

## National Green Theatres Programme Case Study

### Active Travel in NHS Highland

April 2024

#### About

Dr Kristina Muir, Consultant Anaesthetist and Volunteer Chair of Active Travel Subgroup, at NHS Highland, shares work carried out at Raigmore Hospital to encourage active travel



#### Why Active Travel is important

Transport is the largest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK, accounting for 26% of the total emissions<sup>1</sup>. In Scotland, 53% of journeys are taken by car or van and over two thirds of short journeys (between 1-2km) are taken alone<sup>2</sup>. To reduce our emissions we must provide NHS staff with affordable and accessible transport options.

There are further major public health effects of the continued use of private vehicle transport over active travel. Physical inactivity contributes to 1 in 6 deaths<sup>3</sup>. Being more active in our everyday journeys will help improve this.

Additionally, air pollution from fossil fuel use has wide adverse health effects with morbidity, mortality and financial implications in society.<sup>4</sup>

NHS Scotland as an organisation is playing a key role in meeting the climate change targets set out in the Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy: 2022-2026, where it recognises the need for sustainable and active travel. Over half of journeys by private vehicle were less than 5km in 2019<sup>5</sup>. These could be shifted to actively travelled journeys with the right encouragement.

NHS Scotland has committed to reducing the need to travel for patients and staff, decarbonising its fleet and increasing possibilities for patients, visitors and staff to travel by public transport or by walking and wheeling.

#### Challenges to realising Active Travel

In recent years there have been several surveys shared to investigate the challenges for individuals considering active travel. Sustrans<sup>6</sup>, a charity who aim to make it easier for everyone to walk, wheel and cycle, run an NHS staff survey every two years, and the team at NHS Highland have also carried out local surveys.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-and-environment-statistics-2023/transport-and-environment-statistics-2023#:~:text=It%20covers%20the%20period%201990,road%20vehicles%20\(100%20MtCO2e%20\).](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-and-environment-statistics-2023/transport-and-environment-statistics-2023#:~:text=It%20covers%20the%20period%201990,road%20vehicles%20(100%20MtCO2e%20).)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/your-services/related-services-and-accessibility/travel-and-transport/active-travel/#:~:text=Active%20travel%20is%20a%20journey,a%20walk%20or%20cycle%20too>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-applying-all-our-health/physical-activity-applying-all-our-health>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bmj.com/content/383/bmj.p2774>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/48191/transport-and-travel-in-scotland-2019.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/>

The main challenges identified were:

- the cost of purchase and maintenance of a bicycle,
- distance to travel,
- safety perceptions of cycling,
- adverse weather,
- changing and showering facilities at the workplace,
- childcare, and
- concerns regarding security of bikes at the end destination.

## Initiatives to improve Active Travel

NHS Highland had previously employed an 'Active Travel Workplace Engagement Officer'. Employed by Sustrans, this partnership post was half-funded by Sustrans and half-funded through NHS Highland sources (including: endowments, Halfords Cycle2Work cashback scheme and the Health Improvement Team of the Public Health Department).

Through the Health Improvement Team, and in recent years the Active Travel Officer, there have been a number of initiatives introduced to make it easier for staff to switch to modes of active travel:

- Increasing the cycle parking infrastructure.
- Introducing bikes and e-bikes for staff to use for work journeys.
- Improving changing and showering facilities.
- Providing bike maintenance tools and bike doctor sessions for staff.
- Training sessions on the provision of equipment needed for active travel.
- Help for staff on use of the Cycle to Work scheme.

The securing of external funding from a range of sources has underpinned this work.

## Improving cycle parking

In 2018, Highland Council and HiTrans partnered to provide funding for an upgrade of the cycle storage facilities and bus shelter at Raigmore Hospital.

An open public cycle shelter and a secure staff shelter were built outside the main entrance of the hospital, with two tier space for 80 bikes in the staff bike storage.

There has not yet been an assessment of whether there has been an increase in the number of staff cycling to work. However, anecdotally, reports from staff have been positive, with the main comment being the reassurance that expensive bikes will be secure.

*The new secure shelter*



*New secure shelter in use*



## Lessons learned from this initiative

- The motion sensor lights are triggered by people walking past the shelter, so are on more frequently than off. This, of course, has financial and environmental implications and needs to be rectified.
- An environmental concern is the perspex build which has had birds flying into it from nearby trees. We have introduced measures to reduce this harm, but it's worth considering a part-perspex construction for anyone in a planning phase.
- In terms of the environmental impact of the build, it has concrete foundations and a tree was felled to create space for it. These are issues for builds everywhere and need to be addressed for future NHS projects.
- Administration of the new bike shelter has been a challenge, and this is an area where staff capacity needs to be directed.

## Looking forward

Increased prioritisation and funding is required if NHS Scotland is to meet its sustainable transport goals. NHS Highland has an Active Travel subgroup of the Environment and Sustainability Board. This subgroup currently relies on the enthusiasm of its volunteer members to maintain project momentum.

The subgroup's goals are to ensure that they align with and achieve the targets set by NHS Scotland in reference to sustainable travel. To be able to achieve this, the goals must be treated as high priority. NHS resources should be directed at mitigating the climate and environmental crises to avert a future public health crisis. Sustainable travel needs to be supported by infrastructure improvements that make it a more attractive option for all. The shiny new secure bike shelter at Raigmore Hospital is a step in the right direction.

## Contact us

If you have any questions about this case study or want to find out more, please [visit our website](#): or contact the National Green Theatres Programme by emailing [cfsgreentheatres@gjnh.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:cfsgreentheatres@gjnh.scot.nhs.uk)