

NW TRANSPORT ROUNDTABLE & CYCLING PROJECTS REGIONAL SEMINAR: ACTIVE TRAVEL

Held at Stockport Town Hall on 30.1.2009

Sponsored by Stockport MBC, North West Transport Roundtable (NW TAR) & Stockport Primary Care Trust & supported by GONW

Contemporaneous notes by Lillian Burns, Convenor, NW TAR

Councillor Stuart Bodsworth, Stockport MBC's executive member for the Environment, chaired the morning session. He opened the seminar and welcomed everyone, explaining that he was Stockport's cycling champion, that Stockport MBC aimed to become a 'greener' Borough and that he wanted to see the Council do more than it was doing on active travel and the 'green' agenda. He explained who the North West Transport Activists Roundtable were and also the role of the Greater Manchester Transport Resource Unit, which had carried out much of the administrative support, and he paid tribute in particular to Roland Graham for his role as the principal organiser.

John Grimshaw, CBE, recently retired Chief Executive of Sustrans, was the keynote speaker. He identified the three key transport issues of our time as:

1. We have created a sedentary lifestyle
2. We have caused a depletion of resources
3. We have exacerbated climate change

Walking and cycling can make a contribution to all these issues. However, we should travel less.

In 2000 over 25% of U.S. citizens were considered obese. The percentage has since risen significantly.

We tend to drive to fitness centres. It ought to be a requirement that all fitness centres are easily accessible on foot and by cycle.

We have built an obese society while some other countries in Europe have done the opposite. The Chief Medical Officer says you have to build cycling and walking into policies. The Department of Health publishes its 'National Plan for Physical Activity' on Feb. 11th, 2009. The Department of Transport, however, do not see it (the promotion of healthier lifestyles) as their job. Nevertheless, an Active Travel consortium succeeded in raising £20 m. towards active travel.

'Walking buses' of school children are well-meaning initiatives, but they have a downside. They are teaching children to be less confident about walking around the streets on their own.

We need a real commitment to an active and fit society – it requires a fundamental change in transport priorities – and we need to make a decision to drive less. Meanwhile the government is careering ahead with a third runway at Heathrow, despite the fact that the Committee on Climate Change recommended an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions between 1990 and 2050.

Personal travel accounts for over 30% of climate change emissions by the UK. The actual percentage of greenhouse gas (GhG) emissions that come from transport is a half. Some fixes can be achieved through technological change but we must create a society which travels less far and we must share more journeys, ie. 'increased occupancy'. Every car in the country should be able to charge for carrying passengers. Perhaps we should be putting more effort into tourism (?) We should reduce long distance travel by making more places nearer to hand more attractive and easily accessible. Stockport has the Peak District National Park on its doorstep. Work is ongoing to get two important national trails to connect in to Buxton station. The aim is to get one million more visitors to into the Peak Park by public transport.

Strip out all pelican crossings and toucan lights and install zebra crossing instead. Pelicans and toucans give priority to the motorist. Zebras give priority to pedestrians.

Planting street trees reduces the temperature on streets, helps with CO2 and makes streets more civilised.

The advice to government is - don't waste funds on expanding roads. Invest in favour of short journeys. Applaud walkers and cyclists and give them real priority everywhere. Active travel = more people walking and cycling = less cars.

Dr. Stephen Watkins, Director of Public Health, Stockport Primary Care Trust, confirmed that we are currently in the middle of an obesity epidemic. If it continues at the present rate, it will be normal to be obese. Over 50% of the population will shortly be obese, carrying with it huge expenses. We are stupidly buying and eating food – so is it not our fault? No, it is not. The cause of the epidemic is diminished physical activity. We need to build more gyms and swimming pools. Recreational activity as part of leisure is important, as is an attractive environment close by conurbations.

Moving around is something we do every day. There has been an American study which has compared people's average weights, like for like, between those living in an infrastructure which is pedestrian permeable and one which is not. Those people who were able to access services and jobs on foot easily weighed on average six pounds less than those whose environment was less pedestrian friendly. Six pounds is not important – or is it? How many deaths a year would we save in Stockport if the average weight of people was reduced by that amount? The calculation is 300 deaths a year. So, for Greater Manchester that is 3,000 deaths a year. Across the UK it is 60,000. That is what the American evidence, endorsed by the DfT, has shown. This information was hidden in an appendix to a DfT design guide. It highlights the significance of active travel. If we are going to get people to walk farther, we are going to have to make environments more attractive. Stockport is introducing attractive routes as a priority.

Cycling - we can promote for journeys of up to five miles. If many short journeys by car were transferred to cycling, we would meet government targets on obesity. And the combination of cycle and train as a transport mode can match the flexibility of the private car. We should think and plan more for combined cycle and train journeys. In California, Cal-Train has put a cycle van on every train. (It is not necessary for the length of the whole van to match the available platform – only the doorway). However, Cal-Train's problem is that there are too many cyclists using the trains. They are now trying to convince people to buy two bikes and are offering free storage at each end.

If we are going to tackle obesity and save lives, we are going to have to promote Active Travel.

Josie Wride, Group Leader, Greater Manchester Transportation Unit, declared that road safety should be a concern for everyone and partnership working was the way we would have to work.

The Audit Commission produced a report in February 2007 saying we should look at matters from a killed and seriously injured (KSI) point of view. The Transport Committee put an estimate of £18 bn. on the cost of road casualties.

The Greater Manchester Casualty Reduction Partnership is now building on neighbourhood working it started some years ago with local communities. Members are welcome. One thing we are very grateful for in Greater Manchester is that we do very well on partnership working. But it can also be quite difficult.

We need to tell “a good story” to the DfT to bring in funding. (A recent bid was unsuccessful through not telling a good enough story). Amongst other things, the partnership was carrying out a speed limit review, evolving a Greater Manchester National Driver Improvement Scheme, running a safety camera operation and managing specific road safety projects funded by the DfT.

In Greater Manchester the aim has been to stretch casualty reduction targets and keep the trend downwards. It was becoming apparent, though, that the stretched targets would probably not be met. However, many national targets had been met such as the reductions in slight casualties and child casualties. Figures for pedestrians and cyclists killed or seriously injured were also coming down and there had been a “fantastic” performance in reducing fatalities. Pedestrians accounted for 45% of deaths and 37% of serious injuries in 2007.

Safety cameras – love them or hate them - were bringing speeds down and making people feel safer. There are around 250 fixed speed camera sites around Greater Manchester and about 200 mobile locations. It was essential to get car drivers more aware and caring. Research shows that every 1mph reduction in average speed = 5% reduction in collisions. Cameras do make people go slower and do improve quality of life and variable speed limit signs do give people a reminder of the correct speed.

The priority must be shifted more to pedestrians and cyclists. (NB. Endorsement of the call by John Grimshaw for push button requests for traffic lights to change to be more immediate but defence of walking school buses as helping to teach pedestrian skills). Children holding up posters outside schools was a very effective way of speed campaigning.

Children like walking to school and put pressure on parents. School crossing service very popular. There were 1,500 ‘lollipop’ crossing points in Greater Manchester. Customer satisfaction survey showed that lollipop crossings were hugely popular.

Greater Manchester was offering speed awareness courses as an option to prosecution for speeders. So far 31,000 drivers had been trained.

People cycling must wear bright colours. A lot of people taking part in ‘Bikeability’ safer cycling scheme and there was also ‘Crucial Crew’ training for children and a ‘Not drinking and driving’ awareness programme. A very effective stunt a couple of years ago was the laying out of a massive circle of 94 pairs of shoes in Albert Square representing the number of people killed on the roads.

The focus for the future was effective partnership working and a detailed investigations of KSI ‘hot spots’.

Peter Hillsdon, Principal Transport Policy Officer at Sefton, explained that he was a member of the delivery team for the Southport Cycling Town programme.

All local authorities were required to produce accessibility strategies. Accessibility can mean improving access to services – which stems from the Social Exclusion Unit report: *Making the Connections*.

On Merseyside, the focus was tackling worklessness which, in parts of Merseyside, rose to 28%. There were a whole host of challenges. However, one initiative had been the production of a Draft Supplementary Planning Document on transport accessibility agreed across all the Merseyside authorities.

Also, Bikeability training was being offered to all children. 'Let's Get Moving', involved using neighbourhood teams and also to help get people to work there was 'Dial-a-Link' demand responsive transport and 'Work Wise' travel cards and 'Work Wise Wheels'. So far there has been a heavy reliance on public transport to date. There has not yet been sufficient focus on the role of walking and cycling.

Giving parents choice of where to send their children to school has caused problems. We (society) should be reducing the need to travel.

The 'Accession' model has primarily been used for public transport improvements to date, but its application could be extended eg. to developing a cycle journey plan. If the whole highway network in Merseyside were mapped and put into 'Accession', we could develop a cycle journey plan. Unfortunately, as a society, we are travelling further. This works counter to cycling and walking.

Robin Field, former Chairman of the Cyclists Touring Club and also a representative of Living Streets, explained that he meets regularly with the Highways Agency, who do carry out useful work from the perspectives of walkers and cyclists, but who argue that the real need is for their remit to be changed for them to take on the wider sustainable travel work.

He explained his own mobility problems which had led to him becoming more aware of shortfalls in the design of infrastructure, bicycles and other equipment. He said we should be designing an environment (eg. with dropped kerbs everywhere) which was geared to people with mobility problems and he explained the detailed design of a cycle he had evolved which enabled people with the sort of physical disability he had (on just one side) to be able to continue cycling. There needed to be more cycle adaptations generally available for people with different mobility problems which would allow them to keep fit by keeping cycling. The NHS were hopeless as an advice source for such matters but 'Wheels for All', a charity with 17 locations was excellent.

'In-line skating' should also be taken seriously. Switzerland has national (roller) skating routes as well as cycling and walking routes.

Key questions which need to be asked are - Is cycling taken seriously enough and are disabilities properly provided for?

David Robinson, the recently re-elected national chairman of the Cyclists Touring Club, chaired the afternoon session. The CTC, he explained, has 60,000 members. He himself had changed his opinion over the years on the matter of cycleways, he said, and he spoke of the high number of casualties in hospitals following the recent icy spell.

Roland Graham, Cycling Projects trustee (and principal organiser of the event) spoke about the stretching targets for active travel which London has set itself - a quintupling of cycling from 1.9% in 2000 to 5% by 2025 and from 21% to 22% for walking. Walking has been decreasing for some time and therefore it is ambitious – and much more positive than local authority targets in the North West. London also clearly believes there is a greater potential for cycling.

The adopted NW Regional Spatial Strategy has one chapter on transport which begins with seven objectives. One of these is to reduce the adverse impacts of transport. Another is to secure a shift towards more sustainable modes of transport, and there is much said about sustainable transport. The seven objectives are brought about by 10 policies, each with a supporting statement. Through the RSS Examination in Public process, cycling activists expressed the opinion that the cycling (and walking) policy was inadequate and should be more robust.

In the RSS, policy 10 requires that a full range of policy options should be considered, including behavioural change. Policy 3 required that measures should be introduced to enhance accessibility by public transport and policy 9 (the walking and cycling one) required that local authorities should develop integrated networks of continuous and safe routes for walking and cycling. Priorities included a high standard of safer routes to school.

The value of networks is greater than the sum of their individual parts. Wallasey is a good example of cycle routes.

There is a need to make more on-road cycle routes which are amenable and attractive. This is possible in many urban areas. They should lie along minor roads with some re-design to help crossing major roads. These routes deserve green landscaping.

Promote cycling district by district. Local networks give added value to regional networks and vice versa.

Michelle Cameron, who leads on cross-policies for GONW, spoke on the government's future transport planning as revealed in *Delivering a Sustainable Transport Strategy* (DaSTS) and the guidance for the third round of Local Transport Plans.

DaSTS represents a new way of working- looking at the long term with partners. Very much influenced by Stern and Eddington, both of which were published in late 2006. DfT goals have been very much aligned with Eddington's principles.

There is a need to harvest technology and tackle CO2 emissions (the government have committed to an 80% reduction in GhG emissions). There is also a need to tackle behavioural change.

Closing date for DaSTS consultation – February 27th. Closing date for LTP 3 consultation - April 9th.

[In reply to a question from Terry Perkins of the Ramblers Association, Manchester & High Peak Area, who was concerned about building on the countryside and government departments not always pulling together]. Thinking is changing. Thinking from DaSTS needs to be incorporated into the RFA review. We have to reduce the need to travel.

Sue Stevenson, Transport Policy & Programmes Manager at Stockport MBC, opened by explaining that the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority was about to become an Integrated Transport Authority.

In Greater Manchester, the shared priorities for the 10 local authorities are: managing congestion, delivering accessibility, improving transport safety and security, better air quality and public transport.

Amongst the aims of Greater Manchester's second LTP are: to increase the number of short trips on foot and by cycle and to deliver and promote a safe cycle network.

Stockport MBC's headline priorities include: a leading green borough and an attractive and thriving Stockport. These are connected to the health agenda and accessibility needs.

Stockport publishes green 'A – Z' maps and 'Walk Stockport' and every transport scheme is checked using 'Copecat' (the Concise Pedestrian and Cycling Audit Tool).