



# Healthy Futures

#5

## Sustainable Transport & Active Travel

*“The NHS can make a significant contribution to tackling the public health challenges of obesity and climate change by promoting active travel and reducing dependency on the car by encouraging people to travel by bicycle, on foot, or by public transport.”*

Caroline Flint MP, Minister of State for Public Health

**Increasing car use is one of the main reasons for the decline in physical activity and associated health problems in the population.** Almost one in 20 journeys in the UK are associated with the NHS and 83% of these take place by car or van. Transport is responsible for a third of our greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to climate change. Climate change is beginning to reveal its impacts on our health: through regular extreme weather events, increased risk of flooding, potential impacts on food production, increased spread of communicable disease and potentially the social and economic implications of global recession.

**As a good corporate citizen, the NHS can lead by example, by encouraging staff and visitors to get out of cars and on to bikes and public transport.** By supporting more active lifestyles and reducing air pollution, the NHS can promote a healthier environment, workforce and population and make a big contribution in the battle to reduce health inequalities.

This publication is the fifth in a series that explores the NHS contribution to sustainable development. It looks at how and why the NHS should promote sustainable transport options that benefit our health and environment.

# What's in it for the NHS?



*"The NHS needs to show some real leadership on travel issues. Reducing the volume of traffic by encouraging public transport and active travel represents an important step towards creating a more sustainable NHS."*

**Jonathon Porritt**  
Chairman, Sustainable Development Commission

Staff at **Nottingham City Hospital** can hire bikes for £2.50 per week and the hospital has introduced free bus services within and between different hospital sites in the city. They estimate that the introduction of the bus service resulted in a £150,000 saving in taxi journeys in just four months of operation.

**East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust** introduced free Health Hopper buses between sites and has arranged a discount scheme with a local bus company for hospital staff. They also employed a transport co-ordinator who managed to save the Trust over £50,000 in taxis and courier services in the first year.

**North Bristol NHS Trust** hired consultants to find sustainable ways to improve its patient transport service. Using analytical and logistical expertise, they have improved the quality and reliability of the service, reducing vehicle movements by 15%. This saved the Trust over £240,000 in the first six months, making the project self-funding within a year.

**The NHS White Paper, *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say*** presents a vision of health services that are delivered closer to where people live and are available at times which fit in with modern lifestyles. There will be investments in primary care, including new community hospitals and walk-in centres. With 90% of

**Sustainable transport and physical activity are good for staff and great for business in the NHS. People who regularly engage in physical activity are healthier, fitter and cope better with daily stress, making them more productive.**

The healthcare environment will benefit too; many NHS sites are clogged with traffic and have poor air quality at busy times of the day, which is not conducive to well-being and patient recovery. Providing good quality public transport, alongside active travel options will go a long way to ensuring that hospitals become healthy places. Parking management should focus on the needs of the most vulnerable who have the least choice about how to travel. It may even be possible to free up car parking space to provide health enhancing green spaces, which were once a common feature of hospitals. Sustainable transport saves money too. As the price of fuel rises, investing in measures that reduce unnecessary travel can bring big cost savings in a remarkably short time, as our case studies show.

## THE Transport and the NHS FACTS

- NHS staff, patients and visitors travel 25 billion passenger km per year. Visitors account for 70% of this, patients 20% and staff 5%.
- 59% of the poorest 20% of households in the UK have no access to a car and therefore rely on other forms of transport to access NHS facilities.
- 1.4 million people missed, turned down or chose not to seek medical help due to transport difficulties in the space of one year.
- Physical inactivity costs the NHS £10.9 billion per year.
- Around a third of space at new NHS hospitals is allocated to car parking.
- Over 3,000 people are killed and 270,000 are injured on Britain's roads each year. This costs the NHS over £500 million per year.

NHS activity taking place in primary care this provides an opportunity to ensure that facilities are developed with sustainability in mind. If NHS organisations make active travel and public transport a priority when considering where to locate new services, this will help to ensure that new facilities are good for the long-

term health of the population. **Ashton, Leigh and Wigan PCT** obtained a grant from the Energy Saving Trust to publish a series of leaflets promoting 'Healthy Ways' to access their new LIFT health centres, and providing information about how to reach them by bus, train, bike and on foot.

# What can you do to promote active travel?

*"The NHS is a car-dependent organisation that could do much more to lead a change towards cleaner and more active ways of travelling."*

**Mike Farrar**, Chief Executive,  
North West Strategic Health Authority



*"NHS management should show real leadership and tackle its car-dependency now, by promoting physically active transport and making it easy for people to access health services without the need of a car."*

**John Grimshaw**  
Chief Executive, Sustrans

Travel plans are an important way to make sustainable transport policies work. Here are some things to include:

- On-site walking and cycling paths that are safe and clearly signposted
- Financial incentives to use public transport
- Parking schemes that give priority based on need
- Accurate information about active travel and public transport
- Rewarding staff who travel actively.

The best travel plans go further and include new walking and cycling routes to the sites, dedicated bus services, car

share schemes, and the employment of a transport coordinator to find ways of minimising unnecessary travel and saving money.

Some private sector companies have been even more adventurous. Pfizer encourages staff and visitors to car-share, walk or cycle to their sites. They even pay staff who don't bring a car to work up to £5 per day and have worked with Sustrans to provide an eight mile cycle route.

NHS organisations can develop similar links with organisations like Sustrans to ensure new facilities are as accessible as possible to cyclists and pedestrians.

## Our ticking time bomb

Obesity levels have risen by 38% since 2003. There is a new sense of urgency about the need to increase activity levels across the population. Our obesity problem today is likely to become our chronic disease problem in the future, placing a massive burden on the NHS and the economy at a time when our population will be ageing. The Government has issued a physical activity action plan, which proposes a 'culture shift' to change the physical landscape and provide an environment that helps people to develop active lifestyles. The NHS can lead that culture shift.

## THE FACTS Climate change and air pollution

- If current greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced, global temperatures could rise by almost 6°C this century.
- This will have a devastating impact on the planet and threaten the health and survival of people all over the world.
- People in the UK lose on average eight months from their life expectancy due to air pollution.
- During 2006 we have seen the hottest months in July and September ever recorded in the UK.
- The fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK is transport.
- There are an estimated 10,500 respiratory hospital admissions in urban areas each year due to emissions from fuel burning in transport and industry, costing the NHS over £17 million.

*"Physical activity must be one of the most undervalued interventions to improve public health."*

**Sir Liam Donaldson**  
Chief Medical Officer



**Addenbrooke's Hospital** is the largest generator of traffic in Cambridgeshire and has one of the best travel plans to go with it. At peak times 60 buses stop at Addenbrooke's each hour and 1,300 cycle spaces are provided. The Trust offers interest-free loans for buying bikes, has 16 pool cars, a car-share scheme and offers discounted bus and train tickets. Car park fees for staff will soon be linked to the cost of a return bus ticket to ensure that public transport is cheapest. Car use has

fallen from 60% to 42% since 1999. Bus use has gone up from 12% to 23%, and 25% of staff now cycle to work.

**University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust** is offering incentives to encourage staff to cycle, walk or use public transport. These include installing new secure cycle storage and changing facilities as well as offering a 50% discount on annual bus/rail travel passes for staff who are prepared give up a car parking permit.

# Resources to help you make a difference

## **NHS Good Corporate Citizenship Model**

A toolkit that helps NHS organisations identify, assess and improve their contribution to good corporate citizenship.

[www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk](http://www.corporatecitizen.nhs.uk)

## **Sustrans Active Travel**

Publishes lots of information on a wide range of active travel initiatives.

[www.activetravel.org.uk](http://www.activetravel.org.uk)

## **Spokes – the NHS Cycling Network**

Informal network for NHS staff who cycle to work or use a bicycle for work purposes.

[www.networks.nhs.uk/spokes](http://www.networks.nhs.uk/spokes)

## **Making the case:**

### **Improving health through transport**

Identifies the policy drivers behind more sustainable travel plus advice and case studies on taking action.

[www.nice.org.uk/page.aspx?o=503416](http://www.nice.org.uk/page.aspx?o=503416)

## **Energy Saving Trust Transport Advice Service**

A government funded programme that provides free advice on travel plans and transport needs. Offers up to five days of free site specific travel plan advice to employers in England.

**Helpline: 0845 602 1425**

[www.transportenergy.org.uk/tools/publications](http://www.transportenergy.org.uk/tools/publications)

## **Sustainable Travel**

Department for Transport's advice for employers on reducing car use.

[www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft\\_susttravel/documents/sectionhomepage/dft\\_susttravel\\_page\\_hcsp](http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_susttravel/documents/sectionhomepage/dft_susttravel_page_hcsp)

## **Transport and Health Study Group**

An independent society which studies the links between transport and health and promotes a healthy transport system.

[www.nhs.uk/transportandhealth](http://www.nhs.uk/transportandhealth)

## **Living Streets**

Campaigns and runs practical projects to create safe, vibrant and healthy streets.

[www.livingstreets.org.uk](http://www.livingstreets.org.uk)

## **The Association for Commuter Transport**

A network that helps organisations realise the potential of travel plans.

[www.act-uk.com](http://www.act-uk.com)

## **CTC**

Is the UK's national cyclists' organisation, offering a range of resources to enhance cycling opportunities including cycling to work.

[www.ctc.org.uk](http://www.ctc.org.uk)

## **Cycling England**

National body coordinating the development of cycling in England.

[www.cyclingengland.co.uk](http://www.cyclingengland.co.uk)

## **National TravelWise Association**

A network of organisations working in partnership to promote healthy and sustainable transport.

[www.travelwise.org.uk](http://www.travelwise.org.uk)

## **Transport 2000**

Campaigns to reduce the negative impacts of transport by encouraging less use of cars and more use of public transport and active travel.

[www.transport2000.org.uk](http://www.transport2000.org.uk)

For further information about the relationship between transport and health, download a copy of the Sustainable Development Commission's report on the *Health Impacts of Unsustainable Transport* [www.sd-commission.org.uk/health](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/health)

The Sustainable Development Commission's Healthy Futures project, funded by the Department of Health, helps the NHS to maximise its contribution to the health of individuals, communities and the environment. For more information visit [www.sd-commission.org.uk/health](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/health). If you are involved in sustainable development in the NHS, or want to be, please e-mail [larissa.lockwood@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:larissa.lockwood@sd-commission.org.uk) or [geoffrey.barnes@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:geoffrey.barnes@sd-commission.org.uk)