access to cars.

Community engagement, underpinned by appropriate information, effective communication and education for road users should support the introduction of new initiatives intended to encourage transport choices and behaviours which rely less on private cars. This will, in time, influence what is considered 'normal' in terms of how we travel.

URBAN PLANNING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD DESIGN

Planning, neighbourhood design and transport systems which prioritise walking and cycling will improve health by increasing safety and encouraging more physical activity, reducing road traffic accidents, improving air quality, and by supporting stronger communities where people can safely and easily access local amenities with more opportunities to interact with each other.

We know that safety concerns play a major role in discouraging people from walking or cycling more. 20mph zones and limits can be effective in reducing accidents and injuries, traffic speed and volume, as well as improving perceptions of safety and so increasing active modes of travel.



The evidence and actions highlighted in this leaflet are discussed in detail in the 2017 GCPH publication “**Active travel in Glasgow: what we’ve learned so far**”. This report and other GCPH publications are available on the GCPH website. Information about the GoWell research and learning programme, including publications, is available on the GoWell website.

Active travel and health

Increasing the number of journeys that are made actively and reducing the number made by private cars will have important health and environmental benefits. Encouragement and support for people to change their behaviour (for example through workplace and school travel plans, campaigns, public transport information and marketing, car sharing, and car clubs) are important in helping to change views and influence choices, but there is limited evidence for the effectiveness of these ‘soft measures’ alone. To be effective, such initiatives need to be introduced alongside – and not instead of – a clear and consistent vision, strong leadership, adequate investment, supportive policy, and planning and infrastructure developments which recognise and address the barriers to increasing active travel. These should also be accompanied by early and ongoing community engagement which allows accurate information to be shared in a timely way with the communities involved, and local concerns to be expressed, discussed and considered as part of planning processes.



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