Public Health Association of Australia: Policy-at-a-glance – Low Emissions and Active Transport Policy

Key message: 1. The transport sector is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and our reliance on private motor vehicles is also a major contributor to the lack of physical activity in Australia.

2. Active transport is the mix of walking and cycling, integrated with public transport used for commuting and travelling instead of private motorised vehicles and taxis.

3. Increased use of active transport, particularly in urban areas, delivers direct and indirect benefits for personal, community and environmental health.

4. A range of strategies need to be developed and implemented by Governments to encourage increased use of active and public transport to achieve improvements in both environmental and health outcomes.

Summary: PHAA will advocate for the development and implementation of a range of measures to encourage uptake of active and public transport options and discourage the use of private motorised vehicles. Cross-portfolio initiatives at the national, jurisdictional and local levels to make active and public transport options more accessible and user-friendly will be key to this approach.

Audience: Federal, State and Territory Governments, policy makers and program managers.

Responsibility: PHAA’s Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group (SIG).

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Low Emissions and Active Transport Policy Statement

This policy should be read in conjunction with related PHAA policies on:

- Prevention of Overweight and Obesity
- Physical Activity
- Preparing for Peak Oil
- Safe Climate

The Public Health Association of Australia notes that:

1. There are two major public health concerns with exhaust from fossil fuel powered vehicles:
   a. Emissions which contribute to air pollution and are directly hazardous to human health
   b. Emissions of greenhouse gases which contribute to climate change.

2. The transport sector is a major contributor to global warming, responsible for 17% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Australia in 2015 (92.77 of 549.2 Mt CO₂-e). Reducing particulate and other emissions from the transport sector can have benefits for global warming and for health.

3. The extensive reliance on private motor vehicles built into urban design is a major contributor to the lack of physical activity in Australia.

4. Active transport is the mix of walking and cycling, integrated with public transport, used for commuting and traveling, instead of private motorised vehicles and taxis. Active transport promotes individual and community health and wellbeing.

5. There are three components to reducing emissions from transport:
   a. To promote less use of motorised transport by reducing the need to travel (working in smaller communities; non-physical/electronic connectivity), more efficient use of travel including multiple destinations in one trip, sharing of vehicles (car-pooling), disincentives to motor use.
   b. To encourage active and public transport options.
   c. To ensure that motorised transport has no (or very low) per person emissions. Replacement of petroleum-using engines with electric engines powered by renewable energy would be the most effective way of achieving this where vehicular transport is required. At the same time, other benefits of using active transport instead of vehicles need to be promoted.

6. Traffic calming, speed reduction and smoothing traffic flow measures both reduce emissions and enhance safety, and make active transport more appealing.
7. Regular physical activity is associated with enhanced health and reduced risk for all-cause mortality and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, ischaemic stroke, type 2 diabetes, colon cancers, osteoporosis, and depression.6

8. Access to clean, safe and affordable public transport is also an equity issue. All people need access to employment, services, recreation and social interaction. While the urban public transport services people living in cities, rural and regional people, those living in outer suburbs, and those needing to travel across or tangential to the central business districts require interurban and inter suburban public transport. In our partially decentralised urban sprawls, much travel is not into the metro hub but across or around ‘town’. Having to travel to an urban centre to travel out again is wasteful of both energy and people’s time. Reducing private motorised vehicles in urban centres reduces congestion.

9. Increased use of active transport confers direct and indirect co-benefits for personal, community and environmental health.7, 8

Direct Benefits

10. As little as 30 minutes exercise daily helps to improve physical fitness.9 Even moderate exercise promotes psychological wellbeing, reduces chronic diseases, improves co-ordination, increases bone strength and reduces injury risk.

11. Use of public transport may promote exercise in that people need to get to transport nodes, either by walking or bicycling. Thus more use of public transport has health benefits through increased physical activity, community benefits through reduced road trauma and traffic congestion, and environmental benefits through reduced air pollution including GHG emissions.

12. Reduced use of motor vehicles will result in reduced exposure to particulate and other air pollution, noise pollution for drivers, residents and workers along traffic corridors, and other users of public spaces.

Indirect Benefits

13. The benefits that will derive indirectly from an improved public transport system are perhaps more extensive than the direct ones. Such benefits may include:

   a. Building social capital and improving social connectedness, since people are interacting with others whom they see on shared journeys or while walking/biking around their neighbourhoods.10 This has the potential to reduce socio-economic inequalities11 and has mental health benefits as it reduces peoples’ sense of insularity.12

   b. Ultimately, a well-developed and effective transport system could result in reduced commuting time which would provide improved social benefits.13
c. Greater use of active and public transport should result in reduced greenhouse gas emissions which mitigates global warming.

The Public Health Association of Australia affirms the following principles:

14. Government investment in infrastructure and willingness to regulate is required to achieve public health benefits for the whole community. The role of government is to lead, to invest in, and to encourage others to action by the types of measures listed.

The Public Health Association of Australia believes that the following steps should be undertaken:

15. Active transport to be encouraged by:
   
a. Provisions of quality infrastructure for walking and cycling (safe, connected cycle and walkways), workplace facilities for bike storage and showering, and provision of shaded cycle parking.

b. Measures to separate drivers and cyclists (off-road cycleways).

c. Public bike share schemes.

d. Social marketing to normalise cycling and walking as means of transport, educate about reduced morbidity and mortality associated with cycling, and change the perception that special gear is needed to cycle.

e. Improved availability of urban green space;

f. Removing and prohibiting unnecessary restrictions on cycling such as requirements to carry identification;

g. Promoting safe cycling through enforcement of helmet legislation and RBT.

16. Actively encourage public transport by making it as cost effective (affordable and at least no more costly) and amenable (easy to use, quick and convenient) as private cars.\textsuperscript{14}

17. Make public transport infrastructure attractive for use by ensuring adequate physical capacity and robustness, but also the location, coverage and frequency, ease of access, actual personal and infrastructure safety and a positive public perception of that safety.

18. Make public transport more amenable by:

a. Well designed and maintained, graffiti-free and secure buses, light and heavy trains and ferries – and stops, stations and wharves.
b. Integrating public and other active transport modes such as fitting racks to buses so they are able to hold bicycles in racks externally.

c. Frequent enough service to be useful.

d. Having sufficient capacity to carry expected numbers comfortably including those with bicycles, and

e. Ticketing to enable people to take multiple trips, in multiple directions, on different transport modes, with relative ease. This includes long term infrastructure planning for population growth.

19. Integrate walking and bicycle use with public transport by designing an extensive, linked (with existing transport corridors and other networks), well maintained, safe to use (free from obstacles, separated from traffic) and secure (well lit, patrolled) network of walking and cycle ways, that actually follow routes that people tend to use (rather than following vacant usable land).

20. Heavy and light rail transport is the safest and lowest emission form of mass transport. It can carry bikes and link with inter-urban transport.

21. Use of private vehicles will also need to be actively discouraged by policies that increase inconvenience and priorities public transport, pedestrian and bicycle travel over private motor vehicle use. Specific examples include:

   a. Fees or charges that discourage use of vehicles, particularly discouraging entry into central cities, or where access to frequent and reliable public transport is possible.

   b. Subsidies and tax rebates for people and businesses that provide active transport and public transport options and support for themselves or their employees. Specific strategies for employers to encourage staff to use active transport may include not providing vehicles or parking as part of employee benefits, offering cycle use as part of employment packages instead, and/or ensuring appropriate infrastructure for cyclists (bike racks, change rooms).

22. Any planned replacement of public transport infrastructure and equipment needs to reduce rather than increase greenhouse gas emission.

23. Promotion of low emissions vehicles which can be achieved by:

   a. Removal of tax rebates for petrol/diesel vehicles

   b. Incentives for providing electric, hybrid or LPG vehicles

   c. Changed fringe benefit tax arrangements to support active and public transport options.
The Public Health Association of Australia resolves to undertake the following actions:

24. Promote active and public transport whenever possible.

25. Encourage its own staff and members to use active and public transport.

ADOPTED 2011, REVISED AND RE-ENDORSED IN 2014 and 2017

First adopted at the 2011 Annual General Meeting of the Public Health Association of Australia. The latest revision has been undertaken as part of the 2017 policy review process.
PHAA Policy Statement on: Low Emissions and Active Travel Policy Statement

References