

Cycling and the New Agenda on Public Health

Cycle to Work Alliance's Parliamentary Reception, House of Commons - 28th July 2010
Summary of Discussion

On 28th July 2010, the Cycle to Work Alliance hosted a Parliamentary Reception; "Cycling and the New Agenda on Public Health". The event involved key sector stakeholders including representatives from Central Government, businesses, charities and the media. A summary of the key points covered can be found below.

Summary of discussion:

The reception sought to examine the Government's pledge to focus their health agenda on preventative healthcare by encouraging people to live more active lives and to take responsibility for their own health. It discussed the role businesses can play in encouraging their employees to have a healthy lifestyle. The reception also looked at how the Government is able to drive forward its public health agenda by incentivising businesses and individuals to change their behaviour.

Julian Huppert, MP for Cambridge and host of the event, spoke of his experience as an MP for a Cycling City and, in particular, the impact that cycling to work has on commuting patterns and changing people's lifestyles.

He went on to lay out what the Coalition Government is doing in terms of cycling. The Government has a commitment to sustainability and green transport and is keen to promote cycling as a way of achieving these aims. Julian talked about the public health benefits of cycling as well as its contribution to outcomes across a wide range of other policy areas. For this reason, he argued, it is essential that cycling remains at the top of the Government's agenda.



Dr Mike Knapton, Associate Medical Director of the British Heart Foundation, focussed on the health benefits cycling can bring about. He argued that the Government should be very supportive of initiatives, such as the cycle to work scheme, which increase physical activity.



He talked about the number of benefits that physical activity has, including reduced mortality from cancer and cardio-vascular disease and improved psychological health. Physical activity, Mike went on to say, can also help combat diabetes, osteoporosis and, more generally, obesity.

Mike then looked to consider how levels of physical activity in the UK shape up. Generally speaking, he said, trends in physical activity have been improving, albeit slowly. A Health Survey for England in 2008 noted self-reported of physical activity at 40% for men and 30% for women. However, more objective measures, Mike declared, see these figures fall to 6% and 4% respectively. Whilst these more objective figures may overestimate the case, the key point emerging is that not enough people are taking enough exercise to remain healthy.

David Wild, CEO of Halfords, spoke about the cycle to work scheme and how it fits in with the policy agenda of the Coalition Government. The scheme has been a great success story and can contribute in a number of ways to the Government's policy agenda.

David went on to say that the Government has stretching targets for improvement in health, emissions and congestion levels. In health, the Coalition has set out a revolution in public health with the aim of promoting behaviour change to allow people to lead healthier lives. He talked about how the Coalition is keen to see innovative techniques brought forward to help people take responsibility of their health.

In terms of reducing carbon emissions, David discussed the Government's commitment to the increased EU emission reduction target to 30% by 2020 and to reduce central government carbon emissions by 10% within the next 12 months. He also talked about the increasing problem of congestion on Britain's roads, stating facts from the CBI which show that the average UK commuter spends the equivalent of 29 working days travelling to and from work and that 87% of the public and 96% of businesses believe congestion to be a serious or very serious problem facing the country.



The good news, David declared, is that cycling is on the increase. Department for Transport figures show that 4.75 billion km per year were travelled by bike in 2008, an increase of 0.5 billion km from 2007. He believes that the cycle to work scheme underpins this change as almost half a million people have participated over the last ten years and its popularity of has been on the rise in the last two years.



Summing up, *Chris Boardman* argued that the excellence of the scheme comes from the way in which it incentivises individuals to do something beneficial for themselves which ultimately benefits everybody. To ensure cycling reaches its full potential, Chris believes, there will be a need for a cultural change in our views on transport. The key issue for him is to ensure that more people understand what the scheme is and what it can offer them.

Further discussion events around this topic and other, including sustainable transport, will be organised. In the meantime we would any further views and comments you may have.

Contact:

For more information, please contact Alexandra Arikoglu, Cycle to Work Alliance Secretariat, **t:** + 44 (0) 207 222 9500, **e:** info@cycltoworkalliance.org.uk **w:** www.cycltoworkalliance.org.uk