

Earth has not anything to show more fair....

Please forgive a personal reflection on transport and health. This morning I have had the privilege of cycling to work (an electric bike) along dedicated cycle paths embedded within a city that have taken me through woods, along river paths in beautiful autumn sunshine, observing birds and listening to their song. As Wordsworth so memorably wrote:

*“Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching its majesty:
This City now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning: silent, bare” (1)*

Where in our discourse about active travel is this notion of wellbeing, of joy, and of connection with nature? Perhaps we need to pay more attention to the emotional and psychological impacts of walking and cycling as methods of transport. This might provide some sort of counterbalance to the huge creative endeavor undertaken to persuade us of the positive and aspirational benefits of driving different types of automobiles on our self-image and happiness in the promotion undertaken by the car industry. Douglas (2) argues that private cars share many characteristics with tobacco and could be regarded as the archetypal ecological risk, and for the need for the public health community to advocate strongly for effective policies to reduce car use and increase active travel. Some of these policies may be controversial, such as the right (or not) to have free parking at the workplace. Evidence suggests however that some interventions have a sudden and dramatic impact on active travel rates; the introduction of a workplace travel policy which limited parking places in a university for staff and students living close to their workplace was associated with a significant increase in the proportion both cycling and walking to work and a 70% were meeting 80% of their recommended physical activity goals through active travel (3). The important role of active transport in physical activity is again highlighted in this edition by Shaw et al (4), highlighted as Editor’s Choice, in

New Zealand who found that people who walk or cycle to their main activity are 76% more likely to meet physical activity guidelines. Thus we need to look seriously at policies that impact on these rates, including controversial areas such as workplace parking restrictions. There is also further evidence of a substantial decline of patterns in active travel to school in children compared to their parents (5) in this edition.

Changing behaviour is complex, and the behaviour change model (6) describes a number of key factors affecting behaviour change- including capability, opportunity and motivation. Opportunity is a key driver of travel behaviour. We know that provision of cycling infrastructure (7) is associated with increases in use, with a delay as individuals take time to adjust. There is also good evidence that the form and structure of the built environment influences behaviour, with studies showing that when individuals move into an environment designed to support walking, peoples' behaviour changes (8). Lee (9) in this edition demonstrates that local shops encourage short walking trips and avoid "trip-chaining" whereby people undertake several tasks in one long trip; this has implications for the design of new developments and urban form. As the evidence accumulates that urban design and the built environment impact on behaviour there is need to ensure that new developments are fit for purpose, and that the inequalities inbuilt into our existing environment with respect to infrastructure as outlined by Fuller et al are addressed (10).

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