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PRESS RELEASE

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10% investment in walking and cycling needed now to tackle UK obesity crisis

70 bodies launch call to "Take action on active travel"

The UK's leading public health, transport and planning bodies are calling on electoral candidates across the country to invest 10% of transport budgets in cycling and walking initiatives if elected, to help fight the UK's obesity crisis.

In 2006-07, spending on cycling in England amounted to a tiny 0.3% of the overall transport budget and in Wales the figure was just 0.4%; spend on walking is not isolated. Groups including the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH), Sustrans, and the Royal Institute of British Architects believe significant investment now could help create a population-wide shift away from sedentary travel and have a significant impact on public health.

Dr Tim Crayford, President of the ADPH said:

"If we really want to see levels of obesity declining in the UK, we have to move on from the rhetoric. We need to see a visible investment in infrastructure that makes cycling and walking the travel modes of choice for people across the country.

"What's more, every transport and land use decision should be checked to ensure it meets public health criteria. The government's drive for a wave of new Eco-towns is a start, but we need to address transport decisions within existing redevelopment projects if we want to see an all encompassing cultural shift."

Philip Insall, Director, Active Travel at sustainable transport charity Sustrans said:

"The best European cities already see half of journeys made by bicycle or on foot, thanks to serious levels of investment.

"We really must start investing properly in the ways of travelling that promote good health and do not pollute; 10% of all transport spending should be just a start. That

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would be a truly sophisticated approach to transport investment, and it would tackle the ruinous growth in obesity we now face.”

The 70 organisations are also calling for:

- A 20mph speed limit to be made the norm in residential areas
- A coherent high quality network of cycle routes that link everyday destinations
- Improved driver training and better enforced traffic laws
- Ambitious official targets to be set for increases in walking and cycling

Other interested parties can sign up to **“Take action on active travel”** by visiting <http://www.adsph.org.uk/news.php>

Gordon Lishman, Director General of Age Concern said:

“Exercising a few times a week can make a big difference to an older person’s mental and physical health. Equally, being able to get out in a safe and attractive environment can also help to alleviate feelings of loneliness and depression and make people feel more socially included.

“Older people experience barriers to being active. Many are reluctant to go out because of fears of falling, traffic or areas not being accessible enough. We would like to see more local authorities taking action on active travel which will promote physical activity for all age groups”.

Professor Judith Buttriss, Director General, British Nutrition Foundation, said:

“The British Nutrition Foundation welcomes this initiative. In the battle against rising obesity levels and associated poor health, improving physical activity patterns through provision of opportunities for safe walking and cycling, for example, is just as important as changing dietary habits”.

Roger Geffen, Campaigns & Policy Manager, CTC, the national cyclists' organisation said:

“Cycling is one of the best ways to fit exercise into your daily routine. A small but growing number of towns are keen to follow London's success in increasing cycle use by 83% in 7 years, and its promise to make 20mph speed limit the norm for residential streets. The Government now needs to show some serious leadership in making cycling mainstream throughout the country

Erl Wilkie of Cycling Scotland said:

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"The Government of Scotland is moving to increase the funds spent on cycling and walking and their concordat with the Local Authorities together with their Smarter Choices Smarter Places Programme and the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland (circa 2009) should see a significant rise in the percentage of the councils' transport budget spent on cycling and walking. However we cannot be complacent and must strive towards the level of funding given by many European Authorities if we want to have any chance of changing the way we travel and its effect on public health. Therefore 10% would be a start in solving these problems."

Dr Alan Maryon-Davis, President, Faculty of Public Health, said:

"Greener, cleaner and safer roads, streets and parks make for fitter, healthier people. An active travel policy has to be a winner for any prospective councillor."

David H Geldard, President, Heart Care Partnership (UK) and President, Trans Pennine Cycling Club, said:

"Unless local and central government significantly redistribute transport investment to resources for walking and cycling then all recent advances in health care provision will be negated by the imminent obesity crisis."

Charlotte Potter, Senior Health Policy Officer, Help the Aged, said:

"Every generation needs to get fit and active but it won't happen without investment. Older people in particular are less likely to get enough exercise. Steps to make walking and cycling the transport of choice is an easy way of encouraging all ages to get active in their neighbourhoods."

Celia Richardson, Director of Campaigns for the Mental Health Foundation, said:

"Taking physical exercise is actually one of the best ways to look after our mental health. The more that can be done to get us active in our day-to-day lives, the better we will feel. The benefits to our mental health come not only from the exercise itself but also from the social contact involved in being out and about and the fact that getting fit helps boost our self-esteem."

Paul Lincoln, chief executive of the National Heart Forum, said:

"Government must place health at the heart of transport and town planning decisions. Making every day physical activity – such as walking and cycling – the easy and attractive choice is essential to reducing the growing rates of obesity and other chronic diseases in the United Kingdom."

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Koy Thomson, Chief Executive of the London Cycling Campaign, said:

"Active travel neatly recruits the health sector into a vision of towns and cities planned around people and their dreams for a liveable city, not around cars and the enslavement of motorised traffic flows".

Tony Armstrong, Chief Executive of Living Streets, said:

"Investing 10% of transport budgets in walking and cycling schemes is what local authorities now need to commit to if we are to seriously to increase levels of everyday physical activity. This investment has a hugely positive benefit to cost ratio, transforming communities for a fraction of the cost of big road schemes. Campaigns to change behaviour and encourage walking are also very successful - the Walk to School campaign's WOW scheme has seen a 30% modal shift to walking where it's been adopted. But we now need to mainstream actions to encourage and enable more walking to avoid the costs of poor health becoming unmanageable."

Ian Findlay, Chief Officer, Paths for All Partnership, said:

"The Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns projects in England have already shown that Active Travel is a very effective means of increasing physical activity and reducing obesity. The responsibility now firmly rests with local and central government to ensure that, through effective cross-cutting policy and substantial investment, everyone in the UK can benefit from health gain through Active Travel."

Adrian Voce, Director, Play England, said:

"Active travel for children isn't just about their health or that of the environment it's about their freedom to enjoy their childhood. The Children's Plan has placed a greater emphasis than ever before on the role of the public realm in children's well-being. Child policy - locally as well as nationally - now needs to be joined up with transport, planning, and environment to really give children the free-range childhoods they need."

Professor Richard Parish, CEO of The Royal Society of Health and the Royal Institute of Public Health, said:

"The need for us to take more exercise and use environmentally friendly travel could not be clearer. This welcome initiative will not only help the health of today's generation, but also generations yet to be born. It is a classic win-win - people and the planet!"

Simon Waters, Head of Promoting Walking, The Ramblers' Association said:

"Walking is the perfect exercise, an excellent form of transport for short journeys, a quiet pleasure and a great way of exploring an area. Walking is free, easily available to

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most people, and it brings streets and communities back to life. Everyone should have safe and enjoyable walks that begin at their doorstep -and we need to invest properly to make sure they do."

Amy Aeron-Thomas, Executive Director, RoadPeace, the national charity for road crash victims, said:

"For too long, pedestrians and cyclists have suffered from a car centric approach to transport, as seen by our deadly speed limits and high tolerance to law breaking on the road. Not only has this resulted in unnecessary deaths, disabilities and devastated families, but it has also restricted our choices and resulted in unhealthy lifestyles among the general public. An Active Travel policy challenges this culture and promises a world where people take precedence over cars. With road crashes a leading cause of premature death worldwide, and obesity and climate change twin global crises, every country needs an Active Travel policy."

Ends

Notes to Editors

For more information or to request an interview, please call Amy Gooden at the Association of Directors of Public Health press office on 020 7544 3103. www.adph.co.uk

There are 70 bodies calling for ***action on active travel***.

These are:

Age Concern; Arrhythmia Alliance; ADPH, British Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation; British Association of Nursing in Cardiovascular Care; British Cardiovascular Society; British Dietetic Association; British Heart Foundation; BHF Health Promotion Research Group; BHF National Centre for Physical Activity and Health; British Hypertension Society; British Nutrition Foundation; Campaign for Better Transport; Campaign to protect Rural England; Cancer Research UK; CCPR; Chartered Institute of Environmental Health; Child Growth Foundation; Children in Northern Ireland; CTC the national cyclists' organisation; Cycle Campaign Network; Cycling Scotland; Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges; Friends of the Earth (England, Wales and Northern Ireland); Faculty of Public Health; Healthcare Commission; Heart Care Partnership; Heart of Mersey; Help the Aged; Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers; Liftshare.com; Living Streets; Living Streets Scotland; London Cycling Campaign; Men's Health Forum;

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Mental Health Foundation; National Federation of Women's Institutes; National Heart Forum; National NGO Forum; National Obesity Forum; National Coalition for Active Ageing; Northern Ireland Cycling Initiative; Northern Ireland Environmental Link; Paths for All Partnership; Play England; Play Wales; Ramblers' Association; Ramblers Scotland; RoadPeace; Royal College of Nursing; Royal College of Physicians; Royal Institute of British Architects; Royal Institute of Public Health; Royal Society of Health; Sandwell PCT; Socialist Health Association; South Asian Health Foundation; Spokes, the Lothian Cycle Campaign; Strathclyde Partnership for Transport; Sustainable Development Commission; Sustrans; Transform Scotland; UK Public Health Association; University of Bristol Department of Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences; Walk21; Walk to School Campaign; Weight Concern; WWF Northern Ireland;