



News...

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Transport research could make us healthier

Ground-breaking research into how transport can help to improve people's health is underway in the North East.

The results of the pioneering work will become part of an ambitious strategy to tackle obesity and transform the health of the region.

It was commissioned by the advisory group for economy, culture and environment, one of ten established to take forward *Better Health, Fairer Health*.

Project manager Cynthia Bartley said: "We believe this research may be the first of its kind in the world.

"Transport initiatives can potentially play an enormous part in improving an individual's health - and we want to explore how this can happen in the North East."

The study is being carried out by Atkins, one of the world's most respected engineering consultancy firms, in partnership with Oxford and Newcastle Universities.

According to Geoff Gardner, who is leading the team, the key is getting everyone on board with health objectives.

"The latest thinking is that simply telling people to walk, cycle or run more because it's good for their health, or telling planners to plan for this, doesn't work – you have to make them want to.

"It's a bit like treating someone for an addiction – you have to go about it in a different way. We are linking expert thinking in health and transport for the first time. It's cutting edge but it does look promising."

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Key areas to be covered include:

- how to make walking and cycling the 'norm' rather than car usage
- children's journeys to school
- employees' journeys to work
- patients' journeys to hospital

The researchers have also been asked to outline solutions showing degrees of benefit and the complexity of the barriers faced in implementation.

They will also suggest innovative action which could influence future transport policy.

An interim report is currently being prepared and the work should be completed in January.

Better Health, Fairer Health, the North East's first such strategy, was launched by Regional Minister Nick Brown earlier this year.

Led by regional director of public health Professor Stephen Singleton, it aims to catapult the North East from the unhealthiest region in the country to the healthiest within a generation.

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