

Transport and Health

Public Health Association of New Zealand position statement 2004

- **Governments should promote public transport, walking and cycling as these forms of transport offer greater gains for health than reliance on transport via private motor vehicles.**
- **Use of private motor vehicles can be reduced by user charges, car sharing and limiting urban sprawl.**
- **Health damage from motor vehicles could be reduced by control measures aimed at reducing exhaust emissions.**
- **Health organisations should develop and promote information on the health impact of transport systems.**

This policy links closely with the PHA position statements on alcohol, health promoting taxation, road safety and climate change

Adopted by the Council of the PHA of New Zealand on 27 June 2004

The PHA notes:

1. There are significant health benefits of physical activity as part of walking and cycling.¹
2. Road traffic injury is a major cause of premature death in New Zealand.²
3. Travel by bus or train reduces the risks of harm from injury compared with car and motorbike travel.
4. Transport injuries affect Maori and Pacific peoples significantly more than European/Pakeha New Zealanders).^{3 4 5}
5. Air pollution in New Zealand can exceed safe levels⁶ cause hospitalisation⁷ and premature death.⁸ Vehicle emissions are estimated to be responsible for around 400 premature deaths.⁹
6. Greater use of public transport, walking and cycling would also tend to reduce overall noise pollution levels from vehicular traffic.
7. Private motor vehicles are substantial contributors to greenhouse gases in New Zealand. Vehicle-related CO₂ emissions have substantially increased since 1996.¹⁰
8. The New Zealand Transport Strategy has a public health objective.

The Public Health Association affirms the following principles:

1. That the “polluter should pay” principle should be applied to transport-related pollution.
2. That a supportive fiscal environment is critical for encouraging behaviour change towards use of healthy transport options.
3. That the health sector should particularly support transport policies that reduce inequalities in health.
4. That New Zealand needs to address the greenhouse gas emissions from its

- transport sector and to meet its international obligations to prevent climate change (eg, under the Kyoto Protocol).
5. That some of the revenue from fuel taxes is used to promote sustainable public transport options to provide alternatives to private motor vehicle travel (particularly in areas populated by disadvantaged groups).
 6. The New Zealand should strive for sustainable energy policies.

The Public Health Association believes the following steps should be taken or given further consideration:

1. **Central and local government should promote cycling and walking by:**
 - *Building* more cycle lanes, expanding pedestrian only areas.
 - *Making roads safer* for cyclists by enforcing of the law according to the road code in the case of cyclist and pedestrian collisions along with enhanced education of vehicle users and cyclists.
 - *Requiring large workplaces to provide* shower facilities to encourage walking and cycling to work.
 - *Expanding* the use of supervised walking groups of school children in the form of “walking school buses” with priority given to communities with the highest need for affordable transport – ie, low-income and Maori communities.
2. **Central and local government should promote public transport** (buses, light rail, trains) by further subsidies for public transport where such services reduce air pollution and time wasted due to traffic congestion in urban settings.
3. **Central and local government should discourage use of private motor vehicles by:**
 - *Regulating to limit urban sprawl* to enable better use of public transport, limit transport costs and reduce access difficulties to health and social services for Maori and low-income New Zealanders.
 - *Piloting and evaluating car sharing schemes*, including the option of fast lanes for full cars.¹¹
 - *Considering elimination of subsidised vehicle parking and company car use:* High parking fees can cross-subsidise urban public transport.
 - *Introducing user charges*, in particular bring in carbon charges for motor vehicles sooner than 2007, levying a charge on aircraft jet fuel and considering congestion charges.
4. **Government should reduce health-damaging vehicle air pollution by** reducing congestion, introducing and regularly raising fuel efficiency standards for vehicles (beginning with all new and imported used vehicles), and further reducing the sulphur content of diesel.
5. **Health and transport agencies produce and disseminate evidence on transport and health**, such as the British Medical Association’s “Road transport and health”.¹² This would help influence national and regional transport policy.

References

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- 12 British Medical Association. Road transport and health. London: British Medical Association, 1997.