



Essential Evidence 8

Bus Protecting the NHS

The bus provides many benefits to society, not the least of which is their inherent safety relative to other forms of road transport and reducing the need for travel by modes which place the greatest safety burden on others.

Together with increasing physical activity associated with bus use compared to car use, and improved air quality, bus travel helps take the strain off the NHS.

Of all road traffic fatalities in Europe, bus and coach fatalities represented 0.3–0.5%. In the OECD countries across recent decades, the risk of being killed or seriously injured was found to be seven to nine times lower for bus and coach occupants as compared to those of car occupants.

Specifically in Great Britain, buses and coaches are the safest mode for users and the second least dangerous mode for other road users, per passenger miles travelled, (0.3 vehicle user deaths and 1 other road user death per billion passenger miles travelled).

Moreover, during the Covid-19 pandemic, doctors have called to “lower the baseline” of NHS demand from preventable causes like road crashes by rapid introduction of proven public health measures including lowering speeds in order to reduce risks from modes which pose the greatest physical danger. Indeed, the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety has emphasised that most people who die on the roads do so in cars, or in collisions with cars.

Another area which can reduce the strain on the NHS is if more people are physically active. Scotland has an unenviable record of poor health and premature mortality compared to other western European

countries (McCartney et al. 2011), and only two thirds of adults (66%) meet the guidelines for Moderate or Vigorous Physical Activity and 65% are overweight or obese (Scottish Government 2019b).

Active travel is recognised as having a role in both increasing levels of physical activity (Scottish Government 2018a) and addressing overweight and obesity (Scottish Government 2018b).

Walking to and from bus stops and interchanges often leads to bus users meeting the minimum threshold of activity recommended by the Chief Medical Officers (30 minutes).

Increased physical activity levels provides significant protection from heart disease, Stroke, Type 2 Diabetes, and other major diseases and conditions. Studies have suggested that the extra energy spent by public transport commuters could amount to substantial weight loss if the public transport commute were sustained over 6 weeks.

In addition, each year in the UK, around 40,000 deaths are attributable to exposure to outdoor air pollution which plays a role in many of the major health challenges of our day. It has been linked to cancer, asthma, stroke and heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and changes linked to dementia. **If there are less cars on the roads due to increased bus use there is the additional benefit of improved air quality** when there is sufficient mode shift to bus.

Thanks to Professor Adrian Davis for this Essential Evidence.

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