

Active Travel in Liverpool: an unmet opportunity for well-being.

Executive summary

- active travel's public health benefits outweigh the risks of crashes, pollution, etc.
- cycling and walking are safe in isolation but have perceived and real risks on our roads [1]
- in 1971, 80% children walked to school; in 1990, 9% walked to school [2]
- children and elderly are more fragile and more at risk in road crashes
- worldwide, road crash is the main fatal accident risk in children, 9-17 years [3]
- the lowered risk to drivers from car safety devices induces faster driving [4]
- increased pedestrian and cyclist deaths followed seatbelt legislation [4]
- 52% of Merseyside's road casualties are pedestrians and cyclists [5]
- road conditions produce fear and withdrawal in walkers and cyclists
- there seems limited protection of vulnerable road users by the judicial system
- deterring active travel removes great benefits, e.g. public health, carbon [6]
- by 2050, 90% of adults will be overweight or obese if no action is taken [7]
- our challenge is: 'safer roads for healthier people'

Travelling actively benefits people, environment and economy. Walking and cycling reduce heart disease, obesity, cancer, diabetes and stress [6], outweighing the risks of poor air quality and road traffic collisions. The more we travel on foot or bike, the more we reduce congestion, pollution, carbon emissions and road risk, as well as liberating road and parking space.

Obstacles to active travel. Cycling and walking are intrinsically extremely safe, yet over half of British adults feel local roads are too dangerous to cycle on [1]. Is this fear justified? Merseyside's casualties amongst vulnerable road users have risen from 47 in 2007 to 85 in 2012 [5] and now exceed the falling risks of vehicle occupants; pedestrians and cyclists thus comprise the majority, 52%, of all road casualties (killed or seriously injured) where the national average is 38% [5]. Why should this be the case? In 1983, seatbelt legislation produced more modest reduction in road casualties than expected; while fewer drivers and front passengers died, substantially more pedestrians and cyclists were killed [4]. Risk compensation for 'safety improvements' have been blamed, producing higher speeds and faster cornering [4]. It is also known that levels of walking and cycling are directly related to the speeds and volume of motor traffic [8]. Indeed, an absence of casualties on some of the busiest road sections seems due to withdrawal of people through fear of traffic. That child fatalities have halved over 20 years has resulted from withdrawal of children from road space [3]; now they are driven to school, deprived of exercise whilst adding to congestion and road risk [2]. At the same time, compromised protection of active travelling road victims by the courts is implicit in newsworthy mitigations of sentencing [9,10].

Poor cycling infrastructure, alongside fear of the real risks from traffic, together comprise the most significant obstacle to active travel in Liverpool. Further deterrents include: restraining road furniture, street clutter, pavement parking, dress code issues, noise, abusive behaviours and pollution. Indeed, particulates are implicated in 239 deaths annually in Liverpool, breaching EU standards and, with 2,440 life years lost, is amongst the UK's highest air quality risks [11].

Creating opportunities for active travel. EU level, high quality, walking and cycling infrastructure could replace many car journeys, particularly the 60% under 5 miles, with active travel. In turn, this will reduce the known risks from traffic, air pollution, carbon emissions and congestion, while greatly improving public health [12]. Children and the elderly are particularly fragile in collisions and road crash is the leading cause of death by injury at ages 9 to 17 years [3]; such considerations should be central to highways design, education programmes and processes that modify driver behaviour. 20 mph areas are being implemented in Liverpool and, together with best quality routes, are known to reduce casualties, with measurable reductions in mortality and air pollution that comfortably outweigh risks from crashes [12,13].

Recommendations and challenges. Building on the third Local Transport Plan [14], we propose a transformational approach that draws on the wealth of European expertise in road safety:

1. a new target of **zero road deaths** in Liverpool, by adopting 'Vision Zero Merseyside' [15-17],
2. 360 miles of safe, continuous, City-wide and segregated space for cycling and walking [18],
3. taxi, bus, freight, council and police drivers to act as ambassadors for best practice,
4. the authority to lobby for funding of enforcement of safe driving practices everywhere, including pavement parking, indicated speed limits around schools and on rural B roads,
5. the justice system to empower the courts to fairly address the plight of vulnerable road users.

What is the future of transport for our children and our grand-children? Indeed, how many Liverpool children should we accept being killed or seriously injured on our roads each year?

MCC website; click here for references:

<http://www.mersecycle.org.uk/wp/draft-submission-to-sustainability-commission/>

Appendix

References

1. BBC website; News England: <http://www.highwaysmagazine.co.uk/local-roads-too-dangerous-to-cycle-on-poll-suggests-20140703> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-28093374> (Accessed 3rd July 2014).
2. Hillman M, Adams J, Whitelegg J. In: One False Move. ISBN 0 85374 494 7
3. Wikipedia website: List of Preventable Causes of Death. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_preventable_causes_of_death (Accessed 17th June 2014).
4. McCarthy M. The benefit of seatbelt legislation in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 1989, 43, 218-222
5. Travel independent website. <http://www.travelindependent.org.uk/> (Accessed 17th June 2014).
6. Sustrans website; Health and Active Travel: <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/policy-evidence/related-academic-research/health-and-active-travel> (Accessed 03/07/14).
7. UK Government, Department of Health website: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthimprovement/Obesity/DH_079713 (Accessed 03/07/14)
8. Jacobsen, PL; Racioppi, F; Rutter, H (2009) Who owns the roads? How motorised traffic discourages walking and bicycling, *Injury Prevention*, v15, pp369-373.
9. BBC website: Cyclist killer Gary McCourt: Crown loses appeal against 'lenient' sentence. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-24240127> (Accessed 17th June 2014).
10. The Jewish Chronicle Online: Mr Loophole defends rabbi death claim. <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/119731/mr-loophole-defends-rabbi-death-claim> (Accessed 17th June 2014).
11. Public Health England website: http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317141074607 (accessed 30/04/14)
12. Lindsay G, MacMillan A. Moving urban trips from cars to bicycles: impact on health and emissions. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. Feb 2011; Vol 35 (1) 54-60.
13. Bristol Local Government Website; City Council Cabinet minutes: https://www.bristol.gov.uk/committee/2012/ua/ua000/0726_7.pdf (Accessed 03/07/14).
14. Merseyside Local Transport Plan website; LTP3: http://www.letstravelwise.org/content206_Local-Transport-Plan-3.html (Accessed 03/07/14)
15. Whitelegg J, Haq G. Vision Zero: Adopting a Target of Zero for Road Traffic Fatalities and Serious Injuries (2006), for the Stockholm Environment Institute, produced under a contract with the Department for Transport. http://sei-international.org/mediamanager/documents/Publications/Future/vision_zero_FinalReportMarch06.pdf
16. Vision Zero Merseyside; pdf document. www.wirralpedestrians.org.uk/files/vision_zero_merseyside.pdf (Accessed 17th June 2014).
17. Hong Kong Road Safety Council website: <http://www.roadsafety.gov.hk/en/campaign/campaign20140502.html> (Accessed 03/07/14)
18. CTC website; Space for Cycling: www.ctc.org.uk/spaceforcycling. (Accessed 03/07/14).

MCC website; click here for references:

<http://www.mersecycle.org.uk/wp/draft-submission-to-sustainability-commission/>