



Northern Ireland Cycling Forum

Tom McClelland

Fit Futures Secretariat
Investing For Health Team
C.1.22
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3SQ
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Dear Sirs

Task Force on Obesity in Children and Young People

Please thank the Minister for her invitation to respond to the short questionnaire set by the Fit Futures Secretariat.

The Cycling Forum's response is attached.

Unfortunately the Forum was not included in the first round of consultees, delaying our response.

Although we have missed the deadline I do hope you can consider the Forum's views

Yours faithfully

Tom McClelland
Chair

PREVENTION OF OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Response From The Northern Ireland Cycling Forum

1. What do you consider to be the major issues that need to be taken into account in tackling the issues of overweight and obesity in children and young people?
 - a. Some of the issues around childhood and adolescent obesity are complex, however health has been a tragically neglected aspect in official assessments of transport across Western Europe and particularly in Northern Ireland.
 - b. Dora and Racioppi stated in 2001 “*Governments spend large amounts of time and money on transport schemes which just do not take account of a healthy, cheap and traditional method of getting around*”¹
 - c. Walking and cycling, the healthiest and most sustainable modes of transport need to have much higher priority in transport planning if we are serious about improving children’s, young people’s and general public health levels.
 - d. Walking is the second most common journey mode in Northern Ireland yet has been largely ignored by the Regional Transport Strategy.
 - e. It is irrefutable that active, non-polluting forms of transport (walking and cycling) are more beneficial to our health than the use of motorised vehicles.
 - f. Childrens’ independent mobility has in a single generation shrunk to one-ninth of its former size.²
 - g. The logical way forward is joined up health and transport policies, promoted by every politician whether at Ministerial, MLA or Council level.
2. What is being done already by your organisation to prevent children and young people from becoming overweight or obese?
 - a. The Forum is promoting cycling as a healthy, sustainable, economic and fun mode of travel, and monitoring the implementation of the NI Cycling Strategy
3. What could be done by your organisation to more effectively assist efforts to prevent increases in levels of overweight and obesity in children and young people?
 - a. Promoting real and active partnership between DRD and DHSSPS leading to an increase in healthy sustainable journeys, e.g. the DRD was not a Departmental member of the Fit Futures Task Force until the Cycling Forum raised the issue.
 - b. Finding and unlocking sustained funding streams to properly promote cycling and cycle training.

¹ Dora, Carlos and Racioppi, Francesca (2001) “Cycling and walking: The planners don’t always count it” European Bulletin on Environment and Health, May 2001 – http://www.euro.who.int/transport/modes/20030207_1

² Hillman, Mayer “One false move” A study of childrens’ independent mobility, the home habitat of a typical eight-year-old – the area in which in which children are able to travel on their own has shrunk to one ninth its former size.

4. What would others need to do to maximise your organisation's contribution to the prevention of overweight and obesity in children and young people?
- a. To provide a coherent, safe, extensive cycle network for the 30 towns in Northern Ireland (excluding Belfast and Derry) capital costs have been estimated at less than £10,000,000³. We are unaware of estimated costs for providing linked green/quiet rural lanes. We speculate that costs of identifying and promoting the rural network would be lower than that required for urban networks.
 - b. The Westminster Parliamentary Health Select Committee recently reported "*If the Government were to achieve its target of trebling cycling in the period 2000-2010...that might achieve more in the fight against obesity than any individual measure we recommend within this report*"⁴

We recommend that budgetary and Departmental emphasis is refocused on providing a proper walking and cycling network, promoting cycling and providing cycle training. We also hope that political and civic leadership could be shown so that society moves to a health service and away from our current sickness service.

³ Presentation by Stephen Wood, Transport Planner, DRD to the NI Cycling Forum

⁴ www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmhealth.htm