European Heart Network response to the European Commission on the "Green Paper Towards a new culture for urban mobility"

March 2008

Executive Summary

Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases (CVD) and several other avoidable chronic diseases, including diabetes, certain forms of cancer, overweight and obesity, and osteoporosis. Sedentary lifestyles are a key contributing factor to the increase in CVD, obesity and other chronic illnesses across Europe. The cost of treating these diseases is likely to overwhelm health systems and negatively impact economic growth if current trends are not reversed. CVD cost the EU economy over 192 billion Euros annually.

Transport policy has the potential to improve health by encouraging active travel. The majority of trips (and many car trips) within urban areas are less than 5km, which means that walking and cycling should be the preferred choice.

Unfortunately the urban environment is not always conducive to this choice, with fast-moving traffic, insufficient cycle lanes or pedestrian walkways, and air pollution discouraging people from choosing active transport solutions, such as walking and cycling. The most important measures that could be taken to promote walking and cycling as real alternatives to the car are to:

- place walking and cycling as two central components at the heart of urban transport policy;
- implement physical improvements to the urban environment, which work to 'lock in' travel behaviour change, thereby making sustainable transport choices the more attractive, healthier, safer and smarter choice;
- employ 'soft measures' such as travel behaviour change programmes, which aim to work with people's perceptions, provide appropriate information, and overcome barriers to bring about a change in travel behaviour towards more sustainable, 'smarter' choices**;**

- place sustainable transport at the heart of urban transport policy, as it is the key to long-term modal shift;
- redesign residential neighbourhoods, which is a powerful way to facilitate a shift in mode choice;
- introduce road user charging, since it can play an important role in sustainable urban transport policy, by helping to change how and how much we travel;
- encourage greater use of public transport, which will also promote a modal shift.

Introduction

The European Heart Network is a Brussels-based alliance of heart foundations and other concerned non-governmental organisations throughout Europe. EHN has members in 26 countries throughout Europe.

The European Heart Network plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular disease through advocacy, networking and education so that it is no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe.

General Remarks

The European Heart Network (EHN) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the European Commission's Green Paper *'Towards a new culture for urban mobility'*. This is an important opportunity for the European Commission to demonstrate its commitment to including health in all policies. Transport policy has the potential to improve health by encouraging active travel; at the same time, it can create barriers that make it less likely that people lead active lives.

Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases (CVD) and several other avoidable chronic diseases, including diabetes, certain forms of cancer, overweight and obesity, and osteoporosis. According to the World Health Organization, physical inactivity represents 3.5% of the DALY burden (disability adjusted life years) in the WHO European Region. In developed countries world wide, the population attributable fractions of physical inactivity to ischaemic heart disease is 22% and to cerebrovascular disease it is 9%. In Western Europe, more than 30% of adults are not sufficiently active and levels of physical activity are continuing to decline.[1]

Sedentary lifestyles are a key contributing factor to the increase in CVD, obesity and other chronic illnesses across Europe. The cost of treating these diseases is likely to overwhelm health systems and negatively impact economic growth if current trends are not reversed. CVD cost the EU economy over 192 billion Euros annually.[2]

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[1] The European health report 2005 – Public Health action for healthier children and populations, WHO Regional office for Europe, 2005
[2] European cardiovascular disease statistics 2008; EHN, Brussels, February 2008

In 1999, EHN published a report on physical activity and Cardiovascular Disease prevention.[3] In this report, sedentary lifestyle is highlighted as one of the risk factors that increase CVD. Physical inactivity is a strong risk factor for CVD. The risk-increasing effect of being physically inactive as compared with being physically active (relative risk) is around 2. This is of the same order as the relative risk of cigarette smoking, high blood pressure and raised blood-cholesterol levels. EHN recommends that in the framework of prevention of CVD, every European adult should accumulate 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most, and preferably every day of the week. This means that physical activity needs to be part of everyday life - and not limited to vigorous activity in a sports centre. It encourages people to engage in physical activity as part of their daily life. In this publication, EHN recommends for action at a national level in the field of environment and transport to "encourage changes in infrastructure and policy that increase the opportunities for physical activity as part of daily living and transportation."

The publication gives practical examples of environmental changes to promote physical activity, which include:

– Develop an integrated transport strategy that emphasises walking and cycling
– Ensuring streets are safe and well-lit to encourage walking
– Marking-out safe routes for waling and cycling, particularly around schools
– Providing and promoting the use of local parks and green spaces
– Improving bicycle parking facilities near public amenities, work-sites and residential housing so that they are secure and easy-to-use
– Encouraging town planners to provide facilities that can be walked to and around, such as local markets, town squares, pedestrianised areas.

In several Commission co-funded projects led by the EHN, the importance of physical activity, and the need to create environments enhancing the possibility to do more physical activity have been highlighted.

In 2001, EHN published a report, "Children and Young People – the importance of physical activity"[4] which examines children's and young people's engagement in physical activity at various levels in 13 European countries. This report was developed in the framework of the Commission co-funded project "European Heart Health Initiative". The report includes a series of recommendations helping and encouraging young people to be physically active, including recommendations on better urban planning to allow for more physical activity.

In 2005 - 2006, EHN and its members worked intensely on the aspect of childhood obesity, in the framework of the Commission co-funded project "Children and Obesity

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[3] Physical Activity and cardiovascular disease prevention in the European Union; EHN, Brussels, December 1999
http://www.ehnheart.org/content/ItemPublication.asp?docid=4523&level0=1455&level1=1611

[4] Children and young people – the importance of Physical Activity; EHN, Brussels, December 2001 -
http://www.ehnheart.org/files/phyactivity-084635A.pdf

and Associated Avoidable Chronic Diseases." In the framework of this project, EHN developed a list of 10 policy options to prevent child obesity. One of the top-ten priority policy options was "change planning and transport policies: encourage more physical activity by changing planning and transport policies"[5].

EHN believes that current transport policies are unsustainable, both in terms of human health and in terms of environment pollution. Evidence shows that air pollution with Particulate Matter (PM) increases deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Even a short-term rise in PM concentrations increases the risk of emergency hospital admissions for cardiovascular and respiratory causes. Since long-term exposure to PM is particularly damaging to human health and reduces life expectancy, reducing long-term PM concentrations and exposure is a priority.

Transport and use of fossil fuel in households are the major contributors to PM air pollution. The transboundary nature of PM pollution requires that all countries take measures that will benefit the European population. Providing alternatives to private motorized vehicles, particularly public and non-motorized transport such as trains, cycling and walking, may lead to changes in people's behaviour. Furthermore, it would also lead to reduce traffic congestion and influence long-term trends in transport demand and pollution emission.[6]

Prioritising walking and cycling in urban areas will achieve dual European policy goals by contributing to health gains and helping to address climate change. Public transport also generates more physical activity than private motorised transport, as people generally walk farther on either end of their journey than when using a private car, and is more environmentally sustainable than private motorised transport.

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[5] Policy options to prevent child obesity, stakeholder consultations carried out in the context of the project on Children, obesity and associated avoidable chronic diseases ; EHN, Brussels, October 2006 - http://www.ehnheart.org/files/policy%20options%20final-150305A.pdf

[6] WHO Fact sheet EURO/04/05 - http://www.euro.who.int/document/mediacentre/fs0405e.pdf

In its detailed response to the Commission consultation, EHN will focus mainly on those questions which relate to promotion of physical activity.

Free-flowing towns and cities

1. Should a "labelling" scheme be envisaged to recognise the efforts of pioneering cities to combat congestion and improve living conditions?

EHN believes that the Action Plan should focus on health and environmental sustainability in addition to reducing congestion. Facilitating active travel choices, speed reduction, safer roads, reducing the need to travel by motorised transport, emissions reduction, and delivering accessibility rather than mobility should all be primary policy goals.

A labelling scheme could help establish and share good practice in efforts to reduce congestion, benchmark initiatives which make a difference to people's lives, and standardise improvements to urban transport across Europe. Any labelling scheme should establish clear criteria and standards, set by an expert group, which would bring cities closer to meeting sustainability objectives. These criteria could include: do efforts deliver carbon reduction, healthier communities, air quality improvements, increased social cohesion.

Efforts to combat congestion should be implemented with complimentary measures to reallocate road space away from private motorised traffic and 'lock-in' the benefits from reducing congestion. Complimentary measures include making access by sustainable modes simpler, more convenient and less time consuming than access by car; reducing traffic speeds; introducing priority lanes for cyclists and public transport; intersection treatments to improve safety for cyclists; parking restrictions; pavement widening; raised crossings; and re-phasing of light-controlled crossings in favour of pedestrians.

2. What measures could be taken to promote walking and cycling as real alternatives to the car?

The majority of trips (and many car trips) within urban areas are less than 5km, which means that walking and cycling should be the preferred choice. In its publication "Cycling, the way ahead in towns and cities, the European commission reports that more than 30% of car trips in Europe are under 3km, and 50% are under 5km.[7] These journeys could easily be made by walking, cycling or public transport.

Unfortunately the urban environment is not always conducive to this choice, with fast-moving traffic, insufficient cycle lanes or pedestrian walkways, and air pollution

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[7] Cycling : the way ahead for towns and cities, European Communities 1999
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cycling/cycling_en.pdf

discouraging people from making the healthy choice. The most important measures that could be taken to promote walking and cycling as real alternatives to the car are to:

- **Place walking and cycling as two central components, at the heart of urban transport policy.** The balance of advantage needs to be shifted away from private motorised transport, and towards walking, cycling and public transport in urban areas. A key tool in doing this is to apply the principle of filtered permeability – separating the sustainable modes from private motorised traffic in order to give them an advantage in terms of speed, distance and convenience. Subsequently, urban transport policy needs to be fully integrated with policies on land use, development, zoning, and other related policies which influence the physical environment in which people make their transport choices on a daily basis.

- **Implement physical improvements to the urban environment, which work to 'lock in' travel behaviour change, thereby making sustainable transport choices the more attractive, healthier, safer and smarter choice.** Specifically, the volume and speed of motorised transport within cities should be restricted to make walking and cycling safer, more attractive and easier choices to make. UK research suggests that 30kph zones in residential areas may increase children's use of streets and encourage more adults to work or cycle. Road space needs to be reallocated to walking, cycling and public transport, and to public space – we currently give over too much of our shared urban space to motorised transport uses and too little to other public activity. Other measures that can be put in place to reduce the dominance of the car in urban areas include priority lanes for cyclists and public transport, intersection treatments to improve safety for cyclists, parking restrictions, pavement widening, raised crossings and re-phasing of light-controlled crossings in favour of pedestrians.

- **Employ 'soft measures' such as travel behaviour change programmes, which aim to work with people's perceptions, provide appropriate information, and overcome barriers to bring about a change in travel behaviour towards more sustainable, 'smarter' choices.** Many cost-effective tools are now widely available to facilitate travel behaviour change. These tools focus on improving information, changing perceptions and attitudes, and raising awareness which delivers behaviour change towards sustainable transport choices. Practical measures include workplace and school travel plans, car sharing and individualised travel marketing. Forthcoming research has estimated that if implemented now, measures such as these could save the equivalent of up to 14.2 million tonnes of carbon emissions by 2015 in the UK alone.

- **Physical activity should be a normal part of growing up for young people.** Throughout the early years of life, physical activity plays a key part in young people's physical, social and mental development. All forms of activity has a part to play over the years, whether informal play, 'free range' activity and games, physical education, sport, waling and cycling as transport, or more formal

exercise. Environments should be created where these types of physical activity are possible and encouraged.

3. What could be done to promote a modal shift towards sustainable transport modes in cities?

A shift towards sustainable transport modes will only occur on a significant scale when sustainable transport choices become more attractive, convenient and affordable choices than private motorised transport. Current transport policies have created an environment that is hostile to pedestrians and cyclists. People are more likely to choose to drive if it is impossible, unpleasant or even dangerous for them to walk or cycle. Too often, shops and employment centres are planned for locations that are virtually inaccessible by cycle or on foot. Roads without cycle lanes or appropriate footpaths and crossings for pedestrians create an inhospitable and often unsafe environment. Parents won't send children out to play in communities where cars speed through the streets.

Requiring health impact assessments as part of the strategic planning process will help ensure that active travel and other health-related considerations are included in the planning process from the earliest stages. EHN welcomes that some EU Member States, such as England, are broadening Strategic Environmental Assessments to consider impact on human health.

Other important measures that will promote a modal shift towards sustainable transport in cities are:

- **Placing sustainable transport at the heart of urban transport policy is the key to long-term modal shift.** The balance of advantage needs to be shifted away from private motorised transport, and towards walking, cycling and public transport in urban areas. The road user hierarchy (now widely accepted across many parts of Europe) is a powerful tool to bring about this shift. The hierarchy places walking trips and pedestrians at the top of transport policy, cycling and cyclists second, public transport third and private motorised transport last. Subsequently, urban transport policy needs to be fully integrated with policies on land use, development, zoning, and other related policies which influence the physical environment in which people make their transport choices on a daily basis.

- **Redesigning residential neighbourhoods is a powerful way to facilitate a shift in mode choice**. By combining urban design, community involvement and sustainable transport planning, home zones significantly reduce vehicle speeds and transform streets into spaces for people and not just vehicles. Home zones embody the design principles of safety through uncertainty, whereby an absence of priority for cars - along with short driver sight-lines, social activity and a lack of clarity regarding vehicle routes - significantly reduce vehicle speeds. The application of these principles need not be limited to residential areas: in northern Europe they have been successfully applied to shopping areas and public squares

and spaces. Restoring the balance between traffic and communities helps to promote sustainable travel behaviour and makes streets safer, more sociable and better places to live in.

- **Road user charging can play an important role in sustainable urban transport policy, by helping to change how and how much we travel.** By encouraging drivers to think more about the individual journeys they make, road user charging has the potential to reduce the volume of motorised traffic within cities, thereby reducing transport emissions and encouraging people to walk and cycle. Since congestion charges were introduced in London in 2003, there has been a 21% overall reduction in traffic entering the inner zone. Cycling has increased by 43% and road crashes have declined by 7%[8]. However, road user charging should not be used as simply a mechanism to reduce congestion. Road space liberated by the charging regime should be "locked in" by reallocating it away from private motorised transport and toward pedestrians and cyclists.

- **Encouraging greater use of public transport will also promote a modal shift.** For public transport to become a viable transport choice, a change in public attitudes is needed. Public transport is often perceived as being less competitive in terms of convenience, speed and cost than it really is. This misperception should be addressed through information provision and individualised travel marketing campaigns. An integrated transport system is also important in encouraging people to choose public transport. People using public transport generally engage in more physically active then when they use private motorised transport.

- **With a particular focus on children and young people,** home zones should be extended to promote safe local play and activity facilities in communities, with traffic-calming measures. Furthermore, it is important to establish safe zones around all schools, where walking and cycling are prioritised and car travel is made difficult, and to establish safe routes to schools from neighbouring communities.

Greener towns and cities

4. How could the use of clean and energy efficient technologies in urban transport be further increased?

EHN does not have expertise in energy-efficient technologies. We welcome technological advances that will help reduce emissions, but any long-term solution in this area must involve shifting transport patterns away from private motorised transport and towards active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport.

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[8] http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/media/newscentre/5474.aspx

While some technological solutions may offer a path away from fossil fuels, they will not address the problems posed by an inactive lifestyle, solve the safety or congestion problems posed by our over-reliance on private motorised transport, or reduce the impact of traffic on communities' ability to use what should be a social space.

By adapting the built environment to make it more conducive to walking and cycling, and by properly investing in people-focussed sustainable transport solutions – giving people what they need in terms of their accessibility requirements – we will have immediate pathways to enable people to easily choose sustainable, active transport solutions. Such solutions can be taken up now, without waiting for technological advances and long-term infrastructure transitions, and will provide dual benefits of addressing climate change while improving health across Europe.

5. How could joint green procurement be promoted?

For any governmental or EU tenders for procurement, both environmental and health criteria should be included. The European Commission should examine existing EU public procurement rules and determine if it needs amending so as to contribute to health.

6. Should criteria or guidance be set out for the definition of Green Zones and their restriction measures? What is the best way to ensure their compatibility with free circulation? Is there an issue of cross border enforcement of local rules governing Green Zones?

EHN supports the introduction of criteria or guidance for the definition of Green Zones (pedestrianisation, restricted access, speed limits, urban charging etc). EHN is aware that in the United Kingdom there are several policy options which could serve as models and provide best practice information, such as the Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns, and the new Eco-Towns initiative being piloted by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

The development of criteria or guidance - if established with clear goals in mind (such as, do efforts deliver increased opportunities for physical activity, air quality improvements, increased social cohesion, and carbon reduction) – could help considerably towards establishing and sharing good practice, benchmarking initiatives which make a real difference to people's lives, and standardising improvements to urban transport across Europe.

Young people are more likely to be physically active if they spend more time out of doors. Access to suitable environments and facilities are also key determinants. This justifies an environmental approach to promoting physical activity – supporting efforts made at EU and national level to increase funds available for environmental improvements which may make it easier for young people to enjoy sport and activity. This includes safe walking and cycling routes, access to countryside and open space as well as community sports and facilities.

7. How could eco-driving be further promoted?

Eco-driving falls outside of EHN's remit. However, we would like to emphasise again the importance of promoting walking and cycling over using private motorised transport of any sort. Walking and cycling will be most effective both at reducing emissions and improving population health by increasing physical activity.

Smarter urban transport

8. Should better information services for travellers be developed and promoted?

Information concerning the impacts of our travel choices are poorly communicated at present, and therefore the travelling public are unable to make informed decisions about how and whether to travel. Information services could raise awareness among the public about the impact of their travel choice on their health and the environment, as well as provide information on using active travel (in terms of health benefits, routes, cost savings, and other practical information). Information services could also work with people's perceptions, since perceptions are sometimes the key obstacle to the uptake of sustainable transport options.

9. Are further actions needed to ensure standardisation of interfaces and interoperability of ITS applications in towns and cities? Which applications should take priority when action is taken?

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10. Regarding ITS, how could the exchange of information and best practices between all involved parties be improved?

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Accessible urban transport

11. How can the quality of collective transport in European towns and cities be increased?

Collective transport should be reliable, affordable, safe and attractive enough to offer real alternatives to the private car – without these levels of service, collective transport is unlikely to be able to compete with private motorised transport for short or long trips.

12. Should the development of dedicated lanes for collective transport be encouraged?

Dedicated lanes for collective transport are an important method for making collective transport more attractive and reliable than private motorised transport and can help

initiate long-term changes in travel behaviour. Planning tools which can increase the attractiveness of collective transport should at the same time increase the attractiveness of active transport choices. Providing dedicated lanes for cycling and improved access for pedestrians should be the top priority due to the health benefits of active travel.

13. Is there a need to introduce a European Charter on rights and obligations for passengers using collective transport?

A European Charter on rights and obligations would be valuable not just for passengers using collective transport. The ability to reach key destinations on foot, by bike and/or by collective transport should be a basic right, and there should be obligations placed on local planning authorities, and included in planning guidance, to deliver an environment which is conducive to making sustainable transport choices – and in particular active travel – as the preferred way to travel.

14. What measures could be undertaken to better integrate passenger and freight transport in research and in urban mobility planning?

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15. How can better coordination between urban and interurban transport and land use planning be achieved? What type of organisational structure could be appropriate?

Coordination between urban and interurban transport and land use planning should be strengthened by placing common policy themes at the heart of planning. EHN believes that the policy themes of climate change, health, social cohesion, and energy security be placed at the centre of any approaches to improving coordination between urban and inter-urban transport and land use planning. Public health officials should also coordinate with transport and land use planners to assess the impact of new plans on opportunities for physical activity, and wider impacts on population health.

Safe and secure urban transport

16. What further actions should be undertaken to help cities and towns meet their road safety and personal security challenges in urban transport?

Cities and towns can meet their road safety and personal security challenges in urban transport by prioritising walking and cycling over private motorised transport. This requires physical changes in the urban environment as well as traffic-calming measures. The volume and speed of motorised transport – including motorcycles - within cities should be restricted. At the same time, road space needs to be reallocated to walking, cycling and public transport, and also to public space – we currently give over too much of our shared urban space to transport uses and too little to other public activity. Reducing traffic speeds helps make city streets safer for all

17. How can operators and citizens be better informed on the potential of advanced infrastructure management and vehicle technologies for safety?

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18. Should automatic radar devices adapted to the urban environment be developed and should their use be promoted?

Evidence shows that automated speed enforcement (such as automatic radar devices, speed cameras, red light cameras) can be effective at reducing speeds on a wide range of roadway types. EHN supports traffic-calming measures that will increase safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

19. Is video surveillance a good tool for safety and security in urban transport?

EHN has no position on the effectiveness of video surveillance. However surveillance should not be overlooked as a tool for safety and security in urban transport. By making urban environments – including roads, cycle/walking paths, and green space – attractive enough to considerably increase numbers of pedestrians and cyclists, it is possible to achieve increased safety and security, as a result of the active surveillance provided by the numbers of people moving through urban environments. Part of delivering an environment which facilitates active transport choices is providing adequate lighting.

Creating an urban mobility culture

20. Should all stakeholders work together in developing a new mobility culture in Europe? Based on the model of the European Road Safety Observatory, could a European Observatory on Urban Mobility be a useful initiative to support this cooperation?

Creating a European Observatory on Urban Mobility, or a similar initiative that brings stakeholders together, could be very useful to fostering a wider culture change across Europe. Such a network would enable national and regional policymakers and NGOs to exchange information and share best practice in policy, research and strategy.

Financial Resources

21. How could existing financial instruments such as structural and cohesion funds be better used in a coherent way to support integrated and sustainable urban transport?

EU funds should be used to promote actively and centrally a move to more sustainable and active travel which will achieve dual policy objectives of improving public health and addressing climate change.

22. How could economic instruments, in particular market-based instruments, support clean and energy efficient urban transport?

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23. How could targeted research activities help more in integrating urban constraints and urban traffic development?

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24. Should towns and cities be encouraged to use urban charging? Is there a need for a general framework and/or guidance for urban charging? Should the revenues be earmarked to improve collective urban transport? Should external costs be internalised?

EHN believes that urban congestion charging is a proven strategy to reduce traffic and thereby create a better environment for cycling and walking. Positive evidence of the benefits of congestion charging for cycling can be seen in London where the number of cycle trips has increased 43% in the last 3 years and 650,000 Londoners now cycle annually[9]. Revenues from congestion charging should be earmarked to improve not only collective urban transport but also walking and cycling facilities. Walking and cycling is the natural choice for short journeys, if the urban environment was more conducive to making this choice.

25. What added value could, in the longer term, targeted European support for financing clean and energy efficient urban transport, bring?

European support for energy efficient urban transport can help to reduce emissions and improve air quality in European cities. European support should also help facilitate a shift to non-motorised transport which will not only address policy objectives related to transport but also a number of other policy areas, including public health and obesity.

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[9] http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/media/newscentre/5474.aspx