

Sadiq Khan

Mayor of London

(Sent via email to mayor@london.gov.uk)

London Assembly

City Hall

The Queen's Walk

London, SE1 2AA

4 November 2016

Dear Sadiq,

TfL's role in promoting health in London

The London Assembly Health Committee recently held a public meeting into TfL's role in promoting health in London. We are aware that this is an issue which is being given increased consideration by your administration and we support your focus on this area. We therefore welcome the commitment set out in your vision document, 'A city for all Londoners', to embed health considerations across all areas of your policy work. We are keen to ensure that this ambition is now translated into practical actions that will deliver clear health benefits to Londoners.

The committee heard compelling evidence from transport and public health experts on the role that transport can play in improving health and reducing health inequalities. London's transport system enables Londoners to access jobs, education, shops, recreation, health and social services, and travel to see friends and family. All of these are essential for a healthy life. And walking and cycling in particular are important forms of physical activity which can help prevent a range of illnesses including heart disease, stroke, depression, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

The biggest role of transport for individual health is a positive one: it is one of the main ways in which people stay active. But transport can also have negative impacts on both physical and mental health across the wider population through pollution, noise, anxiety, stress, increased social isolation, and the impact of road traffic collisions.

TfL should go further and faster in its ambitions to promote healthier transport

The committee welcomes TfL's commitment to adopting and promoting the Healthy Streets model across its business planning. Designing and delivering healthier, safer, more attractive infrastructure for walking and cycling is critical to enabling more people to take up these active travel options. We therefore welcome assurances that your new Transport Strategy will include a 'very substantial focus' on Healthy Streets.¹

The committee notes, however, that TfL can go further and it can go faster to deliver a healthier transport system for all Londoners. In its submission to our investigation, Public Health England told us that it would 'encourage TfL to increase [its] level of ambition if health benefits for Londoners are to be fully realised'. We note that TfL's current target is to increase the percentage of Londoners who achieve the minimum recommended activity levels through transport from 56 per cent now to 70 per cent by 2050. **This is a manifestly unambitious timescale to deliver changes that could reduce chronic ill health and preventable early deaths. We echo Public Health England's calls for TfL to aim higher and to revise this target to 2030 at the latest. We**

¹ Ben Plowden, Director of Surface Transport Planning, TfL to Health Committee 19 October

would also like to see a specific target set for 2020 so that the return on investment made in healthy transport initiatives can be monitored throughout your mayoral term.

TfL's first Health Action Plan, published in 2014, was an important first step in highlighting the importance of transport to London's health. We welcome the news that a revised plan is due to be published in early 2017. However, we seek reassurance that this work stream is being taken seriously at the highest levels within TfL and that progress will be monitored regularly by the TfL Board. **We would welcome clarification on which TfL director will be held accountable for, and which Board committee will have oversight and ownership of, the implementation of TfL's revised Health Action Plan. We also recommend that updates on the delivery of the Health Action Plan should be explicitly included in the Commissioner's reports to the TfL Board.**

TfL should increase the resources available to deliver its health commitments

We commend the work of Dr Lucy Saunders in developing TfL's Health Action Plan and her efforts to embed this approach across TfL. However, we would welcome a greater allocation of staff resource to this work stream. Dr Saunders is seconded to TfL on a part-time basis and is the only public health specialist currently working within the organisation. Given your commitments to scaling up work on the Healthy Streets approach across TfL, we would anticipate a corresponding need to increase the amount of staff resource available to provide specialist public health knowledge.

In particular, we note from the discussion that TfL is planning to issue guidance to the boroughs on how they should give expression to the new Transport Strategy priorities through their Local Implementation Plans (LIP). We welcome this approach, but question the extent to which all boroughs have the resources and skills to submit plans that match up to this ambition. John Dales, Chair of the Transport Planning Society, highlighted a need for further training and advice to the boroughs on how they should incorporate health into their work, as transport planners have historically given comparatively little weight to these considerations. **We therefore recommend that TfL should allocate a specific budget and additional staffing resource to the delivery of the Health Action plan, including providing training to borough transport planners on how to deliver the Healthy Streets approach.**

The Cycling and Walking Commissioner should champion public health across TfL

The committee welcomes your decision to appoint a Cycling and Walking Commissioner to champion active travel. We hope that the Commissioner will be given the necessary resources and political support to drive forward the Healthy Streets agenda. It will be crucial for the appointee to have a clear and thorough understanding of the health benefits of active travel and the need to provide high-quality street infrastructure to improve health. **We suggest that the new Cycling and Walking Commissioner should meet with your statutory health adviser and Public Health England at the earliest opportunity to ensure that expert advice on this issue informs their thinking from the outset.**

TfL should prioritise investment decisions which reduce health inequalities

We heard that health inequalities have historically been understated in TfL's investment appraisal and prioritisation process. This means that opportunities to maximise health benefits to Londoners are being missed. We urge you and TfL to consider how investment can be prioritised

LONDON ASSEMBLY

in areas with significant existing health inequality. TfL has an opportunity to support some of London's vulnerable communities through improving access to public transport and active travel opportunities. There is evidence that higher living costs in inner London means that the most vulnerable Londoners are increasingly living in outer London boroughs. This means that vulnerable population groups will be most affected by extended commutes, have less access to active travel options and will be less likely to be able to connect to the Tube or bus services. TfL could therefore have a significant impact on health inequalities through further work to embed active travel and affordable public transport access in outer London boroughs. This should be a material consideration in TfL's forthcoming major review of bus route planning across London.

Further investment in high quality cycling and walking infrastructure should be prioritised in outer London boroughs, which currently have high levels of car use. We are concerned that TfL's current approach is too narrowly focused on central and inner London, despite clear evidence that the greatest unmet potential for increased active travel is in outer London. While the Mini-Holland programme seeks to deliver benefits in the three boroughs in which it is funded, we would like to see more evidence that the needs of other outer London boroughs are being fully considered. In addition to promoting better individual and environmental health, including improved air quality, reducing private car use across London would bring additional benefits in terms of reducing congestion and increasing journey time reliability. **We would urge you to comprehensively review TfL's planned investment in cycling and walking in London to ensure that sufficient priority is given to outer London boroughs.**

TfL needs to communicate the health benefits and risks of its programmes to its customers more clearly

The most disadvantaged, including those from areas of higher deprivation, older people, those from ethnic minority backgrounds and those with a disability, are significantly less likely to travel actively. When developing access to transport opportunities, including active travel, TfL should continue to engage with local populations to fully understand their needs and work with them to ensure they understand how developments will benefit them. Encouraging behaviour change on a mass scale is not going to happen without clearly demonstrating the personal, social and environmental health benefits of making a change to established travel habits. **We would urge you, and TfL, to make full use of Public Health England's behavioural insight expertise to help deliver a step change in healthy travel across London.**

TfL has reported 2.3 million followers on Twitter and Facebook receiving real-time updates on bus and rail services and roads status. Using this platform to encourage key health messages, particularly with regards to increased walking and cycling across the capital could have substantial reach. TfL has reported that it is actively analysing big data to improve transport. **Making big data available to the health sector could help facilitate new insights into changing health needs across London and we encourage you to explore this option with health partners.**

TfL should also make health-related transport data more readily available to the public. This would be of particular value in challenging misconceptions and mitigating fears about how changes to roads and streets affect businesses and communities. This would allow for a more informed discussion with local stakeholders about how healthier transport options can bring economic, as well as social benefits. For example, we heard that some businesses have been reluctant to support road closures because they believe this will have a negative impact on trading, although data indicates that people who walk or cycle to shop spend more on average over a month than car users. We believe TfL is missing an opportunity to inform and engage

communities on the benefits of the Healthy Streets approach. **We recommend that you ask TfL to report back to you how they will make the wealth of data available more accessible to local communities.**

Beyond healthy streets

Integrating public health and transport policy more closely is a comparatively new approach for policy makers. We accept that it will take time for this concept to bed in within TfL. The committee agrees that it is important to focus on streets at this early stage as this will deliver the most direct health benefits to the greatest number of Londoners. Nevertheless, we hope that in time you will broaden your ambition to include other public realm spaces including stations. **We would encourage you to evaluate how the healthy streets indicators could be applied in station environments to bring further improvement to the wider public transport offer in London.**

The committee welcomes your acknowledgement that transport is one of the most significant levers available to you to deliver significant health benefits at a population-wide level. It is vital that this work is sustained and is given the highest level of priority by yourself and within TfL. We will therefore continue to monitor your and TfL's efforts in this regard and look forward to working with you to deliver healthier transport for all Londoners.

The committee would be grateful to receive a response on the points raised by 4 January 2017. Please copy this to Lucy Brant, Scrutiny Manager, via lucy.brant@london.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Onkar Sahota', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM
Chair of the Health Committee

cc. Mike Brown, Commissioner, TfL