

Infrastructure for a physically active nation

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Physical inactivity is estimated to cause 17% of deaths¹ and costs the nation £20 billion per year². The government ambition set out in “*Moving More, Living More*” is for a more physically active nation with all the potential health, social and economic benefits this can provide³. National physical activity and transport surveys provide clear evidence that transport is one of the most important sources of physical activity for both adults and children⁴. UK policy endorses that transport should assume physical activity delivery as a primary objective⁵.

UK levels of physical activity are low for adults and children⁶. This disproportionately affects women and girls. For example, there are currently over 10 million adult women in England alone who do not achieve the national physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week⁷. Gender inequity is evident across physical activity settings, socio-economic categories and age⁸, indicating that a gendered approach to facilitating physical activity is necessary to equally include women. As such, **walking and cycling infrastructure must be designed specifically to meet women’s needs present and future as walking is their single most important source of physical activity.**

Pedestrian and cyclist safety in England is poor in both absolute and relative terms. The rate of killed or seriously injured per billion miles is almost 20 times higher for pedestrians than car occupants (484 vs. 25 respectively) and 43 times higher for cyclists than car occupants (1080 vs. 25 respectively)⁹. These rates are 3 to 10 times higher than absolute traffic injury rates of European counterparts such as Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, and up to 19 times higher when comparing rates for children¹⁰. Even allowing for the methodological limitations of traffic injury rates per distance travelled, this international data clearly suggests that our national traffic safety ambitions can be improved. Many cities across the world are adopting **zero accident targets for pedestrians.**

The economic case for infrastructure investment can not be made effectively without considering impacts on health. This is equally true for all areas of England including the north.

To this end, the following actions should be embedded as part of the national infrastructure strategy.

- 1) The inclusion of walking and cycling infrastructure within the infrastructure plans at a scale sufficient to facilitate measurable population increases in physical activity year-on-year in line with UK policy and the national physical activity ambition and Chief Medical Officers' national physical activity recommendations for both adults and children.
- 2) Ensuring that design and access to new walking and cycling infrastructure is open to currently underserved groups, particularly women and girls.
- 3) New planned infrastructure will deliver improvement in safety for pedestrians and cyclists measured in absolute terms as killed or injury per distance travelled, with a progressive goal towards zero deaths and serious injury for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 4) Further development of economic costs for different forms of travel in relation to economic, societal, climate and health benefits. This should include assessment of impacts on health, health costs, productivity, local spending, congestion, accidents, and air pollution.

This is an incredible opportunity to put physical activity and the nation's health at the heart of this national infrastructure investment strategy. This is the type of joined-up, innovative response widely recognised as necessary to increase population levels of physical activity and reduce disease risk both of which contribute directly to economic prosperity.

REFERENCES

¹ Global Physical Activity Observatory (2016) Country card England. Available at: <http://www.globalphysicalactivityobservatory.com/card/?country=EN> (Accessed: 5 January, 2016).

² Cabinet Office (2014) *Moving More, Living More Annexes*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Based on data from national physical activity surveys: Active People Survey 7/8 and 8, Health Survey for England 2012, National Travel Survey 2013, National Census 2011.

⁵ Cabinet Office (2014) *Moving More, Living More Annexes*
Cabinet Office (2014b) *Inspired by 2012: The legacy from the Olympic and Paralympic Games*; Department of Health (2011) *Start active, stay active: a report on physical activity for health from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers*; Department of Health (2013) *Living Well for Longer: A call to action to reduce avoidable premature mortality*; Department of Health (2015b) *Living Well for Longer: One year on*; Department for Transport (2013) *Action for Roads: A network for the 21st century*; Department for Transport (2013b) *Briefing on the Government's ambition for cycling*; Department for Transport (2014b) *Door to Door Action Plan: Progress Report*; HM Treasury (2014) *National Infrastructure Plan*; NICE (2015) *Physical activity overview*; Public Health England (2014). *Everybody active, every day: An evidence-based approach to physical activity*.

⁶ Based on data from national physical activity surveys, see reference 4 and: Cooper, A., Goodman, A., Page, A., *et al.* (2015) 'Objectively measured physical activity and sedentary time in youth: the International children's accelerometry database (ICAD)', *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 12(113). DOI: 10.1186/s12966-0150274-5.

⁷ Calculated as 22,350,450 adult women ≥ 16 year * 45% not accumulating the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week = 10,057,703. Data for population in England from Office for National Statistics (2013); Data for prevalence of adult women not meeting the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines from the Health Survey for England 2012.

⁸ Consistent across national physical activity surveys, see reference 4.

⁹ Department for Transport (2015) 'Relative risk of different forms of transport, Great Britain: 2014, Table RAS30070.

¹⁰ DTU Transport (2012) *Risiko i trafikken*; Official Statistics Sweden (2014) *Road Traffic Injuries*; Official Statistics Sweden (2014b) *The Swedish national travel survey 2012–2013*; SWOV (2013) *Fact sheet: risk in traffic*; Wiklund, M. (2015).