

Land Transport¹

Introduction

The following is a position statement on land transport prepared by Population Health for Waikato District Health Board (Waikato DHB).

Waikato District Health Board's position

The Waikato DHB agrees that the main focus of transport strategies is ensuring all people have access to the services they need through transport.

As every District Health Board has an objective "to promote the inclusion and participation in society and independence of people with disabilities"ⁱⁱ transport strategies should allow people with disabilities to have access to the services they need.

The Waikato DHB recognises that there are multiple pathways to health gains through transport such as providing access to resources, exercise due to active forms of transport, protecting air quality, and preventing climate change.

The Waikato DHB supports the creation of a public transport environment (including safe walking and cycling options) that is convenient, accessible and affordable, and will positively impact on peoples transport choices.

The Waikato DHB supports public transport initiatives that will assist in reducing inequalities in health. There is evidence that some public health interventions can increase inequalities. Health education interventions tend to be taken up disproportionately by better off groups, while structural and environmental interventions (such as taxation of cigarettes or fluoridated water) tend to affect the population more evenly and have greatest benefit for those worst offⁱⁱ.

When the Waikato DHB is involved in supporting transport-related matters, the focus will be on providing support and information in areas where there is potential for greatest health gain to be realised.

The Waikato DHB has expertise within its organisation to assist and direct transport agencies in undertaking health impact assessments as part of policy development processes. The Waikato DHB supports this interaction.

¹ A review of the Local Government Act (2002) is expected to be completed early next year and will influence the review date of this position statement. Also the review of the Resource Management Act will be reported back to parliament on 18 of August 2009 – this should also effect the review date of this position.

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Transport impacts on health

Access to goods and services

The primary function of transport is the movement of people and goods between places, enabling people to access the services necessary for their everyday lives. Land transport is a key determinant of health as it facilitates access to goods (e.g. food supplies) and services (e.g. general practitioners and pharmacies)ⁱⁱⁱ. Access is the main concept that should be considered when looking at land transport initiatives.

Transport is critical to participation in society. Transport that is accessible, affordable and reliable is needed to access family; education, health services, employment, entertainment services and social settings

Land transport initiatives that are targeted to communities with limited access that enables better access to essential goods and services, will create positive health incomes.

Road traffic injury

Road traffic injury is one of the leading causes of premature death and disability in New Zealand^{iv}. The total mortality of road traffic accidents in the Waikato region between the years 1998-2004 was approximately 395 people^v. By travelling by bus or train the risk of injury from car or motor bike accidents can be reduced. Transport injuries affect a disproportionate amount of Māori in New Zealand than non-Māori with 26 percent of people who die in road crashes being Māori for the year ending 31 December 2007.^{vi}

Enabling physical activity

Participating in physical activity such as walking and cycling has substantial physical and mental health benefits. Different forms of transport other than private vehicle use can create more opportunities for physical exercise^{vii}. Public transport can encourage people to help reach the recommended minimum physical activity requirements of 30 minutes a day. For example on average a trip by public transport requires a 10 minute walk^{viii}. Thus if the person uses a bus twice a day to get to and from work they will be getting 20 minutes of exercise a day.

Public transport options such as busing, walking and cycling have the potential in land transport planning to protect and improve public health and wellbeing. Workplace travel plans that help reduce single occupancy vehicles at commuting peak times by encouraging walking and cycling to work should be supported by company's providing services such as shower facilities. Physical activity can also be promoted by increasing the amount of cycle lanes in urban centres and providing better walkways for pedestrians. Supervised walking groups of school children (walking school buses) are a safe way to provide school children with the necessary daily physical activity. Transport also provides access to active forms of recreation such as river walking paths and sports grounds.

Air quality

Particulate pollution of air is known to exceed safe levels during winter in some communities in the Waikato DHB area^{ix}. Several contaminants produced by vehicles are known to affect air quality which in turn can have consequences for a person's physical health. Research has suggested that the death toll for air pollution has a ratio of 0.8 of the road toll. This means that if there is a yearly road toll of 243 there would have been an additional 200 deaths due to air pollution^{vii}.

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However, it is acknowledged that 85 percent of the poor air quality in the Waikato DHB area is known to be attributed to domestic home heating sources.

Noise pollution

The noise levels of private motor vehicles and heavy motor vehicles have side effects for health. Noise levels can affect a person's physical and mental health. These health effects include impaired communication, disturbed sleep, impaired school and work performance, annoyance, aggression and depression^{vii}.

Social connectedness

Transport can have positive effects on health by allowing access to social support (e.g. enabling better access to friends and family). However some types of road developments for transport purposes can cause communities to be less cohesive and supported when roads with high levels of traffic cross through community networks, thus creating social exclusion or community severance^{vii}.

Summary

Transport is a key social determinant of health whose influence on public health is broader than the traditional public health risk consideration of noise and air pollution. Transport by nature is also clearly linked to urban environments and health.

ⁱ Public Health and Disability Act 2000 (2008), The statutes of New Zealand, 2008, No 91.

ⁱⁱ Woodward, A. & Kawachi, I. (2000). Why reduces health inequalities? *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 54: 923-29.

ⁱⁱⁱ Health Scotland. (2007). Health Impact Assessment of Transport Initiatives: A Guide. Health Scotland: Edinburgh.

^{iv} Conner, J., Langley, J. & Cryer, C. (2006). International comparison of road injury deaths: Road traffic. Retrieved 08/01/09 from <http://www.nzips.govt.nz/documents/international-road-traffic-sept-06.pdf>

^v Waikato district health board (2008) *Waikato District Health Board-Health Needs Assessment and Analysis*. Waikato District Health Board: Hamilton

^{vi} Ministry of transport (2008) Ethnicity. Retrieved June 18th, 2009 from the ministry of transport website: <http://www.transport.govt.nz/research/Documents/Pages%20111%20to%20114%20from%20Motor%20Vehicle%20Crashes%20in%20New%20Zealand%202007.pdf>

^{vii} Public Health Association. (2004). Position statement on transport and health. Wellington: Public Health Association

^{viii} Quigley, R., Cunningham, R., Ward, M., de Boer, M. & Conland, C. (2006). Greater Wellington Regional Land Transport Strategy Health Impact Assessment. Prepared for the Greater Wellington Regional Council. Wellington: Quigley and Watts.

^{ix} Public Health Advisory Committee. (2003). Intersection between transport and health. Background paper by the Public Health Advisory Committee. Wellington: Public Health Advisory Committee.

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