Public Health Association
AUSTRALIA

Public Health Association of Australia:

Policy-at-a-glance – Low Emissions & Active Transport Policy

This policy should be read in conjunction with existing PHAA policy on Physical Activity.

Key message:

1. The transport sector is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and our reliance on private motor vehicles is also a major contributor to the lack of physical activity in Australia.
2. Active transport is the mix of walking and cycling, integrated with public transport used for commuting and travelling instead of private motorised vehicles and taxis.
3. Increased use of active transport, particularly in urban areas, delivers direct and indirect benefits for personal, community and environmental health.
4. A range of strategies need to be developed and implemented by Governments to encourage increased use of active and public transport to achieve improvements in both environmental and health outcomes.

Summary: PHAA will advocate for the development and implementation of a range of measures to encourage uptake of active and public transport options and discourage the use of private motorised vehicles. Cross-portfolio initiatives at the national, jurisdictional and local levels to make active and public transport options more accessible and user-friendly will be key to this approach.

Audience: Australian, State and Territory Governments, policy makers and program managers.

Responsibility: PHAA's Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group (SIG)

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LOW EMISSIONS AND ACTIVE TRANSPORT POLICY

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) notes that:

1. There are two major public health concerns associated with car exhaust emissions:

    a. emissions of various types which contribute to air pollution and are directly hazardous to human health.

    b. emissions of greenhouse gases which contribute to climate change.

2. The transport sector is a major contributor to global warming, responsible for 16.6% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Australia in 2012 (90.2 of 543.6 Mt CO_2-e) (1).

3. The extensive reliance on private motor vehicles built into urban design is a major contributor to the lack of physical activity in Australia (see related PHAA policies on Promoting Healthy Weight, Physical Activity, Preparing for Peak Oil and Safe Climate).

4. Active transport is the mix of walking and cycling, integrated with public transport, used for commuting and traveling, instead of private motorised vehicles and taxis. Active transport promotes individual and community health and wellbeing.

5. There are two components to reducing emissions from transport. The first is to promote less use of motorised transport. Mechanisms to promote less use of motorised transport include less travel (through working in smaller communities; electronic communications) and through making more efficient use of travel including multiple destinations in one trip, and sharing of vehicles through car pooling. The second is to ensure what motorised transport there is has no or very low per person emissions. Replacement of petroleum-using engines with electric engines powered by renewable energy would be the most effective way of achieving this where vehicular transport is required (2). At the same time, other benefits of using active transport instead of vehicles need to be promoted.

6. Less motorised transport results from promotion of more active and public transport use, disincentives to motor vehicle use, and promotion of other forms of non-physical connectivity.

7. Traffic calming, speed reduction and smoothing traffic flow measures both reduce emissions and enhance safety (3,4).

8. Increased use of active transport confers direct and indirect co-benefits for personal, community and environmental health (5,6).

9. Physical activity has many health benefits, including reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, ischemic stroke, type 2 diabetes, colon cancers, osteoporosis, and depression (7). Regular physical activity is associated with enhanced health and reduced risk for all-cause mortality (7).

Direct Benefits

10. As little as 30 minutes exercise daily helps to improve physical fitness (8) and is encouraged to reduce chronic diseases. Even moderate exercise promotes psychological wellbeing. Further important direct benefits of regular exercise include improved co-ordination, increased bone strength and reduced injury risk.

11. Use of public transport may promote exercise in that people need to get to transport nodes, either by walking or bicycling. Thus more use of public transport is a win-win for health by increasing physical activity, for the community through reductions in noise and traffic congestion and for the environment by reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

12. Reduced use of motor vehicles will result in reduced exposure to particulate and other air pollution, noise pollution for drivers, residents and workers along traffic corridors, and other users of public spaces.

13. Lower rates of motorised vehicle use may contribute to fewer traffic crashes and injuries.

Indirect Benefits

14. The benefits that will derive indirectly from an improved public transport system are perhaps more extensive than the direct ones.

15. Such benefits may include:
    a. Building social capital and improving social cohesion (also known as 'community connectedness'), since people are interacting with others whom they see on shared journeys or while walking/biking around their neighbourhoods and building social relationships (rather than each being insulated in their own private car)(9). This also has mental health effects in reducing peoples' sense of insularity(10);
    b. Ultimately, in a well-developed and effective transport system, could result in *reduced commuting time which would provide improved social benefits* (11);
    c. *A public and active transport system on which people from all walks of life intermingle while traveling on* public transport, walkways and cycleways has the potential to reduce socio-economic inequalities (12);
    d. Greater use of public transport should result in reduced greenhouse gas emissions which helps to mitigate global warming.

16. Active transport can be encouraged by:
    a. Provision of improved infrastructure for walking and cycling, including safe, connected cycle and walkways, and workplaces set up with facilities for bike storage and showering. Provision of shaded cycle parking spaces;
    b. Easy pick-up/drop-off cycle hire arrangements;
    c. Social marketing to normalise cycling as a means of transport, and change the perception that special gear is needed to cycle
    d. Improved availability of urban green space

17. Use of public transport needs to be actively encouraged. Encouragement is provided by public transport being cost effective, quick and convenient (14).

18. To be attractive for use, public transport infrastructure needs adequate physical capacity and robustness, but also the location, coverage and frequency, ease of access, actual personal and infrastructure safety and a positive public perception of that safety.

19. More attractive public transport will be priced so as to be affordable and less costly, or at least no more costly, and as amenable and easy to use as private cars. Use of private vehicles will also need to

be actively discouraged by policies that increase inconvenience of driving in built up areas, and prioritise public transport, pedestrian and bicycle travel over private motor vehicle use.

20. Strategies to make public transport more amenable include:
    a. Well designed and maintained, graffiti-free and secure buses, trains and ferries - and stops, stations and wharves;
    b. Integrating public and other active transport modes such as fitting racks to buses so they are able to hold bicycles in racks externally;
    c. Frequent enough service to be useful;
    d. Having sufficient capacity to carry expected numbers comfortably including those with bicycles; and
    e. Ticketing to enable people to take multiple trips, in multiple directions, on different transport modes, with relative ease.

21. Access to clean, safe and affordable public transport is an equity issue as well; non-car users need to be able to access employment, services, recreation and relatives. While the majority of transport will cover people living in cities, good quality public transport has to meet the needs of rural and regional people, those living in outer suburbs, and those needing to travel across or tangential to the central business districts. In our partially decentralised urban sprawls much travel is not into the metro hub but across or around 'town'. Having to travel to an urban centre to travel out again is wasteful of both energy and people's time. Avoiding urban centres reduces congestion.

22. Integrating walking and bicycle use with public transport requires designing an extensive and linked (with existing transport corridors and other networks), well maintained, safe to use (free from obstacles, separated from traffic) and secure (well lit, patrolled) network of walking and cycle ways, that actually follow routes that people tend to use (rather than following vacant usable land), to promote their use. Further, heavy and light rail transport is the safest and lowest emission form of mass transport. It can carry bikes and link with inter-urban transport most easily.

23. Inter-urban travel is challenging in our large and dispersed country. Investment in railways including fast rail between capitals and major regional centres, and promotion of the safety and joy of rail transport are necessary to move people out of the air, off roads and onto the rails. Rail is clearly optimal for non-urgent freight and all subsidies on truck transport should be reviewed with a view to removal, except in special circumstances such as servicing of very remote areas.

24. Public health principles from the 19th century show that it is government investment in infrastructure and willingness to regulate that is required to achieve public health benefits for the whole community. The role of government is to lead, to invest in, and to encourage others to action by the types of measures listed.

25. Specific examples include:
    a. charges that discourage use of vehicles, particularly discouraging entry into central cities, or where access to public transport is possible; and
    b. subsidies and tax rebates for people and businesses that provide active transport and public transport options and support for themselves or their employees. Specific strategies for employers to encourage staff to use active transport may include not providing vehicles or parking as part of employee benefits, offering cycle use as part of employment packages instead, and/or ensuring appropriate infrastructure for cyclists (bike racks, change rooms).

26. It is important that the energy needs of existing, and any planned further replacement, public transport infrastructure and equipment be assessed as it needs to reduce rather than increase greenhouse gas emissions.

27. Reducing particulate and other emissions from the transport sector can have benefits for global warming and for health (15).

28. Promotion of low emissions vehicles can be achieved by:
    a. Removal of tax rebates for petrol/diesel vehicles;
    b. Incentives for providing electric, hybrid or LPG vehicles; and
    c. Changed fringe benefit tax arrangements to support active and public transport options.

The Public Health Association of Australia resolves to take the following actions:

1. The National Office, the Board and all Special Interest Groups promote active and public transport whenever possible; and

2. The National Office to encourage its own staff to use active and public transport.

ADOPTED 2011 AND REENDORSED in 2014

This policy was developed and adopted in 2011 and then was reviewed as part of the 2014 policy revision process.

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