



## Faculty of Public Health Transport Special Interest Group: Public Transport Policy Brief June 2024

The UK Faculty of Public Health (FPH) sets out a vision, which includes as a priority: 'Promote policies and programmes that improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities and tackle health inequalities.' Transport policies have wide impacts on health and health inequalities. This policy brief is one of a series developed by the FPH Transport Special Interest Group (SIG) that describes actions needed to ensure that transport policies and practice promote positive health and reduced health inequalities in the UK. The series of policy briefs is available [here](#).

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### Public Transport

#### Public transport matters for health

A comprehensive, reliable, affordable, accessible and safe public transport system is an important building block of health. Public transport is essential for many people to access employment, education, retail, leisure, family and friends, healthcare and other services that they need for good health<sup>1</sup>. It also has wider health benefits:

- Public transport users can gain a meaningful amount of physical activity by walking or cycling to stops or stations.<sup>2</sup> Bus pass holders are more physically active and less likely to be obese.<sup>3</sup>
- Public transport use is associated with reduced isolation and loneliness, particularly for older people<sup>4</sup>, and increased sense of independence for young people.<sup>5</sup>
- Public transport use contributes to significantly less air pollution, noise pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, congestion and collisions per passenger than private car<sup>6</sup>.
- Reliable public transport is needed to support modal shift away from car use for longer journeys.

#### Public transport and health inequalities

Inequalities in access to public transport contribute to transport poverty and health inequalities. Services in rural areas are often less comprehensive and less frequent<sup>7</sup> but some urban areas may also lack frequent services<sup>8</sup>. This can lead to 'forced car ownership' when people have to run a car and may suffer financial hardship as a result. Disabled adults are more likely to use a bus than non-disabled adults, but report that public transport is often

not accessible to meet their needs<sup>9</sup>. People on low incomes can find the cost of public transport to be a barrier<sup>10</sup>. Women and minority groups report feeling unsafe especially at night when stops and stations are dark<sup>11</sup>. A comprehensive network and integrated ticketing are important to support 'trip chaining' when people travel to more than one destination in one journey, which particularly affects women<sup>12</sup>.

## FPH policy recommendations

These recommendations are for **national and local government, transport authorities and transport operators**.

### Transport strategy

- Ensure stronger strategic management of the public transport system to recognise both direct and indirect health, social and economic benefits, which justify financial investments and subsidies.
- Promote public transport (particularly zero tailpipe emission buses) as a sustainable transport option that can contribute to addressing the climate emergency.
- Increase the profile of buses as a lever for addressing inequalities at scale (on a population level), disproportionately benefiting groups such as women, older adults, people with disabilities, people on low incomes, and young people.
- Ensure transport policies and strategies identify health and equity as strategic objectives and are assessed for their likely impacts on health, equity and sustainability.

### Investment and funding

- Invest in public and community transport to provide a comprehensive network with frequent, fast, punctual and reliable services connecting residential and key destinations.
- Provide concessionary fares for populations likely to face financial barriers.

### Communication and engagement

- Involve communities, particularly people at high risk of transport poverty, in identifying priority areas for investment and where appropriate co-producing solutions.
- Improve the image of buses and tackle harmful stereotypes and stigma.
- Encourage employers to offer public transport offers within employee benefit schemes.

### Accessibility and environment

- Ensure walkable and cyclable routes to stops and stations and make this mandatory in planning conditions for new developments.
- Ensure stops and stations are accessible, comfortable, well-lit and secure
- Ensure accessibility to meet needs of people with disabilities, both visible and invisible.
- Ensure timetables and information about services are up to date and accessible in digital and physical formats.
- Develop protocols and training of public transport staff to respond to antisocial behaviour and improve safety.

## **Integration**

- Integrate across modes and operators, including integration of timetables, ticketing and information to make it easier to plan and undertake journeys.
- Promote the train/bike combination as a distinct mode

## **The health sector has a role to:**

- Prioritise and encourage public transport access to health facilities
- Ensure staff travel policies and reimbursement encourage public transport use
- Advocate for transport policies that support health
- Support transport partners to apply health impact assessment to their strategies, policies and plans.

## References

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