



ESSAY

Inclusive Streets

Move in the Right Direction

Lucy Saunders developed the Healthy Streets Approach through her research into the health impacts of transport, public realm and urban planning. She identified 10 indicators necessary for public spaces to improve people's health. Her model was first adopted in London and is now being applied in cities around the world.

Successful cities around the world are facing the same challenge: a growing population that is causing increased congestion and pollution. This leads to a decline in the quality of life for citizens, which threatens the city's continuing prosperity. In the past century, attempts have been made to address congestion and pollution by building more roads. The result was induced demand: roads quickly filled with more vehicles, increasing congestion and pollution, eroding the quality of life. So how can cities successfully grow without increasing congestion and pollution? By creating a demand for clean, healthy, space-efficient travel: walking, cycling and public transport.

Global cities have known this for some time. Transport policies since the turn of the century have been aimed at shifting travel from private cars to sustainable, healthy options. This has included an

overhaul of bus travel in London, a programme of road-space reallocation to create bike tracks in New York, removal of car parking in Oslo and road user charging in Singapore. However, no major city has managed to keep pace with the needs of its citizens.

City dwellers around the world are facing an epidemic of physical inactivity (lack of daily exercise) because they are not able to build walking or cycling easily into their daily routine. This results in a wide range of health consequences including overweight and obesity, cardiovascular and musculoskeletal illnesses, depression and anxiety. In addition, our understanding of the health impacts of urban noise and air pollution is growing and there is a growing body of scientific evidence showing the negative impacts these have on unborn babies, cardiovascular and pulmonary disease, sleep and performance at school and work.



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Cycle Superhighway in central London separates people walking and cycling from automobiles for a safe and relaxing journey.

URBAN SOLUTIONS

So how do we ensure our urban transport policies achieve the pace and scale of change that is needed to see real population-wide benefits? We need to focus on the outcome we are seeking to achieve, which is a healthy environment in which everyone can live well. Evidence from studies around the world shows that people will not choose to travel in healthy, space-efficient ways unless we ensure the environment they are travelling in is comfortable and attractive to walk, cycle and spend time in.

We need to accommodate everyone. Special consideration needs to be made to ensure streets and public transport are welcoming to older people, children, disabled people, people travelling in groups, people visiting and working in the city, as well as people living in the city. We also need to consider all possible times of the day and weather conditions because when people need to travel, it is often not an option to cancel or postpone their trip.

An effective framework for achieving this is the 10 Healthy Street Indicators. These focus on the human experience and show what really matters on all streets, everywhere, for everyone. By improving these indicators, cities know they are addressing the major negative health impacts of cities: physical inactivity, road traffic injuries, noise and air pollution, social isolation and loneliness.

Importantly, we can only improve these indicators by reducing the dominance of private motorised vehicles that are responsible for many of these health problems. People are not willing to walk or cycle in constrained spaces dominated by noise, pollution and danger. People will choose to travel in a private car if they can, even though it is not the best choice for their own health or the health of others in the city. So it is not sufficient to provide the choice of active travel versus private car. Active travel needs to be a more convenient and attractive alternative.

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How do we get Healthy Streets?

To make streets healthier we must first assess how they perform against the 10 Healthy Street Indicators and then seek to improve their performance. It is possible that a quiet back alley performs well in the “not too noisy” and “easy to cross” categories, while a busy main street does better for “things to see and do” and “places to stop and rest”. However, to

ensure the public environment is healthy and welcoming to all people then we must improve and balance all of the indicators. The back alley may be quiet and easy to cross but if it also feels drab or even unsafe, people will not be willing to use it. The main street may have lots of attractions and places to rest, but if it is also noisy and difficult to cross with narrow footpaths, then many people will not want to do so, and some will not be able to use it. Once

- 01 Narrow streets are designed to prioritise people walking and the vehicles are ‘guests’ in these spaces.
- 02 The 10 Healthy Street Indicators focus on the human experience and show what really matters on all streets, everywhere, for everyone.



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you start looking into the Healthy Street Indicators it becomes clear that they are interdependent, which is because the human experience is multidimensional. A street that is noisy is less likely to be safe and as a result, people are less likely to want to walk or cycle on it.

To achieve improvements in the 10 Healthy Street Indicators, the first thought is often to redesign the street in some way. A wider footpath makes the street feel safer and more relaxing for walking and creates space for seating, planting and bicycle parking. This also serves to narrow the road space for motorised vehicles, leading to steadier, more courteous driving behaviour.

However, there are many ways the experience of being on the street can be improved without engineering. Examples include: enforcing the speed limit and

“Roads need to dedicate more space for sustainable, healthy modes of travel.”

parking rules; activating public spaces with art and novelties that encourage play and reflection; and managing servicing, deliveries and construction work to reduce the number of vehicles people have to interact with when walking or cycling.

The design and management of buildings that line the streets also influence what streets feel like for people. For example, active frontages at ground floor level; shade, shelter and lighting designed into building façades; careful thought about how people can easily access the building on foot, bicycle and public transport.

01 With a successful Healthy Streets Approach, children need not to wear high-visibility clothing to ensure their safety while walking on the streets.

02 People of all ages cycle along the streets of London during the annual RideLondon cycling event.



“Cities become more interesting and pleasant places to live, work and get around when they are not car-dominated.”



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We also need to think beyond the individual street. For example, a bicycle lane that only runs for one block will not result in more people cycling because they need a safe space to cycle their whole journey. A network of high-quality public transport services, bicycle lanes and wide footpaths are essential. Roads need to dedicate more space for sustainable, healthy modes of travel, so that it is quicker and more convenient than travelling by car for short journeys. This can require area or city-wide policies that limit vehicle speeds, enforce bus lanes and charge people more for driving short journeys.

This brings us to the most strategic level of consideration for delivering improvements in the 10 Healthy Street Indicators: spatial planning. To ensure cities are thriving places for people to lead healthy lives free from congestion and pollution, we have to plan for that spatially. People need to be able to easily access the goods and services they need routinely in their own neighbourhood, on foot or by bicycle. This means ensuring that new developments bring everyday services such

as shops, restaurants, leisure, schools, dentists and doctors into communities. These “20-min towns” have to restrict car parking, as people will not walk or cycle in their neighbourhoods if there are ample opportunities to park a private car.

Even people who are not interested in their health and well-being can still enjoy the benefits of Healthy Streets in other ways. Cities become more interesting and pleasant places to live, work and get around when they are not car-dominated.

For example, businesses in London’s financial district can see that it is important to be based in a great place for people if they are seeking to attract top-level talent from around the world. In May 2019, the City of London adopted an ambitious plan based on the Healthy Street Indicators. This includes reducing the speed limit to 24 km/h, increasing the number of streets closed to cars, building 2-m wide cycle tracks and tightening junctions to make them easier and safer to cross on foot or by bike.

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The Greater London Authority has comprehensively adopted the Healthy Streets Approach across all departmental strategies, committed £2.3 billion (\$4.03 billion) to delivering the necessary improvements, embedded Healthy Streets in the spatial plan for the city region and is annually tracking its progress in improving the indicators. Data is already showing record growth in cycling and the Healthy Streets scores for streets across the city are climbing. It is therefore possible for cities to apply urban transport policies that achieve the pace and scale of change needed for real population-wide benefits.

In 2019, Auckland Transport in New Zealand hired a Healthy Streets team to help the city apply the approach there, and in October 2019, Hungary’s capital city Budapest voted in a new mayor who has committed to the approach.

“Active travel needs to be a more convenient and attractive alternative.”

The 10 Healthy Street Indicators are deceptively simple. To achieve our objective, we need a wide range of organisations, businesses, government departments and individuals to work together towards this shared goal. Using the 10 Healthy Street Indicators, they remain focused on improving the human experience to deliver health and well-being benefits for everyone. 🟡

- 01 People enjoying the outdoor seating spaces on a busy street near Leicester Square, London.
- 02 Commuters using the newly installed protected bike lanes in central London.