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72 PERCENT DRIVE TO DAIRY, 10 MINUTES WALK AWAY

A study looking at ways to increase physical activity and reduce CO2 emissions has discovered that people will often drive to a local dairy which is within easy walking distance.

The lead researcher, Dr Karen Witten from Massey University, told the Public Health Association conference at Auckland University today that studies of two west Auckland suburbs showed up to 72 percent of trips to the local dairy were by car.

"Of those who took the car, the main reasons given for doing so were the dairy was only one of several stops they were making, they were too tired or lazy, or walking was too slow," Dr Witten told the public health delegates.

A second study involved people taking photographs of areas around their neighbourhoods which made walking pleasant or unpleasant.

"Destinations considered attractive were those offering views, walking routes between destinations through parks and open spaces, access to waterways and other natural spaces and amenities.

"What made walking unpleasant was traffic volume, footpath safety, areas in need of maintenance, graffiti and vandalism, rubbish and no line of sight into a park making people feel uneasy," Dr Witten said.

"Obviously, if we are to increase the number of people choosing to walk for a purpose or just for pleasure, locality features are very important. Urban designers have to look at improving access to waterways; entrance ways to parks and public spaces have to feel safe. We also need to have prompt response to "incivilities" – those things that decrease a person's sense of safety."

Dr Witten told the conference that people will walk more if there are clustered urban facilities – shops, cafés and other amenities - in the one spot.

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