

Consultation response from the National Heart Forum

Consultation: On the move: by foot. A
discussion paper

Consulting body: Department of Transport

Date: September 2003

NATIONAL HEART FORUM

Response to the Department for Transport's

On the move: by foot. A discussion paper

September 2003

About the National Heart Forum

The National Heart Forum (NHF) is the UK alliance of over 45 national organisations working to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, the UK's leading single killer. Member organisations represent the medical and health services, professional bodies, consumer groups and voluntary organisations. Members also include many individual experts in cardiovascular research. Government departments have observer status.

The purpose of the NHF is to work with and through its members to prevent disability and death from coronary heart disease in the UK. In order to achieve this, the National Heart Forum has four main objectives:

- To provide a forum for members for the exchange of information, ideas and initiatives on coronary heart disease prevention
- To identify and address areas of consensus and controversy and gaps in research and policy
- To develop policy based on evidence and on the views of member organisations
- To stimulate and promote effective action.

The NHF embraces professional, scientific and policy opinion on current issues in coronary heart disease prevention. It co-ordinates action to reduce heart disease risk through information, education, research, policy development and advocacy.

This response does not necessarily reflect the views of all NHF members.

Key observations

The National Heart Forum (NHF) is disappointed that the DfT has issued a discussion document when many groups, including the Department's own select committee, supported and worked hard to inform and improve an earlier draft walking strategy. These groups have also put energy and time into the development of policy ideas and best practice yet the current document lacks breadth, lacks bold ideas, fails to knit together all that is going on across government or address current policy gaps, and sets back the walking agenda again. DfT is fully aware of the enormous support that exists for a national walking strategy.

R1: We call on DfT to demonstrate clear leadership and direction and publish a national walking strategy, that includes targets, without further delay.

This response sets out those issues that the NHF believes should be addressed in a national walking strategy that are not in evidence in the current discussion document. We wish to see something visionary, that moves us away from guidelines and words of encouragement and towards a strategy with clear direction and leadership. It should instil in all a sense of pride at the opportunity to improve the environment through a focus on walking. England should be leading the way in the United Kingdom towards a healthy environment, much like that nurtured by Finland in the latter half of the twentieth century.

We would expect the final walking strategy to resemble the excellent walking strategy published earlier this year by the Scottish Executive, in terms of its breadth and scope.

R2: We strongly recommend that the Department follows Scotland's lead and establishes a credible forum of experts drawn from a range of disciplines to oversee the development of the final walking strategy. This will ensure that all the relevant areas of government policy are included (see also R56).

The NHF estimates that physical inactivity is responsible for 36% of male and 38% of female coronary heart disease cases¹. If current levels of inactivity are left unchecked, particularly among children and young people, the incidence of coronary heart disease and other linked diseases will continue to rise, and rates will increase among younger age groups, causing a burden on the economy and on families. The government has recognised this and published Game Plan, a strategy for physical activity and sport. This strategy puts forward the ambitious target that 70% of the adult population will be participating in 30 minutes moderate activity at least 5 times per week by 2020, compared with current level of 32% adults. Experts would agree that purposeful walking represents the near perfect form of physical activity because it is safe, cheap, requires no other equipment, and is an option for almost everyone. However, Game Plan is lamentable for only paying lip service to the role that walking can play in delivering the physical activity solution. The public health world is therefore reliant on the DfT publishing a walking strategy.

R3: We strongly recommend that DfT ensures, through membership of the cross-government Activity Coordination Team (ACT), that the walking strategy forms a key part of the delivery of Game Plan.

Our towns, cities and countryside continue to be dominated by the car. The NHF is firmly in support of action to encourage a modal shift in transport towards walking and other alternatives to the private car. Road congestion and safety issues strongly discourage people away from walking and raise parents' fears for the safety of their children which limits their ability to play.

R4: We strongly recommend that the strategy emphasises the positive impact that policies to reduce car use (e.g. fuel tax, congestion charging, traffic law enforcement etc) will have on walking rates (see R21, 29, 42, 43, 46, 61). The strategy should include any relevant outcomes from the transport select committee's investigation of traffic law and its enforcement.

R5: We recommend that the strategy clearly sets out all the policies across government that could impact positively on levels of walking in England. This

¹ National Heart Forum. 2002. Coronary heart disease: Estimating the impact of changes in risk factors. London: The Stationery Office.

means that as well as including mention of policies that actively discourage car use, the strategy should also recognise the role that improvements to public transport can play in encouraging more people to walk (see R16, 38, 39).

The NHF continues to be disappointed and mystified by the assertions of the Department that a walking target is not necessary or helpful (see government responses to the select committee inquiries into Walking in Towns and Cities [page 19], and the ten-year plan for transport [page 14]). The Department has set a national cycling target (to treble the number of cycling trips from their 2000 level by 2010) and so why not set a walking target? Targets for each mode will focus minds towards achieving the desired modal shift away from use of the private car.

- R6:** We strongly urge DfT to establish a target for the percentage of trips to be undertaken by foot.
- R7:** We recommend that the strategy is given a vision statement (see R11) and a life expectancy (linked to the setting of a national target) and that the document should commit DfT to reviewing or revising the strategy after that time.
- R8:** We recommend that as well as including a national walking target, the strategy should reflect other relevant national targets (see R10) and also the potential joint objectives, partnerships and shared monitoring that can take place at national and local level.

Specific comments and answers to discussion questions

Section 1: Introduction

It is not clear what the primary objective of the strategy is. There are several statements in the document that could be interpreted as aims. Written in the order in which they appear, these are:

(Section 1. Introduction)

- To promote more walking in England
- To reduce congested transport systems
- To improve our health
- To improve the health of local communities

- To improve the conditions for walking
- To increase the number of journeys made on foot
- To be a part of the Department for Transport's contribution to the broader 'liveability' agenda being developed across government.

(Section 3. Key challenges)

- To make walking for a purpose more enjoyable
- To see more short journeys made on foot
- To create more attractive places where people want to be and which they want to experience on foot

R9: We recommend that the final document should make explicit the primary objective and make clear the reason DfT wishes to see more people making journeys on foot. Is this a strategy to reduce congestion, to increase liveability, or to improve health, or all three? The objective(s) should be clearly presented together and the rest of the document should explain how it (or these) will be met.

Certainly, this strategy would contribute towards meeting other targets set by the DfT in the 10-year transport plan e.g. the accident reduction target (50% and 40% reductions, respectively in number of children and adults killed or seriously injured in road accidents by 2010, compared with the average for 1994-98) and the congestion target (to reduce congestion on inter-urban roads to 5% below current levels by 2010) although we note that walking did not feature as part of the solution to congestion in the 10-year plan (see paragraph 6.27 of the 10-year plan).

R10: We recommend that these associated targets are mentioned in the strategy, given their relevance.

Vision

R11: We suggest that the statements included in Section 9 should be brought forward to the beginning of the document to form the DfT's vision. These are:

- More of the places (people) want to go to are within 'easy' walking distance
- Well-planned routes linking key destinations

- A better balance between the needs of pedestrians and vehicles
- The street environment is 'attractive' in the broadest sense
- People have the inclination to walk – they are motivated to walk rather than drive if they have the choice.

R12: The NHF recommends that DfT clearly defines who they wish to see benefit from action to increase walking and that during development of the strategy DfT continues to examine whether this will be the case. We have set out on page 15 some of the benefits of a walking strategy. Of particular concern is that whilst a reduction in congestion could make the community more pleasant and reduce parental concerns for children's safety, in the absence of strong traffic speed enforcement it would also benefit car drivers by allowing them to drive faster, thus undermining some of the gains.

Section 2: The case for walking

The health case

R13: The NHF recommends that the strategy explicitly sets out the recommended guidelines for health-enhancing physical activity in this section i.e. for adults, 30 minutes of moderate exercise on at least five days per week; for children, 60 minutes of at least moderate intensity activity every day.

R14: The health case should also highlight that these quantities of exercise can be accumulated throughout the day and do not have to be achieved in one period.

R15: The health case would also benefit from inclusion of the fact that 10,000 walking steps per day are considered an optimum target for health. Such a target can easily and cheaply be monitored by an individual with the use of a pedometer and facilitates the notion that activity can be built up over the course of the day. Local organisations have distributed pedometers as part of campaigns to encourage more people to walk, for example the British Heart Foundation as part of the Walking the Way to Health initiative.

The transport case

The transport case must be set in the context of the need to continue to make improvements to public transport. Improving the environment and reducing

congestion for everyone else by leaving the car at home are not arguments that in themselves are going to encourage habitual car users to kick the habit.

R16: We recommend that the case for leaving the car at home must rest on there being an alternative mode of transport that is as cheap, comfortable and fast as the private car if walking the whole journey is not an option.

R17: Reducing congestion will also have an important health gain in that air quality, and therefore respiratory health, will improve for all those who must live and work in congested areas. This should be stated in the case for walking.

The equity case

People who cannot afford to own or run a car are not likely to be convinced by the arguments set out under the heading of equity, which is patronising. People without a car have no choice but to walk part or all of their journey.

R18: We recommend that the case should be set in the context of the need to urgently improve walking conditions for those with no choice.

R19: We strongly recommend that the word equity is dropped and that *social inclusion* is used in its place, since a focus on walking conditions can both improve access (to transport, jobs, food, education) and eliminate crime, isolation, joblessness etc as highlighted in the Government's final report on Transport and Social Inclusion.

Section 3: Challenges

One of the challenges stated is to create more attractive places where people want to be and which they want to experience on foot. It is our opinion that the document fails to address how this challenge will be met.

R20: We recommend one of two actions:

That this challenge is deleted from the strategy, and action being taken elsewhere in government to address this issue (neighbourhood renewal etc) is highlighted instead, or:

That Section 4 addresses the need for planning policies that ensure the creation, retention and maintenance of parks and public spaces (indoors and outdoors) that people will want to use (see also R31).

The four areas for action proposed to meet the three challenges are inadequate on their own. The strategy needs national leadership in the fight against those who flout the law, be it speeding or fly-tipping.

R21: We recommend that the strategy includes a fifth element, and that is:

A stronger enforcement of traffic and other law, and greater use of measures to reduce congestion.

Section 4: The right planning policies and practice

R22: This section outlines a *long-term* solution to increasing the number of short journeys undertaken by foot and this should be made explicit at the outset.

R23: It should also be flagged in the opening paragraph that this solution will have a slow and limited impact on the levels of walking, given that relatively little new build will occur over the lifetime of the document.

R24: The section should openly acknowledge that it does nothing to address the first challenge set out in Section 3, that of making walking for a purpose more enjoyable.

Q1: Is there any further guidance that needs to be given to local authorities about how good provision for pedestrians can be secured through the planning system?

R25: This section should highlight the requirement of future local transport plans to have an accessibility planning framework built into them, as outlined in the final report on Transport and Social Inclusion. This is also to be a consideration for primary care trusts, local education authorities and crime and disorder partnerships and should therefore be recognised as having strong potential to contribute to an increase in the walkability of neighbourhoods.

Q3: *Could more be done to ensure that developers provide well designed, convenient and direct pedestrian access to all buildings, particularly new ones, and public spaces and if so, what?*

R26: The language of the guidance is passive and could be open to threat from vested interests. DfT must do more to ensure that the planning policies that are issued are implemented wherever possible. The NHF recommends that local authorities be required to demonstrate that each of the guidelines has been considered at the relevant stage of the planning process if this is not already a requirement.

Section 5: A better physical environment for walkers

The actions set out in this section would help to meet the first two challenges set out in Section 3 of the discussion document and provide a more immediate solution.

R27: Bullet point 1 should specifically mention options such as pedestrianisation.

R28: Bullet point 2 (*we will have roads which are designed for pedestrians as well as motor vehicles*) needs to be expanded upon or reworded if it is to be meaningful. As it stands, one could argue that roads are already designed for both, since they have an area for vehicles and an area for pedestrians. At issue seems to be the reluctance here or elsewhere in this document to explicitly raise the importance of traffic calming measures. This section should explicitly mention the powers afforded to local authorities to introduce congestion charging and other traffic calming measures.

R29: Bullet point 4 (*we will have well designed crossings that are located where people want to cross*) should also include mention of the need for light-controlled crossings to be phased in favour of pedestrians, with shorter time periods allowed for cars than at present and longer time periods allowed for the pedestrian. Many of the crossings in London are being retimed in this way by TfL, making the pedestrian feel valued and able to walk with fewer interruptions.

R30: Bullet point 5 (*we will have networks of green spaces in our towns and cities which promote walking and other forms of recreation*) should be reiterated in

Section 4 as a planning policy issue that would encourage more walking and should also include 'other' spaces that people will want to walk to (see R20).

- R31:** A link should be made in this section to section 6 and the need to address the fear of crime. A better physical environment, that is actively maintained, should also reduce the fear of crime by virtue of the fact that more people will be out in the streets.
- R32:** Bullet point 6 is concerned with removing the physical obstacles to walking that are present on many of our pavements and footpaths. However, local councils should be actively encouraged to also consider making pavements and footpaths more attractive where possible by the addition of sculpture and other design features, as Sustrans are doing with the National Cycle Network.
- R33:** Other useful amenities for pedestrians include water fountains.

Q7: Would the development of a website to share current good practice be a worthwhile initiative?

- R34:** A website for the sharing of best practice would be worthwhile but there must be a commitment by DfT to maintain it and keep it current.
- R35:** The document lists many useful publications that will be necessary reference material for the delivery of the walking strategy at the local level. We recommend that one of the key purposes of a website to support delivery of the national strategy should be to bring all of the documents together and make them available for download.

Section 6: Supporting the choice to walk

Public transport

- R36:** We suggest that this discussion document could be greatly improved by including all the strands of government policy necessary to meet the strategy's objectives.
- R37:** We strongly recommend the inclusion of a subsection entitled public transport. Encouraging people who rely on motorised transport out of their cars and onto public transport can a) improve the safety and pleasure of those who make their entire journey by foot and b) deliver more short journeys on foot as people walk to and from public transport. Although this section mentions the

need to improve the areas that people must walk through in order to access public transport, it fails to mention the need to provide a high standard of public transport that people will think is worth walking to. This must be acknowledged in this document, if only to emphasise the role that other areas of local government must play in the delivery of a walking strategy.

Fear of Crime

This section is concerned mostly with anti social behaviour.

R38: We recommend that this section also makes reference to the need for local authorities to actively look for issues concerning the condition and safety of pavements and footpaths at different times of the day and at different times of the year. This could perhaps be carried out by street wardens and particular issues reported.

Of particular note is the fact that street lighting hangs over roads and favours vehicle drivers (who already have lights on their vehicles!) and leaves pedestrians in the shadows. Improving the position of street lighting to favour the pedestrian will do much to allay the fear of crime yet this is rarely carried out. A person charged with identifying obstacles to walking would clearly identify such a need. A feature of more concern in the summer months is the overgrowth of vegetation which, after dark, creates perceived hideaways for criminals. Again, such issues could clearly be identified by a street warden.

R39: The final strategy document should make explicit reference to the case study presented by Lewisham Borough Council at one of the Transport 2000 seminars. This council implemented a zero tolerance policy on those people who littered the streets or allowed their dogs to foul public spaces. Strong enforcement of the law appears to be a key driver in the bid to make pavements and footpaths more pleasant.

Fear of Traffic

In this subsection, the onus is placed heavily on schools to implement travel plans, with scant reference made to the need for local authorities to reduce car use and traffic speeds. School travel plans must be supported by tough measures and this strategy is the right place for this to be emphasised.

R40: As mentioned above (R29) we recommend that powers afforded to local authorities to implement congestion charging, workplace parking schemes, road re-design schemes, or Home Zones are highlighted in this document.

R41: Local authorities must be encouraged, through national leadership, to implement tough measures if the government is truly committed to encouraging walking as an alternative to car use, reducing the fear of traffic, reducing traffic speeds, reducing the number of traffic accidents and reducing congestion and pollution, all of which are stated government policy objectives.

The fear of traffic is a result of there being too many cars on the road as well as there being a lack of enforcement of traffic speeds yet the discussion focuses exclusively on parents' use of the car, overlooking the role played by other vehicle drivers e.g. commuters.

R42: The discussion must acknowledge that all drivers, not just parents, must be encouraged out of their cars if the fear of traffic is to be addressed effectively.

It must be recognised that some parents will continue to drive their children to school every day and often for very good reason. The congestion and frustration during school run hours is caused both by the volume of cars on the road and by the blockage caused by those cars that have pulled up on both sides of the road outside the school to set down children.

R43: We recommend that the national strategy also includes mention of the need to look at improving conditions around the school gates. Local authorities should work closely with particularly problematic schools to include in their travel plans schemes to discourage or ban parents from dropping children off directly outside the school gates.

We note that measures to reduce parents' fear of traffic will meet both challenge 1 (by reducing the volume of traffic) and challenge 2 (by increasing the number of journeys to school made on foot).

R44: Since this document is discussing the case for a national walking strategy, there should be mention of fiscal policies that might support the choice to walk, such as taxation on fuel (mentioned in paragraph 9.8 of the 10-year transport plan). It might be considered by some to be a regressive tax but nevertheless it will have an impact on vehicle use that should not be overlooked in the present context.

Health promotion

Businesses have a strong role to play in health promotion, by encouraging their staff to be more active.

R45: We recommend that the strategy highlights the key role for local authority travel coordinators in working with local employers to identify opportunities to encourage employees to walk as part of their working day, through the use of sustained incentives, disincentives and campaigns. This could be wrapped up in businesses' desire to be demonstrating their corporate social responsibility.

R46: We recommend that the strategy acknowledges the power of disincentives to encourage behaviour change and the role that their use by businesses (including the NHS and local government) can play in bringing about behaviour change. Disincentives might include businesses charging employees to park, or limiting the number of parking spaces available for staff or allocating parking spaces only to those staff who must travel over a certain distance to reach the workplace.

R47: In addition to information on the cost of inactivity to the NHS, the strategy should include estimates of the cost to business of inactivity, placing a responsibility on employers to encourage their staff to be more active.

R48: The strategy should also reflect on the costs that could be saved if disincentives were used, such as car parks no longer needing to be maintained, or parking costs no longer having to be met by businesses.

R49: The strategy should encourage businesses to support the choice to walk by providing access to changing facilities, allowing arrival in shoes more conducive to walking, and ensuring that staff can take a lunch break.

R50: The Activity Coordination Team (ACT) has been considering how tax breaks and other incentives might be employed to encourage a more physically active

population. In developing the final strategy document, we recommend that consideration is given to how walking might be encouraged in such a way.

NHS trusts, as part of the national service framework for coronary heart disease, are to develop travel plans that reflect a move towards more active travel for staff, as well as improved access for patients. Sustrans has worked with several NHS Trusts to develop successful travel plans but it is clear that these trusts are in a minority and that most trusts have not yet delivered on this aspect of the framework.

R51: The strategy should highlight this requirement of the NHS and also indicate the role that national and local government can play in ensuring that their own staff are encouraged to walk wherever possible.

It is clear that the choice to walk is made for many different reasons but what is important is that the choice is sustained and there is a role for a national campaign in ensuring this.

R52: We strongly recommend that the strategy sets out the government's intention to run a sustained campaign to encourage people to walk more and to maintain any increase. The campaign could be led by several different departments in order to get across the breadth of reasons why people should walk more and drive less e.g. health, the environment, safety, pleasure, independence, time-saving, money-saving. It could also set out the anticipated role of voluntary organisations, consumer and health groups in supporting this function, along the lines of the stop smoking campaigns, which are being funded by DH but delivered by DH, the British Heart Foundation and Cancer Research UK.

Section 7: Improving the institutional framework

R53: The NHF recommends that the final document explicitly requires that local authorities adopt and provide full support for a social marketing approach to the issue of walking, appealing to their constituents using the arguments provided in table 1 below. Such an approach is outlined on page 103 of Game Plan. Taking strong arguments in support of walking to their constituents and

explaining how tough decisions will benefit them will mitigate against any fear of council unpopularity and potential loss of votes.

Table 1: Who will benefit from an increase in walking?

Benefit	Who benefits	Rationale
Financial gain	Businesses	Less money spent on car park provision, less staff sickness
	NHS	Less money spent on car park provision, less staff sickness, less money spent on treating avoidable disease
Reduced traffic volume/congestion and reduced traffic speed	Drivers	Can get to their destination more easily
	Parents	Less concern for the safety of their children
	Children	Safer streets to walk and play in so more exercise. Therefore more alert at school, fitter, and protected against chronic disease (CHD etc)
	Community	More pleasant
	Local authorities	Meet targets for pollution reduction, traffic reduction, accident reduction, win votes?
Improved health	NHS	Less time lost in staff sickness, less money spent on treating avoidable disease
	Schools	Better league table positioning
	Businesses	Less time lost in staff sickness
	Government	Reduction in inequalities
	Children	Better academic achievement

Q13: Would it be helpful to establish a Walking Regional Development Team (as with cycling) to advise and support local authorities?

R54: We strongly recommend that the Department follows Scotland's lead and establishes a credible national forum of experts drawn from a range of disciplines to oversee the development of the final walking strategy. This will ensure the breadth of the strategy and its integrity. We are particularly concerned to see the establishment of a national walking forum since forums already exist to represent the interests of the cyclist and the motorist.

The establishment of a regional team to support the delivery of the strategy must be dependent on it having added value. The key for delivery will be the

strength that can be mustered at the local level and there may be scope for networks that support local delivery by sharing good practice and skills.

Section 8: Indicators

R55: Other indicators that might be considered include:

Mode split

Modal share indicator for journeys to work, from census journey to work data

Number of businesses committed to increasing levels of walking among their staff

Number of schools committed to the school travel plan programme

Footway condition

Time lag between the report of a problem and it being dealt with effectively

Number of claims paid-out for pavement-related accidents, from local Highway claims records

Number of crossings adapted per year

Number of roads made pedestrian friendly per year

Improvements in street lighting

Road safety

Number of casualties, from accident statistics

R56: There should be an indicator related to congestion since this is one of the stated aims of the 10-year transport plan, to which the walking strategy will contribute.

R57: We recommend that local authorities should set local targets linked to these indicators.

Section 9: Bringing it all together

As mentioned in R11, the key features stated in this section should be used to inform the aims and vision of the strategy earlier on in the document.

R58: DfT might consider establishing an award scheme to reward best practice.

R59: Local and national businesses are another key delivery agent and should be highlighted in this section. Their role, as set out earlier in this response, is key in pushing the walking message to employees and supporting the choice to walk.

- R60:** Without wishing to delay an already much delayed walking strategy, we believe it is important to publish the revised DfT guidance on measures to make streets more pedestrian friendly (e.g. enforcing traffic speeds) concurrently with the strategy, in order to achieve maximum impact. We believe that these measures are central to the success of the strategy.
- R61:** We assume that the omission of Sustrans from the list of key participants is an oversight, since they have been mentioned earlier in the document. We ask that they be added to the list.
- R62:** The public has a strong sense of its perceived rights, in terms of what it expects to be able to do and when. However, the issue of responsibilities is one which was recently raised by the Wanless review of future NHS spending (conducted for the Treasury²) when considering how to put some of the responsibility for health back in the hands of the individual. We recommend that public responsibility for the local community is best achieved through both education (social marketing campaigns) and law enforcement.

National Heart Forum

2003

² Wanless D. 2002. Securing Our Future Health: Taking a Long-Term View. Final Report. London: HM Treasury