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Kathryn Thomas
Legislation Office
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff CF99 1NA

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5 April 2013

Dear Kathryn,

Re: Consultation on the Active Travel (Wales) Bill

The Royal College of Physicians (Wales) plays a leading role in the delivery of high quality patient care by setting standards of medical practice and promoting clinical excellence. We provide physicians in Wales and across the world with education, training and support throughout their careers. As an independent body representing more than 28,000 fellows and members worldwide, including 1,000 in Wales, we advise and work with government, the public, patients and other professions to improve health and healthcare.

Mae Coleg Brenhinol y Meddygon (Cymru) yn arwain y ffordd o ran darparu gofal o ansawdd uchel i gleifion drwy osod safonau ar gyfer arferion meddygol a hybu rhagoriaeth glinigol. Rydym yn darparu addysg, hyfforddiant a chefnogaeth i feddygon yng Nghymru a ledled y byd drwy gydol eu gyrfa. Fel corff annibynnol sy'n cynrychioli mwy na 28,000 o gymrodorion ac aelodau ym mhedwar ban byd, gan gynnwys 1,000 yng Nghymru, rydym yn cynghori ac yn gweithio gyda'r llywodraeth, y cyhoedd, cleifion, a gweithwyr proffesiynol eraill i wella iechyd a gofal iechyd.

Overview

The Royal College of Physicians welcomes this Bill and fully supports its aim of enabling more people to walk and cycle. However, to ensure the success of this Bill, we would urge the Welsh Government to ensure that this Bill has a key role to play in a wider approach to reducing and preventing health inequality in Wales. In addition, we recommend that the Welsh Government include measurable targets and a range of softer incentives to reinforce and encourage a long term culture shift in attitudes towards active travel.

Our response

Our response is informed by our fellows and members in Wales. We have also worked with the RCP Committee on Sport and Exercise Medicine on this response.



The need for an Active Travel Bill

In our recent report, [Action on Obesity](#), the RCP found that obesity in the UK has increased so rapidly and is now so prevalent in the UK that it is often described as ‘epidemic’. Indeed, the UK has one of the highest incidences of severe obesity in the world.ⁱ We know that here in Wales, obesity costs the Welsh NHS £73m a year. Rates of obesity in Wales are continuing to rise, with over half of adults classed as overweight or obese, and around a fifth as obese.ⁱⁱ

A lack of physical activity is one of the four major lifestyle risk factors, alongside smoking, alcohol and nutrition. Only 6% of people in Wales follow health advice on these areas.ⁱⁱⁱ We know that physical inactivity is a risk factor, not only for cardiovascular disease, but also for a number of chronic conditions, such as diabetes, colon and breast cancer, obesity, hypertension, bone and joint diseases, and depression. Being fit or active is associated with a greater than 50% reduction in risk of death from any cause and from specific diseases associated with physical inactivity.^{iv} To sum up, increasing physical activity improves health outcomes and reduces the severity of symptoms for those with chronic conditions.

Yet only around 2% of journeys in the UK are made by bike, compared with 27% in the Netherlands.^v To help the people of Wales become healthier, more active and more environmentally aware, we will need a long term culture shift in attitudes towards walking and cycling. This ambitious Bill, if enacted, could see Wales become the first country in the world to make it compulsory for local authorities to provide safe and integrated routes for walking and cycling. The BMA has suggested that if cycling infrastructure is well integrated into the built environment, there is demand and scope for cycling levels to increase.^{vi}

Overcoming potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill

While the Bill, if enacted properly, could contribute to improving health outcomes, reducing poverty, furthering sustainable development objectives, and growing our economy, there will be huge challenges. There are many reasons why people don’t currently cycle; chief among them is the feeling that cycling is unsafe; the practical difficulties of transporting children, equipment or navigating the Welsh weather; and perhaps most powerful, the lack of a walking and cycling culture in Wales.

This is why the RCP believes that the Welsh Government should ensure that the Bill is accompanied by a range of softer incentives to encourage people to travel by foot or by cycle, including targeted support for underrepresented groups; meaningful engagement with both current *and* future walkers and cyclists; and robust and detailed guidance for local authorities. We also recommend that the Welsh Government encourage all major employers, including hospitals, to provide changing facilities and showers. This will contribute to a change in culture and will help to normalise cycling.

The Welsh Government should ensure that clear, measurable and ambitious growth targets for walking and cycling are set, with increased funding and resources proportional to target levels. The BMA has found that since 1985, walking and cycling have declined by 19 and 58 per cent respectively in the UK.^{vii} Targets should be set to reverse this decline. NICE guidelines have also emphasised the importance of basing interventions on evidence of what works and evaluating these interventions.^{viii} Without targets and data collection, it is impossible to measure what has been achieved.

Finally, this Bill could result in an increased risk of cyclist-on-cyclist and cyclist-on-pedestrian collisions. Our physicians have also told us that if people with chronic conditions begin exercising without the correct advice and supervision, they may aggravate or even worsen their underlying medical condition. We



therefore recommend that the Welsh Government issue information about this legislation to health professionals as part of their awareness raising work on this Bill. We also recommend that funding be made available to increase people's awareness of the significant health benefits of regular exercise through public health and primary care campaigns. The Welsh Government should ensure that the aims of this legislation are closely linked with its obesity work, especially the Obesity Pathway.

Ensuring active travel is part of the public health agenda

The RCP strongly recommends that the Active Travel Bill be considered alongside the proposed Public Health Bill as part of a raft of measures to improve the health outcomes of people in Wales. The Welsh Government should work to ensure that this is not simply perceived to be a transport Bill, or a sports and leisure Bill, for example. Silo thinking has no place in improving the health of the people of Wales. This legislation has the potential to be the most successful behavioural change legislation since the smoking ban, but it will only be truly effective if it is understood to be about improving health inequalities and empowering people to make more active travel choices.

We know that with any collective behaviour change, success is most likely if progress is made on three broad fronts: environment, empowerment and encouragement. We need to make the healthier choice the easier choice by removing barriers such as high cost or difficult access. In this case, the easier we can make walking and cycling for people, the more people will walk and cycle.

The RCP has long worked in the field of public health and we believe that our doctors have a key role to play in supporting individuals and communities to take effective action for good health. We remain fully supportive of the recommendations in our 2004 report, [Storing up problems: the obesity time bomb](#), which listed a number of ways we could encourage healthier eating and physical activity.^{ix}

For example, we called for safe walking and cycling routes to school and work; town planning that discourages car use; safe, accessible parks; bike racks and shower facilities in workplaces; cheaper and easier access to leisure and sports facilities; clear messages about healthy eating and physical activity for all age groups; and incentives and rewards for active travel – walking and cycling – to school or work. Almost a decade after the publication of this report, the RCP believes that the Active Travel Bill is a real opportunity to take action to improve the lives of people in Wales.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Patrick Cadigan
Registrar / Cofrestrydd

For more information, please contact:

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ⁱ Royal College of Physicians. *Action on obesity: comprehensive care for all*. Report of a working party. London: RCP, 2013.

ⁱⁱ Welsh Health Survey 2003/4-2011. *Trends in health-related lifestyle in Wales*, SB 87/2012, September 2012

ⁱⁱⁱ Welsh Government. *Consultation to collect views about whether a Public Health Bill is needed in Wales*, November 2012

^{iv} Warburton DE, Nicol CW, Bredin SS. Health benefits of physical activity: the evidence. *Cmaj*. 2006a; 174:801–9.

^v Sustrans. *Cycling in the city regions: delivering a step change*, April 2011

^{vi} British Medical Association. *Healthy transport = Healthy lives*. July 2012.

^{vii} British Medical Association. *Healthy transport = Healthy lives*. July 2012.

^{viii} NICE public health guidance 41. *Walking and cycling: local measures to promote walking and cycling as forms of travel or recreation*. November 2012.

^{ix} Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and Faculty of Public Health. *Storing up problems: the medical case for a slimmer nation*. Report of a working party. London: RCP, 2004.