

## **Written evidence submitted by Brake, the road safety charity.**

### **1. Executive Summary**

- In Britain, levels of Active Travel, people walking or cycling, are relatively low and have remained around the same level for several years.
- Active travel has many benefits including for health and wellbeing, personal finances, the environment and the economy.
- People are often deterred from choosing active travel modes due to road safety fears.
- Policymakers can address safety concerns by adopting a safe systems approach, investing in more segregated cycle lanes and reducing national default speed limits on urban and rural roads.
- Brake works to promote active travel through community engagement projects such as Road Safety Week and Brake's Kids Walk; as well as engaging politicians and other key stakeholders to campaign for policy changes to improve road safety.

### **2. Introduction**

Brake was established in 1995 and is a road safety charity working with communities and organisations across the UK to stop the tragedy of road deaths and injuries, make streets and communities safer for everyone, and support people bereaved and seriously injured on roads. Brake's vision is a world that has zero road deaths and injuries, and where people can get around in ways that are safe, sustainable, healthy and fair.

Brake believes road safety isn't solely about driving safely and within the law. It's also about making our streets safe and pleasant for everyone to use freely and doing everything we can to protect ourselves and people around us, especially vulnerable road users. A big part of that is providing infrastructure that not only encourages active travel but also protects those who walk and cycle from the dangers on our roads.

Brake has more than 20 years' experience in the road safety and sustainable transport field and can point to policies that can be deployed to try to increase the numbers walking and cycling and address the issue of inactivity.

### **3. Overview of the current situation regarding active travel**

The Department for Transport (DfT) has announced its ambition to get more people in the UK using modes of active travel, through cycling and walking, with the launch of their Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy in 2017 – a move supported by Brake. The current picture for walking and cycling in Britain, however, shows that there is a lot of work to do. The trends for trips taken by bicycle or on foot are both down since records began in 2002, with the numbers remaining within a similar range over the intervening years. The number of walking trips made in 2017 was 4% down on

the number of trips made in 2002; and the number of cycling trips made in 2017 was 8% down on 2002. The total number of trips made by cycling or walking in 2017 was just 28% of all trips.<sup>1</sup>

People choosing to cycle and walk are some of the most vulnerable road users, proportionately more at risk on our roads than other users. In 2017, pedestrians and cyclists accounted for almost a third (32%) of deaths on the UK's roads despite only making up a small proportion of miles travelled.<sup>2</sup> With the volume of traffic on the UK's roads set to remain on an upward trajectory, unless drastic changes are made, this will continue to lead to increased danger for these vulnerable road user groups. Recent statistics from the DfT show that the volume of traffic on our roads is set to increase by between 17% and 51% from 2015 to 2050<sup>3</sup>. Our roads infrastructure was not built for such capacity, particularly in urban areas where space is limited, and the inevitable reduction in space has led to a squeeze on vulnerable road users - cyclist and pedestrian safety can be directly related to their proximity to motorised traffic, therefore the increase in traffic has also led to an increase in their vulnerability.

Active travel, therefore, can be seen to be stuck in a vicious cycle. At present, the facilities for those who choose to walk and cycle are inadequate, therefore they are at increased risk, therefore few people choose to walk or cycle, and finally, government focuses investment on where most use is (i.e. not those who walk or cycle). These factors all feed into and perpetuate each other and concerted government action is required to break the cycle.

#### **4. The benefits of active travel**

Active travel has significant benefits for both individuals and society - it benefits people's health, personal finances, the environment, and the economy.

##### 4.1 Health and wellbeing benefits

Low levels of walking and cycling has serious public health implications at a time when 1 in 5 children in year 6 and just over a quarter (26%) of adults in England are obese.<sup>4</sup> Persuading people to integrate active travel into their everyday routines is a simple, constructive way to address this: incorporating physical activity into everyday life through activities such as walking and cycling is as effective for weight loss as supervised exercise programmes.

Research has also found that, on top of the physical health benefits of active travel, people who commute by walking, cycling or public transport have better mental health than those who drive to work. Active commuters are better able to concentrate and less stressed than car commuters.<sup>5</sup>

##### 4.2 Personal Financial benefits

Driving is becoming increasingly expensive. Around 800,000 car-owning households, many of whom are families with incomes among the lowest 10% in the UK, spend at least 31% of their disposable

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<sup>1</sup> [DfT Walking and Cycling Stats, England: 2017](#)

<sup>2</sup> DfT, [Reported Road Casualties Annual Report 2017](#)

<sup>3</sup> [DfT, Road Traffic Forecasts 2018](#)

<sup>4</sup> [NHS Statistics on Obesity, 2018](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Walking or cycling to work improves wellbeing](#), University of East Anglia, 2014

income on a motor vehicle.<sup>6</sup> Sustainable transport charity Sustrans estimates that nearly half of households in England struggle with the costs of car ownership<sup>7</sup>, and that the average family could save £642 a year by swapping a car-based school run for walking or cycling.

#### 4.3 Environmental benefits

There are major environmental consequences of so many journeys being made by car, including carbon emissions, air quality and noise pollution. 21% of UK greenhouse gas emissions come from transport<sup>8</sup>, so reducing our reliance on cars can make a big difference to this.

#### 4.4 Economic benefits

The economic cost of congestion on our roads, stemming from increasing traffic volumes, was estimated at almost £31 billion in 2016<sup>9</sup>. Shifting more journeys towards active and sustainable modes of transport would help reduce congestion overall and thus have a beneficial impact on our economy.

Improved public health through increased walking and cycling also carries a huge economic benefit. Lack of physical activity is a key contributing factor to obesity, which is estimated to cost the NHS £6.1 billion a year.<sup>10</sup>

Research has also found that when local areas are made safer for walking and cycling, for example by lowering speed limits, they become more economically sustainable. This is because safer areas for walking and cycling are seen as more desirable areas to live, boosting local businesses and increasing the value of homes in these areas.<sup>11</sup> Town centre shops can also benefit from increased footfall when there are more people walking and cycling.<sup>12</sup>

On top of all these benefits, whilst it should be acknowledged that there are increased safety risks to those who cycle or walk, investment in active travel can potentially mitigate these risks and improve road safety. More people choosing to cycle or walk means less people will be driving. Therefore, with less people driving the risk to vulnerable road users is greatly reduced, benefitting the safety of those people choosing means of active travel. There is also some international evidence for the “safety in numbers” theory that more cyclists on the roads creates a safer environment for cyclists. For example, cycling in London increased 91% between 2000 and 2009, and cycle casualties fell 33% in the same period.<sup>13</sup> European data shows that countries with high levels of cycling, such as Norway and the Netherlands, have lower cyclist death rates.<sup>14</sup> This is thought to be down to factors

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<sup>6</sup> [Household expenditure on motoring for households owning a car, by disposable income decile group](#), RAC Foundation, 2012

<sup>7</sup> [Locked Out: Transport poverty in England](#), Sustrans, 2012

<sup>8</sup> 2012 [UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions](#), Department of Energy and Climate Change, 2014

<sup>9</sup> <http://inrix.com/press-releases/traffic-congestion-cost-uk-motorists-more-than-30-billion-in-2016/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment--2>

<sup>11</sup> [Motor Vehicle Speeds: Recommendations for Urban Sustainability, Transportation Research Board](#), 2012

<sup>12</sup> [Businesses profit from 20mph limits](#), 20's Plenty for Us, 2012

<sup>13</sup> [Cycling UK, Safety in Numbers](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Pedalling towards safety](#), European Transport Safety Council, 2012

including: drivers become more used to sharing the road with cyclists, so are more careful around them; and drivers are more likely to be cyclists themselves, so understand cyclist behaviour.

## 5. What deters people from choosing active travel

Despite the significant benefits of active travel, the number of cycling and walking trips taken has remained low and relatively static for several years. There are, however, several reasons as to why people are deterred from choosing active travel and they primarily revolve around perceived safety.

In 2017, 62% of adults aged 18+ in England agreed that “it is too dangerous for me to cycle on the roads”<sup>15</sup>, highlighting just how many people are deterred from choosing to cycle because of fears over their safety. Vulnerable roads users, normally those choosing means of active travel, are particularly at risk on rural roads (defined by DfT as major roads and minor roads outside urban areas and having a population of less than 10,000). Of the total number of cyclists and pedestrians killed on Britain’s roads in 2017, almost a third (30%) of pedestrians and just over half (52%) of cyclists were killed on rural roads.<sup>16</sup> A survey by Brake indicated that 70% of drivers asked would choose not to cycle on ‘single carriageway A roads’ (rural roads). Perhaps deterred by the high speed nature of these roads, with six out of ten drivers agreeing that 60mph speed limits are too fast to assure the safety of cyclists on rural roads.<sup>17</sup>

## 6. What can be done

The current levels of active travel in Britain are low and have remained relatively unchanged for several years. There are, however, several policies that could be implemented to change the current trend of active travel and increase the number of people cycling and walking.

### 6.1 Safe systems approach & investment in segregated cycle lanes

Brake advocates a safe systems approach to road safety management and this encompasses the development of infrastructure. Safe systems are designed with the human being at the centre, taking human fallibility and vulnerability into account, and accepting that even the most conscientious person will make a mistake at some point. The goal of this approach is to ensure that these mistakes do not lead to a crash; or, if a crash does occur, it is sufficiently controlled to not cause a death or a life-changing injury.

Under a safe systems approach, therefore, one of the key infrastructure interventions is the segregation of vulnerable road users - the safest routes being those in which cyclists are physically separated from motor traffic. A Canadian study has found that cyclists on these routes have one ninth the risk of injury compared to a busy road with parked cars.<sup>18</sup> Brake strongly advocates increased UK investment in segregated cycling facilities. Such an approach has the dual benefit of increasing cycling safety and increasing cycling take-up.

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<sup>15</sup> [DfT Walking and Cycling Stats, England: 2017](#)

<sup>16</sup> DfT Road Safety Stats table RAS 30018

<sup>17</sup> [Brake report on Safe Roads Between Places](#),

<sup>18</sup> [Route Infrastructure and the Risk of Injuries to Bicyclists: A Case-Crossover Study](#), University of British Columbia, 2012

The impact of a well-designed cycle route can be dramatic and benefit all road users: building a cycling route along Prospect Park West in New York City reduced crashes resulting in injury by 68%, plus far fewer cyclists rode on the pavement inconveniencing pedestrians, and travel times for drivers did not increase.<sup>19</sup> If properly designed, shared-use paths - those shared between pedestrians and cyclists and wide enough for both to use comfortably - can also be a safe option.

Junctions pose a particular danger to cyclists, accounting for almost three quarters of cyclist collisions and therefore any cycling infrastructure must be designed with junctions in mind. Care and attention must be given by councils and traffic authorities for developing infrastructure that is properly designed and effective in preventing casualties. A potential solution is the amendment of junction priority to prioritise cyclists and pedestrians. Such an approach is advocated strongly by cycling and walking stakeholders and we recommend that the Government investigates the potential benefits further.

By taking a safe systems approach, the development of dedicated cycling and walking infrastructure would not only protect vulnerable road users but also encourage the uptake of active travel, particularly for shorter journeys. By separating pedestrians and cyclists from motorised traffic, this would remove the fear that deters people from cycling or walking and boost active travel levels.

## 6.2 Reduced National Speed limits on urban and rural roads

Safety, or perception of safety is the main deterrent to active travel and getting more people cycling and walking, and speed is one of the primary determining factors in road safety. Changes to the existing law on speed limits could therefore be made to support the Government's aim of improving cycling and walking safety whilst promoting more active travel. The current default speed limits in urban areas and on rural roads are set too high to create a safe road environment and should be lowered to support the aim of improving cycling and walking safety and boost levels of active travel.

In urban areas, the UK national default limit is 30mph, however, the World Health Organisation has emphasised the need for 20mph limits in areas where motorised traffic mixes with pedestrians and cyclists due to the vulnerability of these road users.<sup>20</sup> Safety fears are the primary deterrent to active travel – with many people put off walking and cycling due to traffic speeds. Brake therefore strongly advocates a reduction in the default limit in built up areas from 30mph to 20mph. This reduction in the default would also eliminate the key barrier to councils introducing their own 20mph limits – the costs associated to the required signage where speed limits diverge from the national default.

The situation on rural roads in the UK is similar – we have a national default limit which is set too high and deters vulnerable road user activity. The national default limit on single carriageways, outside of “built-up areas”, is 60mph, yet due to the design and condition of many of these roads, 60mph (or anywhere near it) is rarely a safe speed to travel, particularly with regards to those using means of active travel who are likely to share the same space. Half (50%) of fatal crashes in Britain occur on country roads and per mile travelled, country roads are the most dangerous roads for all kinds of road users.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the cause of crashes on such roads are often speed-related (for

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<sup>19</sup> [Prospect Park West Bicycle Path and Traffic Calming](#), New York City

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/road\\_safety\\_status/2015/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/road_safety_status/2015/en/)

<sup>21</sup> [Reported Road Casualties GB, Annual Report 2017, DfT, Table RAS 30006](#)

example in head-on, overtaking collisions, or when vehicles run off the road). Brake, therefore, urges a reduction in the national default speed limit on rural roads to create a safer road environment for those who wish to use a means of active travel.

Brake urges the reduction of the national default limit on both urban and rural roads. Such a move would improve both real and perceived safety, supporting the Government's ambitions for active travel.

## **7. What is Brake doing**

At Brake, we are keen proponents of active travel and we proactively seek to improve road safety and encourage the uptake of active travel across the country.

Brake is passionate about the safety and welfare of children. We believe it's every child's right to be able to walk in their communities without fear of traffic and pollution. But to do this, we need to make sure their journeys to school, home and shops are safe. Our Kids Walk<sup>22</sup> project aims to inspire and engage children about the dangers they face and help Brake call on adults to make their streets safer. We can do this by having footpaths, cycle paths, safe places to cross, slow traffic and clean traffic. By holding Kids Walks at schools across the country we promote the benefits of active travel from a young age, whilst making local communities more aware of the dangers faced by those walking or cycling.

On a national level, Brake is actively campaigning for policy change that would improve road safety for those choosing a mode of active travel. The main deterrents to active travel are fears about safety. Brake's 'Pace for People'<sup>23</sup> and 'Place for People'<sup>24</sup> campaigns seek to address these fears by calling for reduced national speed limits and prioritisation of the needs of our most vulnerable road users, through investing in and implementing more segregated cycling and walking paths. To achieve this, Brake engages with key decision makers in Government and other stakeholders to work with them to implement policies that improve road safety and create a safe environment to encourage active travel.

Brake also annually co-ordinates national Road Safety Week in November and this year we are focussing on 'Bike Smart'. Raising awareness about the dangers faced by some of our most vulnerable road users, cyclists and motorcyclists and encouraging all road users and policy makers to do what they can to ensure their safety. Our policy calls this year will focus on reducing speed and investment in more segregated cycle lanes because these are the main solutions to tackling the dangers faced by cyclists and motorcyclists. By encouraging everyone to be 'Bike Smart' we hope to make a positive change to the way in which people consider choosing modes of active travel and allay their fears about their safety.

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<sup>22</sup> [Brake Kids Walk](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Pace for People](#), Brake campaign

<sup>24</sup> [Place for People](#), Brake campaign

## 8. Conclusion & key recommendations

Levels of active travel in Britain have remained low for several years now and it is apparent that the main deterrent to improving these levels is fears about safety when either walking or cycling. The Government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy is a step in the right direction and an important acknowledgement of the potential benefits of active travel as well as the current issues faced by those choosing to walk or cycle.

As part of the Committee's inquiry into active travel, we do, however, have several key recommendations, the reasons for which have been set out in this response, for action by the Government which we would like the committee to consider.

We recommend the Government:

- Adopts a safe systems approach to improving cycling and walking levels.
- Invest in improved infrastructure that benefits cycling and walking both in the long term and the short term – **in particular more segregated cycle lanes.**
- Reduce the national default speed limits on urban roads from 30mph to 20mph and rural roads from 60mph to 50mph.