

## **BC Recreation and Parks Association**

### **Submission to 'BC On The Move' – Transportation focused on moving goods and people moving**

Transportation plays a vital role in the health of our economy as well as the health of our people. Keeping goods and people moving provides the infrastructure for commerce but so too does it provide the infrastructure for healthy active living.

The Province of BC needs a transportation plan that prioritizes vehicular and physically active modes of transportation equally, a plan that is about people moving as much as it is about moving people. This starts with reframing the conversation, separating moving goods from people moving and prioritizing pedestrian and non-motorized transportation and safety.

Three priority areas for the development of BC's Transportation Plan are identified that together will help create this shift and result in an inclusive plan of action that prioritizes and supports the health and safety of individuals and communities: Inclusion of Health Impact Assessments; Whole-of-government approach; Development of an Active Transportation Strategy.

#### **Inclusion of Health Impact Assessments**

Transportation is a key determinant of health<sup>1</sup>. Transportation systems and planning have enormous impact on the shape, form and environmental quality of communities, as well as citizens' travel choices, safety and social connectivity. The planning of transportation initiatives must include the process of evaluating impacts to individual health.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a process designed to inform decision-makers about the potential health implications of a given policy, program or project. This allows decision-makers to weigh the health consequences in their deliberations which can lead to changes which can enhance health improvements or mitigate potentially negative health outcomes.

Environmental and Social Assessments are already a standard part of all capital investments, doing an assessment on health impacts should become standard practice.

As the health of citizens is a core responsibility of government it makes sense that there should be a consistent and clear set of objectives by which to evaluate initiatives. These should determine what course of action might be taken to ensure that citizens are afforded maximum protection against negative effects and that potentially beneficial health outcomes are distributed as widely and as equitably as feasible.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas M, Thomson H, Jepson R, Hurley F, Higgins M, Muirie J, Gorman D (eds) Health Impact Assessment of Transport Initiatives: A Guide, NHS Health Scotland Edinburgh 2007

Evaluations of health impact assessment as a tool have shown that they can be effective at providing decision-makers with material to make a more informed decision.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly relevant in areas outside of the traditional domain of healthcare including development sectors such as energy, agriculture, industry and transport.

Researchers have found many instances where the HIA led to measures which mitigated negative health impacts or where modifications were made which either shifted the benefits to include more of the general population or to an underserved population.<sup>3</sup> As the costs of negative health outcomes are carried by government, it is logical to reduce potential negative health outcomes from both a financial and ethical standpoint.

- The Ministry of Transportation should work with the Ministry of Health, BC Centre for Disease Control (BC CDC) and local health authorities to incorporate Health Impact Assessments into transportation projects.
- Where transportation projects require an Environmental Impact Assessment, health professionals from the Ministry, BC CDC and health authority can provide valuable information to increase the quality of the health assessment, quantify risks and offer evidence-based proposals for mitigating health risks.

### **Whole-of-government approach**

A whole-of-government approach needs to be applied in the development of BC's transportation strategy, connecting to and supporting existing government health, physical activity, built environment and active transportation policies and initiatives.

As the most comprehensive health promotion strategy in Canada, Healthy Families BC focuses on enabling all British Columbians to lead healthier lives where they live, work, and play.

Outlined within its strategy is the role government plays. "When looking at the outcomes articulated in the HFBC Policy Framework, it is impossible not to consider how the other sectors, such as education, agriculture, transportation and housing, influence and connect to them."<sup>4</sup> It specifically references "A whole-of-government approach that creates space to identify where the linkages exist and facilitates collaboration and joint planning across ministries and sectors will help ensure that all participants are able to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes." The plan is working to leverage activities across government in order to address the underlying factors that affect health, build healthier public policies and support job creation and economic growth in the province. Active Transportation and Bike Laws are listed as initiatives that support these goals. The Framework acknowledges the need for "strong leadership to account for the

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<sup>2</sup> The Effectiveness of Health Impact Assessments: The Scope and Limitations of Supporting Decision-making in Europe (WHO, 2007) [http://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/98283/E90794.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/98283/E90794.pdf) Accessed 12-07-11

<sup>3</sup> Krämer, U. et al. Traffic-Related Air Pollution and Incident Type 2 Diabetes: Results from the SALIA Cohort Study. *Environ Health Perspect.* 2010 September; 118(9): 1273–1279

<sup>4</sup> British Columbia, Ministry of Health. "Healthy Families BC Policy Framework. A focused Approach to Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention". March 2014 <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2014/healthy-families-bc-policy-framework.pdf>

interconnectedness that exists across social systems and institutionalize action across government and society”, a need that applies to all Ministries.

An initiative of the HFBC Policy Framework is the current development of a BC Physical Activity Strategy. The Strategy has been directed to align with the World Health Organization’s seven evidence –based “best investments” for physical activity, which are supported by good evidence of effectiveness<sup>5</sup>. Two of the seven pertain directly to Transportation:

- Transport policies and systems that prioritize walking, cycling and public transport
- Urban design regulation and infrastructure that provide for equitable and safe access for recreational physical activity, and recreational and transport-related walking and cycling across the life course.

The role of transportation is clearly articulated within these government initiatives and the Transportation Plan needs to include an outline of the support it is providing in each area. Through collaboration and coordination, a cross-government agenda can be created that addresses common goals in physical activity, transportation, health, the natural, built and social environment, and the economy.

### **Development of an Active Transportation Strategy**

The development of an Active Transportation Strategy is based on the spirit of partnership and ongoing engagement and collaboration with local governments, First Nations, and key community stakeholders. Partnerships are key in creating walkable communities that offer access to affordable transit, local zoning, intersection safety, traffic calming measures (etc.), to reduce reliance on the car and ensure pedestrian and cycling safety.

Community planning and infrastructure exert a powerful influence over the ability of citizens to be physically active in their daily routines. “Research is increasingly demonstrating links between the built environment and physical activity behaviours.”<sup>6 7</sup>

BC research found that adults are 2.5 times more likely to engage in active transportation when living in compact and well-connected neighbourhoods. They are also more likely to get the recommended amounts of daily physical activity<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, studies show that neighbourhoods that support active transportation are associated with reduced risk for obesity and reduced air pollution. One study found “a 5% increase in walkability to be associated with a per capita 32.1% increase in time spent in physically active travel, a 0.23-point reduction in body mass index, 6.5% fewer vehicle miles traveled, 5.6% fewer grams of oxides of nitrogen (NOx) emitted, and 5.5% fewer grams of volatile organic compounds (VOC) emitted.”

<sup>5</sup> British Columbia, Ministry of Health. “Healthy Families BC Policy Framework. A focused Approach to Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention”. March 2014 <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2014/healthy-families-bc-policy-framework.pdf> pages 14-15

<sup>6</sup> Douglas M, Thomson H, Jepson R, Hurley F, Higgins M, Muirie J, Gorman D (eds) Health Impact Assessment of Transport Initiatives: A Guide, NHS Health Scotland Edinburgh 2007

<sup>7</sup> BC Recreation and Parks Association. (2009). Physical Activity and Transportation Benefits of Walkable Approaches to Community Design in British Columbia. Available at [http://www.bcrpa.bc.ca/recreation\\_parks/active\\_communities/documents/BCRPA\\_Transportation\\_Study\\_2009.pdf](http://www.bcrpa.bc.ca/recreation_parks/active_communities/documents/BCRPA_Transportation_Study_2009.pdf)

A report by the Provincial Health Services Authority found “a growing consensus among public health experts that supporting more physically active modes of transportation and better access to recreational opportunities offer the most effective ways to increase activity levels across the population, particularly among people who are overweight and/or inactive.”<sup>8</sup>

Many local governments have invested in active transportation facilities but need more financial support to build complete cross jurisdictional networks to get residents more physically active and connected to transit hubs/access points. Smaller communities are especially challenged due to a small tax base and limited budgets. The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute found in a survey of Canadian Municipalities that “three in five communities report that an increase in the amount of walking, bicycling and multi-purpose trails was the most pressing infrastructure need in their community to increase physical activity levels among citizens.”<sup>9</sup>

LocalMotion, Bike BC and the Cycling Infrastructure Partnership Program need more robust funding to reflect the triple bottom line benefits (health, environment, economy) they can deliver in communities. Currently the funding for cycling in BC is just \$9M for the current fiscal year and is set to decrease to \$4M by 2016. This is inadequate and cannot serve BC communities that rely on matching funds from the province.

#### Recommendations:

- An injection of \$175M to LocalMotion and Cycling Infrastructure Partnerships Programs could be used to expedite change on the ground and boost BC’s physical activity rates.
- BCRPA supports the BC Cycling Coalition’s recommendation for an investment of \$175M to enable BC communities to build active transportation networks.
  - This figure is based on postulation that BC could build a first rate cycling network following the funding formula of the Netherlands, who are widely recognized as global leaders in cycling and who spend approximately \$40 per person, per year on cycling.
  - High quality cycling facilities that are attractive to a significant portion of the population such as bicycle paths and separated bicycle lanes can cost from \$1 million to \$4 million per km (1/6 the cost of one km of road network for motorized vehicles).
  - Walking facilities which include enhancement such as benches, way-finding, traffic-calming and safe street crossings will become more important in communities to meet the growing demand of an aging population.
  - Walking is consistently rated as one of the top activities in surveys on physical activity preferences.

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<sup>8</sup> Provincial Health Services Authority. (2007). Creating a Healthier Built Environment in British Columbia

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2004) *A municipal perspective on opportunities for physical activity: Trends from 2000–2004*. Available at <http://www.cflri.ca/eng/statistics/surveys/capacity2004.php>

- This funding could be used by communities to build and activate active transportation plans through the 'Built Environment and Active Transportation (BEAT) Initiative which has been proposed in the Physical Activity Strategy for BC.
- This funding could also be used to support Active School Travel Planning – including education and programming as well as street design and end-use facilities.

Increased use of active transportation takes vehicles off the roads, reducing greenhouse emissions, traffic congestion and infrastructure wear and tear. Fewer vehicles on the road also decreases transit times for those trips that have to be taken by motorized means. A collaborative and inclusive active transportation strategy supports the health of individuals, the environment, and local and provincial economies. It also addresses and encompasses key strategies being explored for *B.C. on the Move*. These include the need to connect and strengthen communities and maximize collaboration and investment with partners and stakeholders.

We have an opportunity to refocus the Province's transportation plan to address the trends and realities of the day. Population is increasing, preferences for modes of transportation are shifting, environmental concerns are growing, and the health of individuals and the economy is forefront. Numerous government initiatives are already in existence that with whole-of-government support and execution will help address the same concerns and goals as the Ministry of Transportation. Investing in an Active Transportation Plan created in collaboration with communities and community groups will ensure actions are truly meeting local and provincial needs. Applying a health lens to all potential actions provides a holistic evaluation that protects and preserves as we benefit from tangible results that carry us forward.

On behalf of the BC Recreation and Parks Association,



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