



Faculty of Public Health Transport Special Interest Group: Policy Brief

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 on the [Faculty website](#).

September 2024

Transport, Spatial Planning and Health

Background

Transport and spatial planning policies can be either a powerful tool to influence good health or a barrier to good health.

Transport systems in the UK contribute to a number of health hazards and health inequalities in both urban, rural and coastal areas. Poverty is strongly correlated with air pollution, noise and road collisions with disadvantage linked with higher density of roads and traffic, poor air quality, higher noise levels and collisions.ⁱ Vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, people with mental disability or long-term illnesses are also more exposed to health-related externalities of the transport system.ⁱⁱ

However, transport and spatial planning can be powerful tools for improving the conditions that influence health. Using these tools effectively requires engagement with both the technical aspects of planning, as well as more integrated community development approaches, such as placemaking, that promote active travel and well-connected places.ⁱⁱⁱ Active travel is beneficial for people’s physical and mental health and wellbeing. It increases physical activity and reduces the risk of numerous diseases, while reducing the number of cars on the road and associated health hazards.^{iv}

A health promoting transport system is available, reliable, affordable, accessible and safe, allowing people to meet their daily needs and provide a good quality of life.^v



What we think

The underpinning principle of public health approach to tackling the complex health issues relating to transport systems should be a major shift away from single car use to sustainable mobility networks which prioritise **intermodal walk-bike-bus-train networks and places that are favourable to car-free living for all**. This would reduce the harms of the road transport system; support individuals, society and the environment; help reduce carbon and improve air quality, road safety, increase social participation and access to services. Transport and spatial planning presents an opportunity to create transport systems and places that promote health.

What we can do

- Advocate for car-free living through intermodal walk-bike-bus / train transport systems and places
- Advocate for transport infrastructure spatial planners to move away from thinking “car” towards a future that is train, bus, cycle and foot
- Advocate for spatial planners to make complete, compact and inclusive neighbourhoods with pedestrian-permeable street design, good cycle routes and aesthetically attractive pedestrian routes through them
- Advocate for facilities which enable and encourage active travel, such as drinking fountains and secure cycle storage, to be routinely provided as part of transport infrastructure
- Advocate building resilience into transport infrastructure against climate change including enhanced green infrastructure such as tree cover and living bus-stops
- Advocate for local transport plans to address road safety by area-wide 20mph speed limits in residential areas and at accident black spots on main roads
- Advocate for inclusive transport systems with consideration for an ageing population and those with mobility challenges
- Advocate for Health Impact Assessment within transport and spatial planning policies
- Advocate for placemaking and community engagement approaches to develop and review local strategies, policies and plans, particularly in relation to contested space



References

- ⁱ Campaign for Better Transport: Transport and Poverty: A Literature Review
- ⁱⁱ UK Gov Office for Science: 2019. Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System
- ⁱⁱⁱ Project for Public Spaces. 2020. Placemaking: What If We Built Our Cities Around Places?
- ^{iv} Public Health England, 2018. Cycling and walking for individual and population health benefits: a rapid evidence review
- ^v Public Health Scotland 2024. Transport poverty: a public health issue

Further Reading

[Transport and Health Science Group](#)

[NICE: Physical activity and the environment](#)

[NICE: Air pollution: outdoor air quality and health](#)

[NICE: Physical activity: Walking and Cycling](#)

[Transport related social exclusion](#)

[Spatial Planning for Health](#)