

Towards healthy transport and society: Making the case for health impact as a critical determinant of transport policy

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The presentation will consider the public health evidence concerning the health impacts of road transport from the time of the Buchanan Report (1963). The analogy of the 'health impact iceberg' will be presented to propose that health impacts now officially recognised do not represent the sum total of health impacts, many of which currently sit below the 'water-line'. From evidenced-based public policy it can be claimed that on the following grounds alone health impacts should be a critical determinant of transport policy: close to a quarter of adults in England are obese, some children borne in the late 20th century are predicted to die before their parents due to a parallel rapid rise in childhood obesity, while up to two-thirds of men and three quarters of women report activity levels which substantially increase their risk of contracting up to twenty chronic diseases. In England the Chief Medical Officer has stated that the target of 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity to promote health will only be achieved by helping people to build activity into their daily lives and that for most people the easiest and most acceptable forms of physical activity are those such as walking or cycling instead of driving.

As a mechanism for applying the current understanding of health impacts of transport policy and practice, both positive as well as negative, Health Impact Assessment will be addressed as it is a valuable tool in providing an overall 'balance sheet'. It's more widespread application to Local Transport Plans and other strategic policies and plans may provide an influential route towards healthy transport in society and prove to be a major challenge to the current orthodoxy in transport planning.

Adrian has worked in both the transport and health sectors in University settings, most recently as a part-time Research Fellow at the Transport Studies Group, University of Westminster. His PhD at the Open University School of Health was a comparative study of inter-sectoral collaboration on transport and health in three European cities. He has worked for the past 11 years largely as a consultant specialising in the health impacts of road transport. Publications include the first report on the topic for a national medical body - Road Transport and Health - for the British Medical Association (1997), the main transport paper for the Acheson Inquiry in Inequalities in Health (1998) and more recently publications for organisations ranging from the World Health Organisation, and Health Development Agency, to Merseytravel and latterly Cycling England. Closer to home he instigated the establishment of Sustrans' Active Travel programme in 2000 and remains their Health Policy Adviser.