

North West of England Public Health Community  
Position Paper  
Response to Consultation on the Future of Transport  
March 2009

The European Commission opened an invitation for stakeholders to express their views on the future of transport. This response is supported by representatives working on public health within the North West of England, in particular, primary care trusts, local authorities, NHS trusts and wider health organisations.

The North West of England public health community appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the future of transport. We believe that this consultation can set the course for future transport policies and actions to truly reflect the health needs and challenges of EU citizens.

We believe that the local and regional dimensions are vital to the practical delivery of EU priorities, as this is often where the organisation and delivery of public services occur. Any European communication should therefore be relevant, understandable and transparent to the regional level. It should also demonstrate that this key audience has been listened to. We believe that the debate on the future of European transport should seek to add value, helping and supporting regions and local communities to improve their own health.

## 1. The North West of England

The North West of England is a diverse region with a population of over 7 million people, the third most populated English Government Office region. The region as a whole accounts for over 11% of employment and over 10% of United Kingdom GDP. The North West has five distinctive sub-regions, Cheshire, Merseyside, Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester.

Unfortunately, the health of the European citizens living in the North West is poor in comparison with other regions in both the UK and parts of Europe. The North West is currently tackling significant health challenges such as heart disease, obesity, cancer, teenage pregnancies, health and social inequity within the region and the affects of excessive drinking.

The North West of England public health community has a history of European engagement, having responded to many EU consultations where public health and health systems have a role to play, including: 'Promoting healthy diets and physical activity' consultation in December 2005, 'Community Action on health services' in January 2007; the European Health Strategy consultation in February 2007; the 'Adapting to Climate Change' consultation in November 2007 and the Consultation on 'Reforming the Budget, Changing Europe' in April 2008; DG SANCO Annual Work Plan 2009 in September 2008.

Our response to the future of transport shall be presented in the following way: First, we would like to explain why we believe transport and health are interlinked; then we shall highlight some of the specific links between transport and health; before concluding with recommendations for the European Commission on the future of transport.

## 2. Why transport is important to health?

Transport is undoubtedly an important factor in determining population health; a fact that needs to be taken into serious consideration at the European level. The health implications of transport are summarised well in the following table:

Health Promoting Implications of Transport	Health Damaging Implications of Transport
Facilitates access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Shops</li> <li>• Recreation</li> <li>• Social support networks</li> <li>• Health services</li> <li>• Countryside</li> </ul>	Can provide inequitable distribution of access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Shops</li> <li>• Recreation</li> <li>• Social support networks</li> <li>• Health services</li> <li>• Countryside</li> </ul>
Recreation	Road Traffic Accidents
Exercise	Noise
	Stress and anxiety
	Exposure to Pollutants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carbon monoxide</li> <li>• Nitrogen oxides</li> <li>• Hydrocarbons</li> <li>• Ozone</li> <li>• Carbon dioxide</li> </ul>

The table clearly shows that there are positive and negative arguments to consider when debating the future of transport. Health damaging implications of transport can out-weigh the health promoting aspects of transport if the systems and policies are not well thought through. For the benefit of Europe, its businesses and its citizens, we need to ensure that in future reality this does not happen. Health promoting transport policy can significantly contribute to a healthier European workforce, which in turn facilitates economic prosperity.

We would like to see:

- Transport decision makers having a greater awareness of the health implications of transport policy;

- The consideration of health implications of transport playing a larger part in determining transport policy;
- Future transport policy playing a larger health promoting role.

### 3. What are some of the specific links between transport and health?

We would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to the following important links between four transport and health specific issues, to support our call for the consideration of health implications to play a larger part in determining transport policy. These specific issues are:

- Ø Transport, climate change and health;
- Ø Transport and obesity;
- Ø Transport and mental health;
- Ø Transport and children's' health.

#### 3.1. Transport, climate change and health

The close correlation between transport and climate change is well established, with transport estimated at contributing approximately 26% to Green House Gases (GHGs). We would like to emphasise that if climate change policy fails, it will be health professionals who will be in the front line to deal with the consequences. The direct health affects of climate change such as an increase in vector-borne diseases, reduction in air quality, and increased allergies are also well understood. However, the indirect health effects of climate change are less understood and acknowledged but are no less important. In fact, the indirect health effects could potentially be more severe than the direct health effects that we currently know about.

We would like to see:

- Strong European political commitment to reduce GHGs through various measures including the decarbonisation of transport;
- Strong synergies between future European transport policy and climate change targets;
- European funds available to research into clean energy technological solutions and to facilitate the improvement of Member State's infrastructure;
- Quick transition of research results in to clean and energy efficient technologies into the private sector;
- Incentives for the use of clean, energy efficient technologies;
- Promotion of joint green procurement;
- Increased number of eco-driving instructors to help establish good habits in new drivers.

#### 3.2 Transport and obesity

Transport is playing a major role in the development of the obesity epidemic through the declining levels of physically active transport modes of walking and cycling. European citizens need to need to be encouraged to take alternative modes of transport to the car. American evidence has shown that the pedestrian permeability of

a street design can have an influence of 6 lbs on the average weight for the population living in that street design, advice that has been endorsed by the UK Department for Transport in its guidance 'Manual for Streets'. However, if the uptake of alternative methods of transport is to be successful, improved infrastructure and the issue of personal safety, especially in the evenings, will be essential.

Would like to see:

- An increase in the promotion and uptake of walking and cycling as a mode of transport;
- Improved road safety measures (such as separate cycle lanes);
- Improved transport safety requirements.

### 3.3. Transport and mental health

Stress and 'road rage' are a common result of traffic congestion which adversely affect drivers mental health and place pedestrians physical health at an increased risk. Traffic congestion will only fall when there are better alternatives to driving by car, both in terms of price and speed. 'Labelling' schemes are often envisaged as a mean to reduce congestion, especially in urban areas. We would like add a word of caution here, as in the experience of the North West of England, labelling schemes have had limited success in conjuring up commitment amongst local and transport authorities, as they are often viewed as undesired, extra work.

We would like to see:

- Improved public transport networks both within and between Member States;
- Cheaper public transport networks both within and between Member States;
- A reduced number of cars on European roads (which could be aided by the promotion of personal economic benefits);
- Transport planning to encourage walking and cycling.

### 3.4. Transport and children's health

Cars create a sense of danger that has led to a considerable reduction in children's independent play. There is also the physical danger of road traffic accidents which exists for both children and adults.

We would like to see:

- Increased driver awareness of their potential to harm through speed.

## 4. Examples of transport and health associated good practice

1. Transport and Health Study Group (UK). The Transport and Health Study Group is an independent scientific society set up to study the links between transport and health and to promote a healthy transport system. It is predominantly a UK body but is at an early stage of expanding into a European body. Link: <http://www.stockport.nhs.uk/thsg/>

2. Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme. Link: <http://www.thepep.org/en/welcome.htm>

## 5. Recommendations for the European Commission

We would like to recommend the European Commission:

- To facilitate improving road infrastructure and clean energy technologies through relevant European funding programmes.
- To continue dialogue with all stakeholders to work together on the issue of the future of transport;
- To collate, analyse and publicise EU examples of good practise of health promoting implications of transport;
- To create strong synergies between European future transport and climate change policy;
- To reduce the number of cars on European roads, promoting walking and cycling as alternative modes of transport.
- To promote the train/cycle combination as an alternative to the car and in that context to promote a European network of cycle-carrying passenger rail services and linking cycle-carrying express bus services reaching to within cycling distance of all parts of Europe.