

“Three things to do with transport to make you feel better” by Professor Nick Tyler, Civil, Environmental, Geomatic Engineering, UCL

Nick Tyler looked at how transport can affect wellbeing and suggested three approaches to try to make that relationship as positive as possible.

1. Make the improvement of wellbeing a primary policy objective, and design the way we plan (cities) to support wellbeing, including removing the need for motorised transport.
2. Reconceptualise our cities in a more holistic way – cutting across the normal sector-silos and contemplate what such thinking means for the transport system and its delivery, including the impacts on environmental emissions.
3. Determine what the transport environment requires of people and how this relates to what they can actually do, in order to improve the design and implementation of accessible transport systems.

“The importance of children’s mobility” by Professor Roger Mackett, Centre for Transport Studies, UCL

Roger Mackett showed that children are walking less than they used to, mainly because they are travelling more by car and fewer are going out without an adult.

There are a number of reasons why the decline in walking matters:

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Summary Presentations

“Active travel and bus passes: the impact on public health” Dr Elizabeth Webb, Epidemiology and Public Health, UCL

Elizabeth Webb examined the impact of the National Bus Pass on public transport use, the amount of active travel and levels of obesity. She found that the National Bus Pass for older residents of England has increased public and active transport use and may have conferred a protective effect against obesity. There is also a protective association between active travel to work and cardiovascular risk.

Key findings included:

- Eligibility for free bus travel was associated with around a 50% increased use of public transport among older people.
- Those who used public transport had about 25% reduced odds of being obese compared with those who did not, as did those who were eligible for free local bus travel.
- Having a free pass was associated with four times greater amount of active travel, seven times greater bus use and 15% greater likelihood of walking 3 or more times per week.
- Almost 70% of participants travelled to work using private transport. Using public transport, walking, or cycling to work was associated with a 20% lower likelihood of being overweight.
- Walking or cycling was associated with a lower likelihood of having diabetes, and walking was associated with a lower likelihood of having hypertension.

“Evolutionary Determinants of Health and Urban Wellbeing: a walk in the park?” by Gustav Milne, Institute of Archaeology, UCL

Gustav Milne pointed out that although we are now adapting culturally to modern urban life, we have not evolved anatomically at the same speed. There is therefore a profound dichotomy between the world we currently live in, and the one we were genetically, metabolically, biologically, physiologically and psychologically designed to inhabit. If, for example, we don't adopt nutrition and activity regimes that broadly simulate those of our palaeolithic ancestors, then obesity, diabetes and cardio-vascular problems will inevitably follow. Our bodies are designed to be active, to take exercise on a daily basis: so transport policies and town plans should be designed around this most basic genetic imperative. Transport policies should integrate these aspects when planning urban streets, highways, junctions and the provision of public transport facilities.

It was suggested that:

Summary of the discussions

The importance of walking

Walking policies, in particular, were discussed, as this mode was felt to be generally undervalued by policymakers. Most participants agreed that:

- Walking as a way of travelling is cheap and effective. It is also an opportunity to engage directly with nature.
- Encouraging an increase in walking can result in quick policy wins that have long-term benefits, particularly with regard to health.
- Both planners and politicians need to be made aware of the benefits of walking. The economic value of walking should be better promoted.

The key policy levers available to deliver more walking include:

- the lowering of the speed limit to 20mph in residential areas
- walking clubs
- improvements to walking paths (e.g. better lighting)
- engagement with parents, schools and communities
- the improvement of signage so that it displays the time taken to walk to a destination rather than the distance in miles.

Improving policy-making

More generally participants considered that wellbeing should be central to government decision making. Economic growth is a significant part of the story, but should not overshadow the importance of wellbeing.

There is a need within government for more inter and cross-departmental collaboration. In addition, there should be more cross institutional policy making between different stakeholders. This includes:

- Local Health and Wellbeing Boards need to join up with the local planning and transport bodies in towns and cities.
- Cross-departmental cooperation between departments such as DCLG, DfT and DH is key for better spatial planning, and improving the walking environment.
- Local consultation will be important. Academics and policy makers need to involve local communities from the start (i.e. when setting objectives)
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