



HEALTH AND TRANSPORT: PROMOTING ACTIVE TRAVEL

Based on the Polis position paper, *Securing the health benefits of active travel in Europe*, the work in the EU PASTA project and the THE PEP – Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme

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Active travel relates to regular physical activity undertaken as a means of transport. It includes travel by foot, bicycle and other non-motorised vehicles. Use of public transport is also included as it often involves some walking or cycling to pick-up and from drop-off points¹.

A. Anticipating future challenges

The shift towards more active travel fits into a wider agenda to answer future challenges linked to changing lifestyles, increased urbanisation and a sustainable approach to costs in public health expenditure.

Cities are becoming more and more densely populated: 82% of the population in Europe will live in towns in 2050 compared to 72% today². High density urban environments offer the advantage of having higher share of short-distance trips thanks to land use mix, extension of the public transport network and intermodal transport solutions.

Yet of the 10 million deaths per annum in Europe, **nearly 1 million can be attributed to lack of physical activity** or moderate exercise as reported by the WHO in its recommendations for a healthy lifestyle.

Furthermore, the costs incurred in public health to treat non-communicable diseases (NCD) due to **sedentary lifestyles, obesity among children and adults, and exposure to noise and air pollution are substantial**. These negative trends in people's behaviour can be reversed. Public health expenditure should be redirected to promote healthy lifestyles on top of curing preventable diseases.

Action must be taken **to secure the health of its citizens and future generations** by promoting active travel among the youngster, and enabling adults and seniors maintain a healthy lifestyle through mobility. The daily recommended moderate exercise can be easily achieved by replacing urban trips made by motorised vehicles with bicycle or on foot combined with the use of public transport.

If we are to see an increase in bicycling and walking in cities, these modes of transportation must be made safe and secure by creating **suitable policy frameworks and adequate infrastructure**: of 92,000 deaths per year in Europe, **pedestrians and cyclists are road users most at risk**, they constitute 31% of all road death³.

B. Benefits of active travel

Beside the health benefits of increased physical activity for individuals, promoting a shift towards more active travel offers **huge potential economic benefits and to society as a whole**.

¹ Based on the work being done in the EU funded project PASTA, FP7 – Health, 2013, on Promotion of active travel as a way to integrate physical activity into people's every-day lives: www.pastaproject.eu.

² [World Urbanisation prospects, the 2011 revision](#), United Nations, Department of Economic and Social affairs, UN.

³ Francesco Mitis and Dinesh Sethi, European facts and global status report on road safety 2013, WHO Regional Office for Europe (http://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/185572/e96811.pdf)

Promoting active modes of transport:

- could **potentially reduce future costs for public health systems**: reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), or health problems linked to air quality;
- would **considerably reduce risks of premature deaths** both linked to air quality and lack of physical activity (PA);
- can **strongly contribute to help achieve European targets/goals** in terms of reduced congestion, air quality, noise pollution and safety; and local authorities goals to deliver better quality of life in urban areas. It can also foster faster progress in shifting towards more sustainable modes of urban mobility and ways from the use of conventionally-fuelled private cars⁴;
- has **direct economic benefits**.

We therefore wish to see strong integration and coordination between transport and health policy, notably at European level.

C. Recommendations

Overall, a shift in mind sets is needed to help promote and secure the health benefits of active travel. It is important to making full use of existing and new platforms and networks to disseminate tools and share knowledge. More specifically, the following recommendations can contribute to achieving the goal:

- **Systematic** internalisation of health costs in transport, notably linked to physical inactivity (**current costs and future costs, bearing in mind the exponential development of externalities**) is needed.
- In this respect, **HEAT** ([Health Economic Assessment Tool](#)), developed by the WHO, is designed to help conduct an economic assessment of the health benefits of walking or cycling by estimating the value of reduced mortality that results from specified amounts of walking or cycling.
- A policy framework is needed to take into account health considerations. In this respect, an integrated approach to all modes of transport while planning mobility is best suited. Thus **Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP)** are a **valuable policy framework** to integrate health considerations in transport planning.
- **Pro-safety policies** should be deployed hand in hand with promoting cycling and walking. These should take on board both infrastructure and policy frameworks. With good policy design, an increase in ridership can be accompanied by a concomitant reduction injury risk⁵.
- To develop better and more efficient policies promoting active travel, notably cycling and walking, it could be useful to have a **baseline for estimating the number of cyclists and pedestrians in urban areas**.

⁴ European Commission Communication : Together towards competitive and resource-efficient urban mobility, December 2013 p. 1

⁵ OECD/international Transport Forum (2013), Cycling, Safety and Health, OECD publishing/ITF.