



To: Transport & Urban Planners & Designers

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Subject: Essential Evidence on a Page: No 186 Active Travel & Physical Activity. Evidence Review.

Top line: The evidence for positive impacts in increasing physical activity is greatest for town and city-wide interventions. All studies addressing whole town or city-wide interventions showed increased levels of cycling and walking compared to controls.

Sport England (SE) supports a broad range of physical activity, including walking and cycling for travel. SE commissioned a review of evidence on the link between active travel and physical activity.¹ It examined the current and potential contribution of active travel to physical activity levels, and reviewed the effectiveness of active travel interventions at increasing walking, cycling and physical activity. The Review identified the strongest available material by setting a high quality threshold and including only those studies with a control or comparison group. This degree of rigour is not common outside of academia, but the decision to apply this approach for the Review was taken in order that the output provides an authoritative overview. The Review found 84 studies meeting the criteria within peer-reviewed and 'grey' literature drawn from wide-ranging and non-traditional sources internationally. There is strong and substantial evidence that active travel interventions are effective at increasing walking, cycling and physical activity.

The Review found 61 out of 84 interventions were effective. This included 36 out of 50 walking interventions, and 41 out of 60 cycling interventions (some covered both). The remainder showed mixed or uncertain results, with a very small number showing decreases. The 84 studies were then clustered by a series of intervention typologies:

- City and town wide interventions
- Building or improving routes or networks
- Social marketing including marketing of infrastructure
- Workplace and other institution based interventions
- Interpersonal interventions
- School based interventions

City and town wide interventions were distinguish from the other intervention typologies by virtue of the fact of the approach applied being usually a combination of measures. These combinations typically included measures also in the other typological clusters. The other groups of identified typologies tend to be relatively more localised. Overall, the review concluded that there is strong evidence for the positive impact of interventions to increase active travel. This in turn increases levels of physical activity. Of the different intervention typologies the evidence was strongest (in terms of volume and robustness) for city or town-wide interventions.² Each of the other intervention types reported some increases in walking and or cycling.

Interventions to build or improve local routes or networks reported increased walking or cycling in most cases. There is also strong evidence of the impact of interventions in school settings. Such interventions have the potential to develop active travel habits that may be continued into adult life.

¹ <https://www.sportengland.org/research/understanding-audiences/active-travel/> Issued May 2019.

² See <https://travelwest.info/project/ee-no-182-sustainable-travel-towns-an-evaluation-of-the-longer-term-impacts>