Submission to the Regional Development Committee Inquiry into Sustainable Transport

7 September 2009

Contents of submission

Summary points

- This Inquiry is very timely and shows leadership crucial to developing further work in this area, which is vital for our future social, environmental and economic health and wellbeing

- Belfast Healthy Cities believes that sustainable transport can significantly support health and wellbeing, but should be built on the concept of **accessibility**, which provides a people focus and allows consideration of what determines people's transport needs and choices.

- Benefits of sustainable transport related to health and wellbeing include:

  Social aspects

  1. Improved opportunities for social interaction
  2. Improved opportunities for physical activity and reduced obesity
  3. Improved road safety
  4. A fairer system, with transport resources more equitably divided across society

  Environmental aspects

  1. Reduced air pollution
  2. Tackling climate change and peak oil

  Economic aspects:

  1. Investment can bring about savings elsewhere in economy, especially health and social care
  2. New economic opportunities can be generated
  3. Reduced need for new roads and road maintenance, with spin off savings and benefits

- Policy is likely to be the key driver of change; behaviour change is most likely if the right choice is the easy choice and there are examples of success

- Policy measures could usefully build on examples of success elsewhere, and should be developed on a cross Department basis

- Key policies, including the RDS, RTS, Planning Policy Statements and Investing for Health, should be based on common aims and objectives and ideally shared targets

- The Regional Development Committee should take leadership in developing common aims and objectives and has a key role in monitoring progress and garnering support throughout the Assembly

- The health sector can support sustainable transport by providing an extensive evidence base and tools for assessing impacts of transport

- Belfast Healthy Cities can support by sharing expertise on Health Impact Assessment and ways of strengthening health equity

Key recommendations:

1. Strong high level, cross sectoral leadership is crucial; further planning should be led by a Ministerial Action Group incorporating Ministers responsible for transport, planning and environment, economy, regeneration, health and rural affairs

2. Joined up policy making is key to a successful switch; need to develop common definition, aim and objectives across relevant policies

3. Policy focus should be on the RDS and the RTS, with the planning system, Investing for Health, regeneration and rural policy key supporting policy arenas. Action could be strengthened through a cross Departmental Sustainable Transport Strategy and Action Plan, linked to the RDS and RTS

4. Health and health equity objectives should be incorporated in policy and action; all transport decisions should incorporate assessment of environmental, health and social impact, while cost benefit analysis also should incorporate these aspects

5. Policy and action must work towards clear targets, eg. a 5% reduction in car journeys per annum or increasing the non car share of journeys to 50% by 2020 (baseline 30%, 2007/08);

6. Setting indicators and collecting data to monitor progress is crucial and a key role for the Regional Development Committee; this may require new indicators to be developed or new data to be collected, for example on accessibility and people's transport needs

7. Transport related policy and action must be based on evidence of environmental and social impacts; collaboration with the health sector can help strengthen the evidence base

8. Community engagement must be a vital element of implementation

9. To get the process underway, meet climate change and emissions targets already set in the UK Climate Change Bill and provide sufficient time to prepare for a 'post-oil' society, it is vital that policies incorporate relevant targets and objectives now, rather than waiting for the next review.

Introduction

Belfast Healthy Cities welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this very timely Inquiry into Sustainable Transport, which shows crucial leadership to initiate work in this area, which is vital to our future health and wellbeing in social, environmental as well as economic terms. Transport is central to support health and wellbeing, and sustainable transport contains many key elements required of a health improving transport system.

Belfast Healthy Cities is a partnership organization working to improve health and health equity, through intersectoral collaboration. Our key partners include Belfast City Council, Belfast HSC Trust, Bryson Charitable Group, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, East Belfast Partnership, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Planning Service, Public Health Agency, Queen's University of Belfast and Ulster Cancer Foundation.

Our work aims to support organizations to integrate health and health equity in all local policies, through providing evidence, tools and models of intersectoral working. We have over 20 years' experience of successfully doing this, and have also been at the forefront of introducing new concepts, such as healthy urban planning and healthy ageing, to Northern Ireland. Belfast is a leading member of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, which has over 90 member cities, and currently provides the secretariat to the Network.

Belfast Healthy Cities has built expertise on the impacts of transport on people's wellbeing in relation to work on healthy urban planning. We have specific expertise on the transport needs of older people, through our work on healthy ageing in Phase IV (2003-08) of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. Transport was a theme of Healthy Ageing:InterAction, the first intersectoral action plan for older people in the Eastern area. Following this work, Belfast Healthy Cities chaired the Eastern Area Transport Forum, which oversaw a pilot buddying scheme, aimed at improving older people's confidence to use public transport. In October 2008, the Forum hosted a consultation event on transport for older people in Belfast – chaired by Fred Cobain MLA, Chair of the Regional Development Committee – which underpinned an action plan currently being implemented through key public and voluntary sector agencies. The event highlighted quality concerns over public transport, but also emphasised its crucial role in allowing older people to remain independent.

We believe health and health equity is an important goal in its own right, as this serves as a yardstick of how society works for people. Improving health equity is a core aim of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network in Phase V (2009-2013), which draws extensively on the report *Closing the Gap* by the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, chaired by Professor Sir Michael Marmot of University College London.

However, health is also an integral element of a prosperous society, and indeed a sustainable society; a healthy population is a prerequisite of social, economic as well as environmental wellbeing.

We are making this submission as we believe sustainable transport is closely related to improved health, health equity and wellbeing. Indeed, we see both improved health and sustainable transport as vital preconditions to achieving the overall Programme for Government aim to build 'a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland … where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in years to come'.

We would be pleased to further develop the themes discussed by giving oral evidence, should the Committee find that helpful.

Definitions of health and health equity

The Healthy Cities approach defines health as the outcome of social, economic and physical living conditions, and therefore as the responsibility of all sectors.

We define health equity as a situation where resources and goods relevant to health are distributed fairly across all population groups. It builds on a body of research which indicates that there is a social gradient in health across society with risks highest among the lowest social groups. Research indicates that the gradient is linked to differential access to goods and resources, which in turn is determined by income and social status.

Response to the Terms of Reference

a. To explore and clarify the social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainable transport.

Belfast Healthy Cities believes that sustainable transport can significantly support improved health and wellbeing, while it also has other major social, environmental and economic benefits. However, before it is possible to consider the implications of sustainable transport, it is necessary to briefly consider what functions transport serves, how transport systems are affected by other sectors of society, and what a sustainable transport system might look like.

Ultimately, the function of transport is to help people reach desired destinations. A sustainable transport system is concerned with achieving this in a more environmentally sound way, and therefore definitions of sustainable transport focus on public transport, walking and cycling. This would involve a significant modal

switch from the current car centred transport system, and is likely to require a combination of policy, technology and measures aimed at changing attitudes.

Evidence shows that people's transport decisions are influenced by a complex set of factors, which often becomes summarised as 'convenience'. Key among these is **cost**, followed by **quality** of transport options: people value punctuality, reliability in travel times, cleanliness, safety and courteous behaviour from others. Another key issue is **connectivity**, which refers to how well key destinations are linked, and how well they are served by different transport modes. Many people need to 'trip chain' journeys within a tight schedule, and therefore clusters of key destinations close to transport interchanges are helpful. It is important to note that transport mode is less important than convenience, therefore, sustainable transport hinges on making public transport and active travel cheaper, better connected, more reliable, more pleasant and safer to use.

However, sustainable transport should also be concerned with travel demand management, or in short reducing the need to travel. In this respect, a transport system is also highly influenced by **land use planning**, which determines where people live in relation to key destinations (jobs, schools, services), and therefore broadly shapes people's transport needs. Land use planning which focuses on mixed use development, with key destinations centred around public transport hubs is key to limiting the need to travel. This would likely require fewer measures aimed at changing people's behaviour, and could significantly help to make the right choice the easy choice.

All of these elements are incorporated in the concept of **accessibility,** which is a transport planning concept increasingly used for example in Britain. Its key advantage is that it enables analysis of why and how people travel, which helps highlight key areas for action. Therefore, Belfast Healthy Cities would suggest that it is particularly well suited to underpin a sustainable transport system.

From a health perspective, Belfast Healthy Cities would identify a sustainable transport system as one that is based on the concept of accessibility, and consists of three key elements: 1) reducing the need to travel; 2) putting in place and maintaining improved infrastructure for more affordable public transport, walking and cycling and 3) promoting public transport and active travel. The priority order is important, as people cannot be expected to change their behaviour (and attitudes) until the appropriate infrastructure is in place. Making the right choice an easier choice is also important to build and maintain public support, and minimise the need for measures such as road pricing, that might be considered coercive and are likely to be highly unpopular.

However, Belfast Healthy Cities would recommend that a common definition of sustainable transport is agreed in Northern Ireland, to provide a clear basis for further debate and planning.

Defined in the above terms, and compared to the current car centred transport system in Northern Ireland, sustainable transport offers considerable benefits, in social, environmental as well as economic terms. Importantly, these benefits are interrelated and can therefore add to more than the sum of their parts.

In *social* terms, mixed use development, improved public transport and improved opportunities to walk and cycle can:

1. Improve opportunities for social interaction

This supports mental wellbeing for individuals and can translate into improved social cohesion at a societal level. This, in turn, may reduce problems with anti social behaviour, and bring about savings for policing and public realm maintenance. Positive impacts can be achieved without significant direct communication; for example, intergenerational relations can improve if both older and young people become used to seeing each other. This can, among other things, reduce fear of crime among older people. It can also reduce social isolation, which is a risk factor for deteriorating mental wellbeing, and thus reduce costs to health and social services.

2. Improve opportunities for physical activity and help tackle obesity

Walking or cycling for transport is easier to incorporate in the daily routine than more formal exercise, and can therefore be easier to sustain. Mixed use development tends to encourage active travel, as it provides key destinations and destinations of interest within reasonable distance. Taking public transport can support this, as the journey usually involves a walk to and from the transit stop. Tackling obesity has major economic implications; if obesity continues to grow at the current rate, the cost to the UK economy has been estimated to reach £50billion per year by 2050.

3. Improve road safety

Less traffic is likely to mean fewer collisions, and fewer casualties. Road traffic deaths and injuries are a major cause of distress and disability for individuals and families, but also have major costs for the economy. In 2007, the Department of Transport in England estimated that preventing all casualties would have had a total value of £19,104million (with human costs valued at £9.740m). Each traffic death has been valued at almost £1,7million. Importantly, research shows that as the number of pedestrians and cyclists increases, the risks decrease, primarily because drivers become more cautious.

With less traffic, children may have more opportunities to walk and cycle to school, and play outdoors. This will boost their activity levels and can also support their development. Research indicates that concerns about traffic are a major reason why parents are reluctant to allow their children this kind of independence, and there is

evidence that lack of opportunities can impair children's emotional and social development as well as their ability to assess and handle risk.

Road safety also has an equity aspect; busy traffic disproportionately affects more deprived people and neighbourhoods. A child from a family with unskilled parents is five times more likely to die in a traffic incident than a child of professional parents. This is primarily because more deprived areas are more likely to be located near busy roads; people from lower social groups are much less likely than the general population to own a car. For example in Belfast, at the time of the last Census in 2001, 40% of households had no access to a car, but this rose to over 60% in many of the region's most deprived wards in inner north and west Belfast. Therefore, reduced traffic in itself can support mental wellbeing in deprived communities, through reducing traffic related concerns.

4. Make the system fairer, with transport resources more equitably divided across society

A key issue with the current car centred transport system is that it tends to favour people who are relatively wealthy and can afford a car. This is a major health equity issue, since 'transport poverty' tends to concentrate among people in lower social groups and among older people, all of whom are generally disadvantaged and at greater risk of ill health. Lack of transport compounds these disadvantages, by limiting access to essential opportunities such as jobs, affordable healthy food and participating in society.

As an example, as far back as 1992, research in Belfast found that carless households had 25% of the job opportunities available to neighbours who had a car. Indeed, many low income households find a car is a necessity and may have to limit other activities to meet the maintenance costs, which can be 10% of income or more. For others, meanwhile, the cost and availability of transport may become a too high barrier: transport issues contribute to economic inactivity, social isolation and social exclusion especially among lone parents, but also lower skilled groups and rural populations.

Sustainable transport can in particular help improve 'transport equity', insofar as it offers cheaper fares and better connectivity. Both can open up new opportunities: cheaper fares and fewer journeys mean more disposable income to spend elsewhere. Better connectivity, in turn, can widen the realistic job search or training area, with associated health and social wellbeing benefits.

Environmental aspects

Sustainable transport is fundamentally intended to reduce reliance on the private car, and thus tackle the core environmental problems, air pollution, climate change and peak oil. These issues also have a health dimension, and key benefits of more sustainable transport include:

1. Reduced air pollution

Air pollution harms the ecosystem in many ways and remains an issue, although pollution levels in Northern Ireland have fallen and now in most places comply with UK standards. Reduced traffic combined with potential new technologies can further reduce pollution and protect the environment. In addition, this will support health and wellbeing, as air pollution is associated with health problems including an increased risk for respiratory infections, worsening of asthma and complications in cardiovascular disease. Particulate matter pollution alone has been estimated to cut average life expectancy in the UK by eight months. Reduced air pollution thus has significant potential for monetary savings, in particular for healthcare services.

Congestion is associated with high air pollution in localized spots; for example, all four Air Quality Management Areas in Belfast are by major roads (local authorities in the UK are required to declare AQMAs where air quality targets are unlikely to be met) Easing congestion will reduce this problem, and will also reduce stress among drivers.

2. Tackling climate change and peak oil

Transport contributes about a fifth of CO_2 emissions in the UK as well as worldwide, and uses significant amounts of oil for fuel. It therefore significantly contributes to climate change, which has been characterized as the most urgent issue of our time. More sustainable transport is essential to cut transport emissions and tackle the core problem, while it will also help preserve dwindling fossil fuel reserves.

Climate change is a major health as well as environmental risk, and therefore sustainable transport can also help limit the health related risks. In Northern Ireland, these include an increase in infectious (tick borne) disease and especially mental, but also physical health problems following flooding, which is projected to become more common. Food is likely to become more expensive, and some foods may become increasingly scarce. Meanwhile, the depletion of fossil fuel reserves will drive up energy prices, which is likely to worsen fuel poverty, already a major concern in Northern Ireland where at least 34% of households are fuel poor.

Climate change is also another major health equity issue, as people in the lower social groups will be first and most affected by rising costs. If not tackled, climate change may therefore exacerbate disadvantage and ill health, which in turn may lead to growing cost pressures on the social security system and health services.

Economic aspects

It is clear that sustainable transport will require considerable initial investment. However, these costs can be counterbalanced against savings and new economic opportunities. Key economic considerations include the following:

1. Investment can bring about savings elsewhere in economy

As a recap of previous comments, investment in a sustainable transport can be offset against potentially significant savings in healthcare, benefits and even policing. In Copenhagen, where about 30% of the population commute by bike, it has been found that frequent cyclists have about 30% lower mortality than people with otherwise similar health and living conditions, which has resulted in significant healthcare savings. Where improved access to transport enables previously unemployed people to take up jobs, this will further boost tax revenues.

2. New economic opportunities can be generated

In particular mixed land use, combined with walking and cycling infrastructure, could contribute to economic vibrancy of local village and neighbourhood centres, and a renaissance of town centres. This is primarily because it helps create *places*, where people are willing to spend time and consequently money. Such places, particularly those where the traditional scale and style has been retained, are also very inviting for visitors. Evidence for this exists from elsewhere; in Groningen in the Netherlands, the city centre economy has grown rapidly since car traffic was limited (http://www.globalideasbank.org/site/bank/idea.php?ideaId=378). Copenhagen, the world's self proclaimed 'cycling capital', has a vibrant economy and a thriving , inclusive evening economy in the city centre. However, it is important to focus on a network of local centres, rather than concentrating on the town centre alone, as this could indeed reduce accessibility and walkability.

Other economic opportunities could be in tourism, such as bike tours, and directly in transport, for example additional community transport services. There are also opportunities in the biofuel sector, as outlined in the DETI *Bioenergy action plan* currently out for consultation. For example in Sweden, experiments with buses fuelled by biogas have yielded positive results and Stockholm is currently in the process of expanding its biogas bus fleet.

3. Reduced need for new roads and road maintenance

This would also have environmental as well as social benefits, as greenfield land in rural areas would be preserved for agriculture, wildlife and recreation. In urban areas, reduced need for multi lane roads would allow for a safer and more aesthetically pleasing environment. This could attract more people to use facilities and services, which could improve social cohesion, and boost economic benefits.

For operators of necessary road freight, reduced traffic would bring improved certainty in journey times and savings in fuel, thus supporting profitability.

b. To identify the policies, technologies and attitudes likely to underpin a move to more sustainable transport in Northern Ireland

To summarise the above analysis, a more sustainable transport system can generate potentially very significant health improvements, and benefits to society overall. Its key advantage is that it allows a people focus, which allows for more holistic and long term planning than planning focused on transport *per se.* However, it is clear that this requires in particular considerable policy leadership, as well as investment in infrastructure and technology. This is a central role for the Regional Development Committee and has been initiated through this Inquiry.

Examples of successful moves towards more sustainable transport can be found both within the UK and further afield, in particular Copenhagen, Dutch cities and also southern European cities such as Barcelona or Porto. Building on the experience of these cities appears a potentially useful approach; it can help avoid pitfalls, while providing clear examples of achieved results and benefits.

Evidence from cities which have made a switch towards more sustainable transport indicates that the key policy measures required to underpin a move to more sustainable and healthy transport involve prioritising the following :

- Strong leadership, based on cross party consensus and therefore sustained long term
- A shift from mobility to accessibility based planning, including:
- Travel demand management, ie reducing need to travel
    - o Focus on the need to support and prioritise mixed land use, with key destinations clustered close to transport interchanges
    - o Growth areas identified on the basis of capacity of existing infrastructure, with public transport links a key weight
    - o Focus also on encouraging the public sector to provide services in integrated 'one stop shops' and online
    - o Supporting organisations to develop more sustainable travel policy
- Priority given to developing the public transport network, with a substantial proportion of the transport budget dedicated to this
    - o Key requirement is to improve accessibility through introducing rapid transit and orbital routes in major towns, in particular Belfast
    - o In rural areas existing services must be better integrated, while improvements should build on community transport and Rural Rover type services with flexible routes

- - o Public transport quality must be raised and fares lowered to remove key barriers to use; consideration should be given to subsidising fares at least for an initial period, until increased patronage can help reduce need for this
  - Development of active travel infrastructure, with ring fenced maintenance budgets
    - o Focus on safe crossings and footpaths and cycle lanes that reach key destinations without being broken or ending with no safe alternative route; to make walking and cycling viable mainstream modes of transport
    - o Focus also on providing and supporting enabling measures such as Safe Routes to School and walking buses

The key policies required to implement these measures and thus underpin more sustainable transport are the Regional Development Strategy and the Regional Transportation Strategy. The planning system, incorporating Planning Policy Statements and Area Plans (to become Local Development Frameworks when this function is transferred to councils), is also important for implementing strategic guidance. Regeneration policy within DSD and rural policy within DARD also influence transport, and must integrate sustainable transport principles to achieve a coherent policy context. There is now an unprecedented opportunity for joined up policy making, as both the RDS and RTS are under review, while the planning reform is also still underway and a Rural White Paper is forthcoming.

In addition, there is now an opportunity to integrate the sustainable transport and health improvement agendas, as the cross Departmental public health strategy Investing for Health is also under review. A key advantage of this would be that incorporating health and health equity objectives could help maintain focus on the core functions and impacts of transport, thus providing a catalyst for people centred action. There could also be an opportunity to improve integration of services, such as the use of community transport to access health care (currently not permitted). Health policy is also based on strong evidence and indicator sets, and collaboration could help strengthen the evidence base and monitoring systems for the overall project.

The health sector can also provide support in assessing the impacts of transport policy and proposals. Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a concept and methodology that offers a systematic, evidence based way to consider how proposals will affect health, wellbeing and quality of life, and make recommendations for how it can best support these aims. HIA was developed to complement Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), but uniquely, it gives particular attention to vulnerable groups and potential differential impacts. This is further emphasised in Health Equity Impact Assessment tools, which are specifically intended to consider

equity impacts and ways of tackling inequalities. The WHO European Healthy Cities Network has focused on HIA for a number of years, and will continue this work to develop Health Equity Impact Assessment tools in Phase V (2009-2013), as recommended by the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Belfast Healthy Cities has pioneered HIA in Northern Ireland and would be happy to assist with further information and advice on transport related HIAs.

Technologies

Technology can help support a move to more sustainable transport in many ways. For example, some key, much discussed technological solutions such as integrated ticketing and audiovisual announcements on public transport are important quality improvements, which can help make using public transport a smoother, more pleasant and therefore more attractive travel option. Indeed, audiovisual announcements are vital to allow older people and people with disabilities to use public transport safely and with confidence. Improved online transport information can help improve passenger confidence and convenience, while preferential treatment for buses and cycles in traffic lights can help them make speedier and more convenient alternatives in cities. Finally, technological mobility substitutes, such as telecommuting, online service facilities and online shopping with delivery, can reduce the need to travel. However, it is important that technology is considered complementary to infrastructure improvements and policy leadership.

Potential new ***renewable fuel or electric vehicle technologies*** may also have a role in supporting a more sustainable transport system, by displacing fossil fuels. Each of these should be considered on their merits; for example, biogas as bus fuel has yielded positive results in Sweden, and Stockholm is currently expanding its fleet of buses running on biogas. However, it is important that such new technologies are seen as ways of further reducing the environmental impact of a sustainable transport system focused on minimizing essential travel, rather than solutions reducing the need to change current transport trends.

Attitudes and behaviours

Ultimately, a successful move towards more sustainable transport requires people to change their behaviour (and attitudes); this applies both to the public and policy makers, who must shift from a mobility focus to an accessibility based planning approach. Again, evidence from successful cities indicates that the best route to sustainable behaviour change is providing the infrastructure and facilities to make the right choice the easy choice. Copenhagen has consistently invested in cycling infrastructure since the 1970s. Curitiba in Brazil has similarly invested in public transport over 30 years, and the Netherlands has supported cycling infrastructure

alongside roads. Community engagement is also important, to help people feel part of the change and therefore embrace it more easily.

A potentially very useful approach would be to develop a series of demonstration projects, which would allow testing and refinement of different models for sustainable transport, potentially at different scales. Existing examples include workplace travel plans and carshare schemes, but larger scale schemes can also be developed in this way. One example is the Connswater Community Greenway being developed in east Belfast, where the local community, through East Belfast Partnership, is leading a broad partnership which includes public sector agencies as well as academia. The Greenway is a major regeneration initiative, but its aims include improved opportunities to commute on foot or by bike, to improve health and displace traffic, which will further benefit the health and wellbeing of local people and communities.

This approach would have a number of benefits: it would enable local community involvement and innovation, encourage intersectoral collaboration, and also allow lessons to be learnt, without the level of financial risk involved in regional approaches. Minimising risk in this way would, in turn, also support longer term strategy and action planning, as only successful models could be considered for regional adoption.

However, there may also be a role for more traditional measures aimed at attitude and behaviour change. These could include incentives and rewards for sustainable transport use, which could build on and expand existing Travelwise initiatives, such as the bike purchase scheme and salary sacrifice scheme, which offers a discount on annual public transport tickets. Health related or environmental social marketing campaigns can help alter behaviour, although they tend to be most effective among already motivated individuals.

 Finally, there are a number of more coercive options, such as congestion charging, road pricing and reducing parking or substantially increasing parking charges in town centres. Belfast Healthy Cities believes these are best avoided, primarily as they may have a disproportionate impact on people in lower or vulnerable social groups (eg. shift workers in manual jobs such as cleaning or delivery, or people with disabilities, who have little option but to park in town) and thus harm equity aims. They are also likely to be highly unpopular, and reduce public support for the overall aim. The exception may be higher parking charges, which may be appropriate to discourage private car use when improved public transport coverage is in place (with appropriate provision made for people with disabilities). Similarly, alternatives could be sought for the car parking benefit common among public sector workers, which is costly and in many ways amounts to a public subsidy to a relatively well off population group. For example, staff not taking up a space could be paid a bonus, or the benefit could be converted to taxi vouchers, etc. The NI Environment Agency has already begun prioritising car sharers when allocating car parking spaces, which is

another alternative. Strong enforcement of parking regulations is crucial and appropriate at all times.

c. To make recommendations arising out of the above investigations, and report to the Assembly.

Belfast Healthy Cities recognises that a wide range of recommendations on sustainable transport have been published very recently; publications include the Consumer Council's survey report *Public Transport – on the right track?* (July 2009), Northern Ireland Environment Link's article collection *Sustainable Transport* (June 2009), which provides a range of viewpoints, and PricewaterhouseCooper's report *Bridging the Gap – Transforming Public Transport in Northern Ireland* (June 2009), published as part of the call for evidence for this Inquiry. It is not necessary to repeat key conclusions and recommendations here, but they should be considered as valuable evidence for the Inquiry.

Belfast Healthy Cities broadly supports the recommendations made in the above publications, in particular those made in the NIEL report. Here, we would simply like to highlight a series of recommendations, which are based on the above analysis and which we believe are particularly important to ensure that a move towards more sustainable transport also is a move towards a more health improving and equitable transport.

As noted in the Introduction, the current work of the WHO European Healthy Cities builds on the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health. We would also like to highlight its key recommendations, which we believe are vital areas for action to develop a healthy, equitable and sustainable society, and could provide useful principles also for developing sustainable transport. These are to 1) improve daily living conditions for all, 2) tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money and resources and 3) measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action.

Key recommendations:

1. Strong high level, cross sectoral leadership is crucial; further planning should be led by a Ministerial Action Group incorporating Ministers responsible for transport, planning and environment, economy, regeneration, health and rural affairs; the Regional Development Committee should take leadership in garnering support for sustainable transport throughout the Assembly

2. Joined up policy making is key to a successful switch; further policy and action must be based on common definitions and a common vision or aim, which should emphasise reducing the need to travel as much as modal switch to public transport, walking and cycling

3. Policy focus should be on the RDS and the RTS, with the planning system, Investing for Health, regeneration and rural policy key supporting policy arenas. Action could be strengthened through a cross Departmental Sustainable Transport Strategy and Action Plan, linked to the RDS and RTS

4. Health and health equity objectives should be incorporated in policy and action to maximise the health benefits of sustainable transport; all transport decisions should incorporate assessment of environmental, health and social impact, while cost benefit analysis also should incorporate these aspects

5. Policy and action must work towards clear targets, eg. a 5% reduction in car journeys per annum or increasing the non car share of journeys to 50% by 2020 (baseline 30%, 2007/08);

6. Setting indicators and collecting data to monitor progress is crucial and a key role for the Regional Development Committee; this may require new indicators to be developed or new data to be collected

7. Transport related policy and action must be based on evidence of environmental and social impacts; collaboration with the health sector can help strengthen the evidence base

8. Community engagement must be a vital element of implementation

Conclusion

Sustainable transport is an essential element of a resilient society capable of adjusting to and prospering in a 'post-oil' world, where fossil fuel resources are increasingly scarce and therefore command high price premiums. It is also a prerequisite of a healthy and fair society, which in turn is both a vital goal in its own right, and necessary to develop resilience in the face of this unparalleled challenge.

This Inquiry is very timely, as all the key policies required to underpin a move to more sustainable transport are currently under review. This situation provides an unprecedented opportunity for joined up policy making, and this Inquiry is particularly well placed to draw up a common framework for this. To get the process underway, meet climate change and emissions targets already set in the UK Climate Change Bill and provide sufficient time to prepare for a 'post-oil' society, it is vital that policies incorporate relevant targets and objectives now, rather than waiting for the next review.