SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT IN THE REGION

1.0 A SUSTAINABLE HEALTHY FUTURE

The Report, "**Building Health**", is very relevant to consideration of sustainable transport. The Report was produced by The National Heart Forum, in partnership with Living Streets and The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.

Building Health: Creating and Enhancing Places for Healthy, Active Lives: Blueprint for Action
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"*The National Heart Forum is the leading alliance of over 45 national organisations working to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease in the UK.*
Living Streets is the champion of streets and public spaces for people on foot, working on practical projects to create safe, vibrant and healthy streets for all.
The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is the Government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space.
Together we share an interest in nurturing an environment that has a positive impact on public health.
Building Health is the result of a partnership of these three organisations. The project sets out to increase awareness of the public health role of organisations concerned with urban design and improving the public realm, in particular in relation to population levels of physical activity, and to facilitate implementation of good health-promoting practice."

Page 13 – 14 of the Report deals with **Transport**:

"*Transport is the lifeblood of human settlements. When the economy is doing well, there is more of it. There is therefore a strong tendency, built into national and regional policymaking,*
to assume that more transport is good for us. So there has been a programme of investment in road, rail and air facilities, essentially to promote continued economic growth. The growth of transport, of course, is predominantly in the form of more and longer car trips. The vicious circle of growing car dependence, land-use change to facilitate car use, and increased inconvenience of non-motorised modes leading to further rises in car ownership, with its knock-on effects on climate change, is widely recognised. There is intuitive understanding that the vicious circle is encouraging lifestyle patterns that are antipathetic to the taking of regular healthy exercise. Yet the trend continues unabated.

Despite the stated commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, government transport policy at all levels continues to foster car dependence. Two examples at the level of city regional planning illustrate this issue. The first is the fondness for bypasses and ring roads. The economic raison d'être for them is often strong, the environmental factors evenly balanced, but the social equation problematic. Evidence suggests that they trigger a greater switch to the car than expected in forecasts13 and a corresponding

decline in active travel. For example, a bypass demonstration project14 which measured walking levels in six towns in the UK before and after the construction of bypasses and associated traffic-calming in the town centres, found a significant decrease in levels of walking and cycling.

From the viewpoint of physical activity, the problem is that bypasses and ring roads lead to locational change by institutions, firms and households in order to profit from the altered pattern of accessibility. New edge-of-town facilities take over from in-town and locally-based facilities. Fewer locations remain accessible by foot, speeding up the increase in car dependence and disenfranchising those who do not use a car.
The second example is 'park and ride' (P&R). P&R has the potential benefit of reducing congestion (with its attendant air quality problems) in-town. It is often sold also as a means of promoting public transport. However, part of the effect of P&R is to increase car dependence and reduce active travel in the suburban or exurban areas it serves. It does this by taking riders away from the normal bus services, which are accessed by foot, and instead enabling people to get in their vehicles and park conveniently close to the P&R stop. Subsequently the normal services, starved of passengers, may need to be cut to balance the books, thus tightening the vicious circle even further. So, while there could be situations where P&R is part of a sustainable and healthy strategy, often it is not. Indeed it could be seen to be altogether counterproductive, contributing to increased greenhouse gas emissions and adding to the decline of small settlements.

By contrast, investment in high-quality public transport services such as light rail, routed so as to serve residential areas and main attractions efficiently, can be a positive stimulus to walking and cycling. In general, people are prepared to walk up to 1km to access a good, reliable public transport service. Yet rail travel seems to have been made more and more expensive, with car travel at least appearing to be the cheaper option for most journeys."

2.0 THE LOCAL EXPERIENCE

This region is well placed to break the vicious circle described above. The distances here are relatively short. Government already invests heavily in public transport provision and in addition it has a programme for road investment alone over the seven year period from 2011/12 and 2017/18 which will spend every year on average over three times the annual cost of providing public transport free at the point of use.

The following are the most up to date figures published on the Translink and DRD websites:

FROM WEB BASED TRANSLINK ANNUAL REPORT

TOTAL TRANSLINK GROUP REVENUE TURNOVER IN 2008	£175.4 million
TOTAL TRANSLINK GOVERNMENT SUPPORT RECEIVED (revenue) IN 2008	£63.7 million
The total Translink turnover **less** government revenue support received	£111.4 million
IN ADDITION, CAPITAL GRANTS FROM GOVERNMENT IN 2008	£79.0 million

DRD Website shows DRD Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) for Roads that it expects to spend a total of £2,483.2 million on Roads between 2011/12 and 2017/18. That averages over £354 million per year.

Roadbuilding and maintenance could be reduced by a third or more if the number of cars using the roads were reduced by a shift to public transport, allowing the provision of public transport in Northern Ireland to be free at the point of use without any additional public expenditure.

There would, as noted in the British Heart Foundation's "Building Health" Report (quoted above) be significant health improvements, even through people walking to the bus stop or station, together with the benefits to all other Northern Ireland government departments as noted below:

3.0 REASONS WHY PUBLIC TRANSPORT SHOULD BE FREE AT THE POINT OF USE

There are many reasons why public transport should be free at the point of use:

1. There is a pressing urgency for severely disadvantaged people to gain access to employment opportunities through training schemes; at present these unemployed people simply cannot afford the bus / train fares to go for training. This is a public disgrace.

2. The resulting additional use of buses and trains by current car users, increasing overall efficiency of the road network, resulting in lower levels of congestion and lower carbon dioxide emissions, will help to meet a significant target in the programme for government;

3. The wider benefits include changing habits and thereby reducing the medium and long term need for expensive road schemes;

4. Overall efficiency in public transport improves through eliminating resource costs of ticketing, fare collection, etc.

5. The proposal would invoke delight among tourists who would enjoy their visits to Northern Ireland to a greater degree, resulting in additional repeat visits, overnight stays and tourist spend, particularly as word spreads in tourists' home countries of the extra attraction of coming to this part of the world.

4.0 BENEFITS TO ALL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Northern Ireland government departments will each enjoy benefits from public transport which is free at the point of use as follows:

Health (DHSSPSNI) benefits as described above,

Economic benefits to the province (DFPNI) because overall transport costs in our economy will reduce

Educational (DENI) benefits of not having to administer the assessment of children's distance from school to home and not all those parents having to pick up and deliver children (not just those whose schools are over 3 miles from home)

Cultural, Arts, Sports and Leisure benefits (DCALNI) of wider accessibility of events, particularly at night; and

Rural Development (DARDNI) benefits of increased accessibility of facilities for rural dwellers,

Regional Development (DRDNI) benfits in meeting targets for carbon reduction,

Social Development (DSDNI) which is responsible for benefits, etc., since DSD is paying out benefits to people who can't get jobs because they can't afford to get to the training programmes,

Employment and Learning (DELNI) of attracting students to universities and further education who presently cannot afford to travel daily from home or to rent accommodation elsewhere,

Industrial and Tourism benefits (DETINI) as more travellers are attracted to the region.

Planning (DOENI) and sustainability benefits

All government departments could show a benefit from public transport which is free at the point of use….. I believe that **Councils** would also see major benefits in services and access to activities.

I would urge that the new arrangements be province-wide on both rail and bus networks, giving us a unique advantage in Europe and costing less than the road improvement schemes proposed to accommodate the congestion caused by our present excessive use of the private car.

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Belfast July 2009

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