

# GREEN OPPORTUNITIES

Supporting Wales' COVID-19 *Green Recovery* by identifying opportunities to support population health through sustainable means

SUMMER 2021

## GUEST FOREWORD

**How do we get from A to B? On the face of it, that should be a simple question, and have a simple answer. But what influences our choice of travel mode, and the impact of that choice, is far reaching.**

Imagine how most people would react if you drove a gas-guzzling SUV one mile to work every day in the centre of Amsterdam; or if you cycled 5 miles to work every day in a sprawling US suburb. In both cases you would stand out, but if the cities were reversed you would feel right at home. How we get around is often not simply personal choice, but heavily influenced by our environment and culture - what we see around us - and most people want to fit in.

Town planning and popular culture in the UK has been dominated by the car for the last 70 years, so it's no wonder so many people drive - but there's no reason why that has to be the case in future.

Transport systems are one of the biggest public health issues facing us today - if poorly designed, they contribute to health inequalities, air and noise pollution, physical inactivity and obesity, loss of green space, and reduced mental well-being. The commonest cause of death of children and young people in the UK is being hit by a car; and it should go without saying that catastrophic climate change is the biggest threat humanity faces.

But if we provide public health leadership and advocacy across professional disciplines and organisations, we can help secure a modern, fully integrated transport system for the citizens of Wales, fit for the 21st century in both our rural and urban communities. This would support people to stay healthy and enjoy themselves, improve air quality and community cohesion, reduce inequalities, injuries and deaths, and lower carbon emissions.

This edition is full of ways you can take action and make a vital difference to current and future generations.

So - what are you waiting for - get moving!

**Dr Tom Porter, Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and Public Health Wales, and lead for Healthy Travel Wales**



## GREEN RECOVERY

The Welsh Government has published its Programme for the 6th Senedd. It includes commitments to build a stronger, greener economy, and embed the response to the climate and nature emergency. There will be a focus on local green spaces, locally-grown sustainable food, locally-generated renewable energy, and avoiding waste.

As you read this, the Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament election will have taken place. In the run up to the election, the Welsh Parliament's Cross Party Group on the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 published 'An active travel manifesto for Wales'. It presented 11 proposals which the Group believes can help tackle some of Wales' most pressing problems, including more support for active travel to schools, legislating for a Clean Air Act, and decarbonising all future transport infrastructure.

Sustrans Cymru's 2021 manifesto Tomorrow's Wales for Everyone includes 12 'Asks' to create a Wales where people are connected via sustainable transport and active travel.

## DECARBONISATION

The new [NHS Wales Decarbonisation Strategic Delivery Plan](#) published in March 2021, sets out how the NHS will reduce emissions to contribute to Welsh Government's ambition for a [carbon neutral public sector](#) by 2030 and identifies transport as one of six main activity themes. Welsh Government has set a target of 30% of work to be done from home, and is currently consulting on [where flexible co-working hubs should be sited](#) across Wales.

As governments across the world look towards a sustainable green recovery, the [climate emergency](#) still needs to be addressed. Transport has a huge role to play in reaching a [net zero emissions public sector](#) in Wales, with public transport and active travel the natural first choice. [Low carbon technologies](#) such as electric vehicles can help pave the way for a strong, clean and environmentally friendly future with [evidence](#) suggesting UK drivers are more likely to switch to electric vehicles in the wake of the pandemic to support the benefits of reduced air pollution.

Welsh Government's [Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy for Wales](#) aims to ensure that by 2025 all users of electric cars and vans in Wales will be confident that they can access electric vehicle charging infrastructure when and where they need it, to support the shift to ultra-low emission vehicles within Wales. The UK Government (Department for Transport and Office for Zero Emission Vehicles) has sought [views](#) on ways to improve the consumer experience at public electric vehicle charge-points, with feedback due later this year.

## CLEAN AIR

Air pollution kills an estimated [seven million people](#) worldwide every year, posing a major threat to health and climate. Recent research suggests [one in four homes](#) in the UK are surrounded by air pollution exceeding safety limits set by the World Health Organization.

The '[Clean Air Plan for Wales: Healthy Air, Healthy Wales](#)', developed in August 2020, sets out a ten year pathway to improve air quality and reduce the impacts of air pollution on human health, biodiversity, the natural environment and the economy. The Welsh Government's commitment to develop a Clean Air Act for Wales is included in both the Clean Air Plan for Wales and new [Programme](#) for Government for 2021-2026.

Welsh Government consulted on the [White Paper on the Clean Air \(Wales\) Bill](#), earlier this year, which presented its proposals before drafting legislation. The Bill identifies two key themes: setting the Welsh Government's strategic approach to enhance air quality to support a healthier Wales; and, a clear and effective legislative framework to manage air quality.

[Pollution levels dropped in Wales](#) during the national lockdown, showing what could be achieved in future if we switch to active and sustainable travel. Almost 70% of trips in the [UK are under 5 miles](#) so switching to sustainable modes of travel could have a significant impact on improving air quality, especially as short journeys contribute disproportionately to emissions.



## SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY

The [2019 State of Nature report](#) revealed that wildlife in Wales continues to decline, with [17% of species at risk of extinction](#). Reducing carbon emissions and air pollution by walking and cycling can have a positive impact on [biodiversity](#), the [environment](#) and [air quality](#), while also providing a connection to nature, enabling people to understand the important role the environment plays to improve physical and [mental health](#).

Green infrastructure interventions, including [green active travel routes](#), create attractive paths for walking and cycling and provide a range of benefits from increased habitat and biodiversity to improved health and well-being. Examples include [Copenhagen's Green Cycle Routes](#) and the [Greener Greenways](#) initiative.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Promoting physical activity in the workplace can increase participation by 12%, with every £1 spent on cycling provision saving £4 in health costs for the NHS in Wales. Moving from the car to walking or cycling can save around £1,200 per person per year, as well as the added health and well-being benefits.



## WHAT CAN WE DO?

Everyone can play a role in travelling actively and sustainably, whether it's by adding walking and cycling into our daily routine, taking advantage of our employer's Cycle to Work scheme, discovering the National Cycle Network or utilising public transport. On Your Feet Britain, Bike Week and World Car Free Day are just a few of the National Awareness Days to encourage active and sustainable travel.

Welsh Government has also worked with local authorities to ask residents to support the Active Travel (Wales) Act by commenting on local active travel maps to help improve local walking and cycling routes. Consultation timescales vary depending on the local authority area. Businesses and organisations can sign up to one of the Healthy Travel Charters which are being rolled out across Wales, including Cardiff, Gwent and the Vale of Glamorgan, to make a public commitment to supporting healthy and sustainable travel.

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Transport can have a positive impact on health where active travel is encouraged. It can also have a negative impact on health in terms of its ability to pollute the environment. Evidence suggests that active commuting encourages higher levels of overall individual physical activity, with potentially large population health gains to be made by shifting to active travel, to help reduce obesity and health related conditions. Corporate low emission travel plans can return £6 for every £1 invested, while low emission zones in populated areas return £27 for every £1 invested.

Public Health Wales' 'Making a Difference' publications provide evidence to support the business case for investing in active and sustainable travel. 'Making a Difference: Reducing health risks associated with road traffic air pollution in Wales' highlights active travel as a 'best buy' for transport investment and a 'wonder drug' for health and well-being, with co-benefits of increasing physical activity, building more connected communities, and reducing congestion and road traffic accidents. 'Making a Difference: Investing in Sustainable Health and Well-being for the People of Wales' identifies that promoting physical activity through active travel could save NHS Wales £0.9 billion over 20 years.



## NEW WAYS OF WORKING AND TRAVELLING

Being physically active can be time consuming, however the average journey to and from work takes about 28 minutes each way, providing an opportunity for commuters to meet recommended activity levels if they walk or cycle for at least part of their journey.

Despite travel restrictions in March 2021, there was a 62% rise in road use across Wales compared with the first six weeks of restrictions from March 2020. Public transport figures reduced by about 60%, suggesting COVID-19 has increased the dominance of the private car, in the short term, even with Welsh Government providing updated safe travelling advice for essential journeys to support active and sustainable travel.

Evidence suggests that switching to active travel for short motor vehicle trips could save the NHS £17 billion over a 20 year period. Physical activity is also associated with many improvements in health and well-being, which can result in less absenteeism costs for employers. The Big Birmingham Bikes project has provided more than 7,000 free bikes and cycle training to residents living in deprived areas, to improve their mobility, health and well-being and increase access to workplaces, education and training. The Swansea Bayways campaign, run by Swansea Council, is encouraging commuters to walk or cycle more so they can reap the rewards of improved health and well-being.

Earlier this year, Welsh Government announced that it will fund pilot schemes to accelerate the uptake of e-bikes and e-cargo bikes through four 'e-bike hubs' in Rhyl, Swansea, Aberystwyth and Barry, which are due to open in summer 2021.

Public transport and its workforce have proven essential for many key workers during the pandemic, and is also a key factor in Welsh Government's [Transport Strategy](#) to reduce private car use. Low passenger numbers as a result of the pandemic and lockdown measures have affected [public transport jobs](#), with many employees being 'furloughed' or made redundant. Welsh Government's [Local Transport Fund](#) has committed £28.9 million to projects to support Wales' transport network, with an emphasis on improving public transport reliability and journey times.

The ambitious, multi-million pound [South Wales Metro](#) will create an integrated public transport network that will make it easier for people to travel sustainably across the Cardiff Capital region, transforming rail and bus services as well as cycling and walking.

Caerphilly County Borough Council is set to have the first [fully-electric public transport hub](#) in Britain with 16 battery-electric buses and associated infrastructure for local routes.

Sustainable and active travel is among the [greatest challenges for rural areas](#) due to the lack of safe walking and cycling paths and limited public transport options. This means for those who cannot work from home, most will either need access to a car or have limited employment opportunities.

Rural bus services such as the [800 bus in the Lake District](#) and the [bike buses in East Yorkshire](#), integrate cycling with public transport to [address the barriers in rural areas](#). The [Shared Electric Bike Programme](#), funded by the Department for Transport, identifies how electric bikes could support sustainable active travel, while a recent [study](#) highlighted incentives to boost electric bike sales are better value and healthier than subsidising the purchase of electric cars, saving twice as much CO<sub>2</sub>.



## VULNERABLE GROUPS AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

A recent [study](#) revealed that Wales faces a '[wave](#)' of [mental health problems](#) in the wake of COVID-19, with younger adults, women and people from deprived areas suffering the most. The [Anxiety UK](#) survey shows how, since the start of the pandemic, we have all been getting used to a different way of living, and how many of these changes will have a long lasting impact on the way we do things. Recent [research](#) found that people who walk or cycle to work benefit from improved mental well-being in comparison with those who travel by car.

The [Earn-a-Bike programme](#) run by the [Bristol Bike Project](#) (BBP) has been repairing abandoned and unwanted bicycles for 10 years, to enable vulnerable people, including refugees, asylum seekers and adults recovering from addiction, to access affordable and sustainable transport for both employment and leisure. The project receives more than a 100 bikes a month, allowing "earn-a-bikers" to learn how to look after the bike they are given. BBP's community work, part of the [Bike Collectives Network](#), also includes '[Social Cycle](#)' for socially-isolated adults and '[After-School Bikes](#)' for young people. As well as the direct benefit of encouraging cycling, community co-operatives such as BBP also provide volunteering opportunities, enable service-users to train and learn new skills, retain money in the local economy, and provide an opportunity for social contact with fellow bike-riders.

## YOUNG PEOPLE

A recent [study](#) documented a number of the difficulties encountered in the early stages of lockdown, including an increase in children's emotional and behavioural needs and an increase in restless behaviour. [Evidence in the U.S](#) shows COVID-19 restrictions could also increase physical inactivity in children, which could have a negative impact on their health and well-being. A [consultation](#) on Coronavirus by the Children's Commissioner for Wales found that many children and young people found pleasure from enjoying the outdoors in gardens and during daily exercise.

[Active travel to school](#) can help reduce physical inactivity among adolescents, a [global public health problem](#) with an estimated [lifetime cost of £53 billion](#) to the UK economy, as well as increase mental alertness, energy, positive mood and self-esteem. A [£15 million fund](#) for COVID-19-proof travel, announced by Welsh Government in June 2020, included £2 million for schemes around schools to enable safe walking and cycling. [Walk to School Week](#) and [Bike to School Week](#) showcase the benefits of walking and cycling to school.

Welsh Government's [Active Travel Plan](#) focuses on walking and cycling as modes of transport, and identifies children and young people as a priority to promote active behaviours from a young age. Public Health Wales' [doorstep to desk](#) provides a visual guide for planners, housing developers and transport managers to help organisations support active travel to school. [Pedal Power Cardiff](#) encourages and enables children and adults to experience the benefits of cycling, providing a range of bikes, including specially adapted trikes and bikes, designed for children and adults with impairments.



## DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE FUTURE GENERATIONS COMMISSIONER FOR WALES

The Future Generations Bite-sized report on Transport outlines the Future Generations Commissioner's vision for transport in Wales, which includes places that include active travel infrastructure, and are fully integrated with accessible, zero carbon, public and community transport.



### REMEMBER...

In 2018, the transport sector contributed to 17% of all greenhouse gas emissions in Wales. With little change since 1990, and 80% of journeys to work being made by car, it is up to each and every one of us as individuals to reduce the need to travel and switch to active and sustainable forms of transport to reduce our individual transport emissions.

### 'BE THE CHANGE' FOR WALES' WELL-BEING GOALS

'Be the Change' is a campaign and movement to encourage and support staff to take sustainable steps in the workplace, individually and within teams, to contribute towards Wales' seven well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. The Be the Change 'Walking our Talk' e-guide highlights practical steps to support active and sustainable travel.

**And finally in this edition...Newport City Council has introduced Wales' first electric refuse collection vehicle.**



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