



Transport and Health Policy Statement

The Public Health Association of New Zealand supports sustainable transport that promotes health. In particular, we support initiatives that increase use of active and public transport; decrease private motor vehicle use; and decrease injuries, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. We urge central and local government to be boldly innovative, using the best available evidence to develop transport policies and infrastructure that are good for the wellbeing of people, the environment, and the economy.

Overview

The choices that societies make about transport have profound effects on health.

On the positive side, advantages of well-designed transport systems include:

- Transport systems that are available, accessible and affordable enable citizens to engage in work, education, community and leisure activities that are essential for a healthy and meaningful life⁽¹⁾
- Active transport (walking and cycling) provides daily physical activity that improves health, reduces cancer risk, and protects against cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression and many other conditions. It also helps people to maintain a healthy weight.⁽²⁾ Active transport generally improves equity by reducing costs, for individuals and families, as well as the public purse.

There are negative impacts of the current New Zealand transport system, including:

- Over 12,000 New Zealanders are killed or injured every year in traffic crashes.⁽³⁾ Rates of road traffic deaths have recently been increasing despite measures such as improved vehicle and road design, alcohol and speed legislation and enforcement
- Hundreds more die prematurely or suffer illness due to vehicle exhaust fumes⁽⁴⁾
- Noise and vibration from heavy traffic reduce quality of life and increase the risk of hypertension and cardiovascular disease⁽⁵⁾
- Lack of affordable transport options can reduce people's life chances, and affect their health and quality of life⁽¹⁾
- The social connectedness of neighbourhoods is reduced by heavy traffic and car reliance⁽⁶⁾
- Transport infrastructure and road traffic can be barriers to mobility and this affects people's wellbeing due to delays, the effort required to find and use safer crossing areas, perceived danger, exposure to noise and air pollution, visual intrusion and loss of sense of place⁽⁷⁾
- According to an OECD 2017 report, New Zealand has the highest car ownership in the world.⁽⁸⁾ Greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles are a major contributor to climate change, making up about 20% of total emissions in New Zealand, and contributing most to recent increases in

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carbon emissions.⁽⁹⁾ Climate change already has, and will continue to have, substantial overall negative health impacts that will be directly and indirectly experienced by New Zealanders⁽¹⁰⁾⁽¹¹⁾

- Physical inactivity is the fourth leading cause of death worldwide⁽¹²⁾, and transport systems that promote private car use are partially responsible for increasing the burden of disease on the health of New Zealanders⁽¹³⁾
- In New Zealand, a high and increasing proportion of freight movement is by road⁽¹⁴⁾ and the volume of truck traffic has public health implications for safety, air quality, noise, climate change, community disruption, and deterrence of walking and cycling.

Transport is a key driver of health inequalities, as many of these negative impacts fall more heavily on disadvantaged groups (e.g. people on low incomes, people with chronic health conditions). The transport needs of children, disabled people, the elderly and people in rural areas require particular consideration within transport policies and plans.

Transport and health issues for Māori

Access to safe, accessible and affordable transport is critical to Māori wellbeing and development. Māori are over-represented in crash fatalities⁽³⁾ and premature death and hospitalisation due to air pollution from vehicles.⁽⁴⁾ Not only is access to healthcare and employment important to reducing inequalities,⁽¹⁵⁾ but also to improving access to valued cultural activities and places such as marae. Māori have opposed the continued taking of Māori land for roading, which affects both mana and the kaitiakitanga of the environment. We support Raerino et al⁽¹⁶⁾ in asserting that a Māori voice in transport decision-making is needed to make sure Māori wellbeing is prioritised in transport planning, and recommend that local authorities across the country take on board the Auckland Council Independent Māori Statutory Board's recommendation to adopt iwi transport strategies.⁽¹⁷⁾

Transport and related issues

Urban design

The issue of transport cannot be separated from urban design. New Zealand has planned for and supported low-density housing and zoning laws that separate residential, retail and industrial areas. This has led to cities and towns in which it is often difficult to get around without a car. Areas with more compact and mixed development (medium/high density housing interspersed with shops and places of employment) are more conducive to walking, cycling, and public transport than low-density urban sprawl.⁽¹⁸⁾

The [Healthy Streets Approach](#) was developed by public health expert Lucy Saunders to put the wellbeing of the community at the centre of urban planning and development. It is an evidence-based approach for creating fairer, sustainable, attractive urban spaces by prioritising walking, cycling and public transport. The essential elements of the Healthy Streets Approach are 10 indicators which together combine to create an urban environment that promotes health.

Congestion

Traffic congestion affects public health through poor air quality⁽¹⁹⁾ and noise⁽²⁰⁾ as well as stress and frustration. Building more and bigger roads does not generally reduce congestion in the medium to long term, because more roads lead to more cars – this concept of 'induced traffic' is well established.⁽²¹⁾ Evidence-based initiatives to reduce congestion manage demand, reduce sprawl, make private car use less attractive (such as tolls and congestion charges) and make other transport modes – public transport, cycling and walking – safer and more attractive.⁽²²⁾

Public transport

Accessible public transport is vital because it provides a good alternative to private car use, and ensures that non-drivers (e.g. young people, the elderly, those who cannot afford a car) are able to get around.⁽²³⁾ Health benefits of increased use of public transport include increased physical activity, social contact, and improved safety for travellers; and reduced congestion, greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution per person-kilometre.⁽²⁴⁾ Key aspects of public transport accessibility are affordability and frequency and timing of services.⁽²³⁾

Active transport – cycling and walking

Cycling and walking promote health in four key ways: they provide daily physical activity, reduce air pollution, reduce greenhouse gas emissions⁽²⁵⁾ and increase social contact.⁽²⁴⁾ Current cost-benefit assessments for transport projects do not account for the full value of these and other health benefits.⁽²⁶⁾ Even a modest shift in the proportion of trips taken by cycle rather than car in New Zealand would have a significant positive impact on population health.^{(27) (28)} However, such a shift requires an investment in street and road design, specific infrastructure, and speed management that prioritise safe, attractive walking and cycling for transport. Transport funding in recent decades has prioritised private car use despite its deleterious effects on the health of New Zealanders. New Zealand needs a better accounting of and accountability for the health and carbon effects of decisions on transport projects, at both local and national levels.⁽²⁹⁾

Air pollution

Premature mortality from vehicle exhaust fumes has been called the ‘hidden road toll’. Conservative estimates indicate that about 400 New Zealanders die every year, and thousands more have compromised quality of life due to the health effects of vehicle emissions.⁽⁴⁾ Although vehicles are becoming ‘cleaner,’ this gain is offset by population growth and more vehicle-kilometres travelled.

Transport, climate change, and health

Shifting from car- and road freight-dominance to more active and public transport and greater rail freight and coastal shipping has the potential to reduce transport greenhouse gas emissions and improve health simultaneously. These health and climate co-benefits make such investments excellent value for money when the full costs and benefits are counted in decision-making.

Economic growth

In the past, economic growth and growth in demand for motorised transport tended to go hand in hand. However in modern economies – based on information and services as well as goods – this is no longer true.⁽³⁰⁾ Recent research shows positive associations between mobility constraints (higher road use prices or traffic congestion) and improved productivity.⁽³¹⁾ Retailers often fear they will lose business if car parks are removed, but this is rarely the case.⁽³²⁾ In fact, there is now solid evidence that cities prioritising active transport do better economically and enjoy better quality of life.⁽³³⁾⁽³⁴⁾

Priorities for action

The Public Health Association recommends that local government and central government:

1. Honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi by including Māori in every aspect of transport planning and decision-making
2. Adopt iwi transport strategies as recommended by the Auckland Council Independent Māori Statutory Board
3. Value the broader health, social, environmental and climate change implications of transport decisions, and include the protection and promotion of public health as a key objective of transport legislation, policy, and planning

4. Invest in a shift from private car use to walking, cycling and public transport as a key objective of transport legislation, policy, and planning
5. Adopt the [Healthy Streets Approach](#) in transport policy and urban planning
6. Commit to a transition to 100 percent zero-emission public transport by 2030 (consistent with the Paris Climate Change Agreement)
7. Prioritise the needs of both rural and urban low income populations and children to ensure that public transport is regular, reliable, accessible and affordable
8. Use financial incentives and disincentives to promote public and active transport, and discourage private car use
9. Introduce national and local targets to assess how well the transport system is reducing greenhouse gas emissions; reducing exposure to air pollution; increasing the shift to public transport, walking and cycling; improving road safety; improving access and mobility; and enhancing equity
10. Adopt a [Vision Zero](#) road safety policy to make the roads safer for all road users, including cyclists and pedestrians⁽³⁵⁾
11. Reduce road freight movements by heavy vehicles in order to mitigate their health impacts
12. Increase rail corridors to include both freight and long distance passenger travel
13. Plan transport systems that:
 - i. integrate all potential transport modes i.e. rail, air, water, and road
 - ii. are integrated with other aspects of urban infrastructure, notably housing, commercial areas and utilities such as water supply and waste disposal
 - iii. are integrated with employment opportunities

PHA actions to support this policy

The Public Health Association, including its branches, will:

1. Keep members informed of relevant research, key policy/legislative developments and consultations on transport issues
2. Influence local and central government transport policy-making through submissions and participation in policy development forums
3. Strengthen relationships with aligned advocacy groups, and transport policy officials and decision makers at regional and national levels.

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