



Environmental Information Sheet

TRAVEL WISELY

Overview

Transport is the fastest growing source of carbon dioxide emissions in the UK, and is responsible for about 26% of the total. However, traffic increases by about 2% each year, while aviation is projected to double or even triple by 2030¹. Our transport system leads to a variety of problems, such as road accidents, time lost due to congestion, and ill-health from lack of exercise or air pollution. Yet the private car and cheap flights have become potent symbols of freedom and prosperity. This is one of the hardest environmental issues to tackle.

Over the past ten years, transport planning has moved away from “predict and provide” – ie. work out how traffic is likely to increase and build the roads to cope. The new principle is “demand management” - work out how you can discourage traffic growth in the first place. The most successful example of demand management is the London congestion charge, with similar initiatives now being considered for other cities.

We need a major shift in transport funding to support walking and cycling, through better cyclepaths, for example. Although 25% of car journeys are under 2 miles, the distance and number of trips made by bike or on foot continue to decline, with safety cited as a major concern. Improved safety and infrastructure is particularly important in influencing the way children travel to school. An increase in walking and cycling would have important health benefits as well as decreasing rush hour traffic. The way people drive and their choice of car is also important from both environmental and safety viewpoints.

Biofuels, from rape, sugar cane or oil palm, for example, are often hailed as a green solution, and the EU requires 5% of our transport fuel to be from biofuels by 2010. However, we could not produce enough biofuels in the UK to support all our needs, while rapid expansion overseas risks deforestation and rising food prices. Electric cars are another option for carbon-free driving, so long as the electricity source is renewable. In the short-term, the greatest carbon savings are probably from higher levels of fuel efficiency for all cars.

The only sector where the “predict and provide” approach still applies is aviation, with proposals for a massive increase in UK airports. Carbon dioxide emissions from air travel are not counted in the UK total, and air travel continues to enjoy considerable tax advantages (eg VAT zero rated). There is now a growing backlash against airport expansion from local residents’ groups. While cheap flights are often defended as enabling people on low incomes to enjoy travel abroad, the poorest 10% of the population hardly ever fly. In a typical year less than 50% of the population flies at all.

Transport issues are closely linked to concerns about deprivation and exclusion, since it is usually the most vulnerable – children, the elderly, disabled, or people on low incomes – who are least able to make use of cars. In rural areas with limited public transport, a car can be a lifeline, and life can be very hard for the 11% of rural households without a car or the 30% of rural people who have no access to a car in the daytime. Car ownership is a major factor in social exclusion in rural areas, where it is unlikely that public transport can ever provide a cost-effective solution. Rural areas, with their high car dependency, are very vulnerable to rises in the cost of fuel, whether due to peak oil or climate change restrictions.

Rural roads tend to be more dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists than those in urban areas, since cars are more likely to be travelling at speed. While there are more accidents in urban areas, accidents on rural roads are usually more serious. While the number of cars on rural roads is rising faster than in urban areas, this is not seen as a priority congestion problem. In fact, road charging to ease congestion may actually make rural roads worse.

¹ Most of the statistics quoted are from the Department of Transport or Transport 2000 websites.

Part of the solution lies in providing better access to services where people are, so that they do not need to travel. In general, we need to travel less. Transport is usually just a means to an end. What is important is access - to work, facilities and opportunities. The Rural Community Councils have long been active in this area, through initiatives such as support for village shops. We need a menu of actions to enable more sustainable transport and access in rural areas. These are likely to include informal carsharing, more local facilities, more working from home (with broadband), and safer cycling and walking infrastructure.

National framework

The Department for Transport published The Future of Transport White Paper in 2004. This recognised the need to manage traffic growth, and proposed action in a range of areas, including road pricing, promotion of walking and cycling, improved public transport etc. The Aviation White Paper "The Future of Air Transport" was also published in 2004, and then reviewed in 2006: it continues to call for an expansion of airports. The Eddington report, published in 2006, highlighted the key role of transport in the economy, with massive cost savings to be made in tackling congestion, and prioritises investments in urban areas and inter-urban corridors.

Local authorities are required to produce a 5 yearly Local Transport Plan, setting out an integrated transport strategy, as the basis for government funding. The planning system has a major role to play in developing sustainable transport, particularly in reducing the need to travel by local provision of facilities.

Key players and programmes

Car Plus: National charity promoting responsible car ownership, including information on car clubs and liftsharing. <http://www.carplus.org.uk>

Energy Saving Trust: Provides information on eco-driving, including green tips, explanation of different fuels etc. The main focus is on business drivers, and it can offer telephone advice to small organisations wanting to reduce environmental impacts from travel. <http://www.est.org.uk/fleet/>

Environmental Transport Association: This is the equivalent of the AA for people who support sustainable transport. <http://www.eta.co.uk>

Transport 2000: National sustainable transport campaigning organisation. As well as national initiatives and research, it also supports the regional Transport Activists Roundtables and locally based Streets for People. Good source of statistics on topics such as social exclusion, under Facts and Figures on the website. <http://www.transport2000.org.uk/>

Sustrans: National sustainable transport organisation, with emphasis on practical local solutions, especially cycling. It is best known for the national cycle network but has also pioneered the TravelSmart approach to "individualised travel marketing", leading to up to 14% sustained reduction in car use. <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/>

Travelwise: Public sector based programme, with 160 members, mainly local authorities. It concentrates on school and business travel plans, with some community activities, including Travelwise Week in September. Possible source of small-scale funding or cycle racks. <http://www.travelwise.org.uk>

Priorities for action

Individual

From a climate change perspective, the first priority is to cut down on flights, especially if you can travel by train instead. Then look at how you can cut down on car use, whether by cycling and walking for short journeys, changing to public transport or carsharing. Car clubs, which provide access to a car for an annual fee, have proved less successful in rural areas, partly due to the need to get a critical mass of members to be viable. However, informal carshare arrangements can be effective and help cement social networks. When you do need to drive, it is possible to cut down your environmental impact by choosing a low emissions car or changing the way you drive. Having the correct tyre pressure or keeping your speed to 50mph will save fuel.

<http://www.seat61.com> Invaluable resource covering rail trips worldwide.

Community

Initiatives are often linked to safety (especially for children) and health. Examples include:

Homezones: Streets designed for people to enjoy, as well as traffic. These are legally defined and developed to Highways Authority specifications. <http://www.homezones.org.uk>

Walking buses: These are like old-fashioned crocodiles, with parents sharing the responsibility for walking their children to school. <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/>

Liftshare schemes: These can also be set up on a village basis and might help put commuters in touch for example. See Car Plus website.

Promotional events: You can celebrate International Carfree Day on 22 September or Green Transport Week in mid June. Ideas and information on the Environmental Transport Association website.