



To committee Secretariat

NSW Parliamentary Committee on Young People's Inquiry into Young People and the Built Environment'.

Email: childrenscommittee@parliament.nsw.gov.au

17th March 2006

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are writing in regards to the New South Wales Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People's 'Inquiry into Children, Young People and the Built Environment'.

For our work in Health Promotion and Public Health/Community Nutrition, it is a fundamental understanding that over-nutrition and inadequate physical activity are major contributors towards the current obesity epidemic in young people. Work on either of these factors is incomplete without considering the other.

The built environment has been found to significantly influence the physical activity levels of children and young people¹. Consequently, it is crucial that the built environment, in which children and young people live and spend their time, be conducive to exercise.

An extremely relevant report was published last October, which we would like to recommend to the committee:

Gebel, K., King, L., Bauman, A., Vita, P., Gill, T., Rigby, A. and Capon, A. (2005)
Creating healthy environments: A review of links between the physical environment, physical activity and obesity.

Sydney: NSW Health Department and NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity.

This report can be downloaded from:

http://www.coo.health.usyd.edu.au/pdf/creating_healthy_environments.pdf

This letter is to add our endorsement to the contents of the above report, as it has practical relevance in our everyday work.

In summary, the report highlights the following:

"The physical environment affects the way we eat, live and play"

"The way we design our cities and organise our lives impacts on our health behaviours in many subtle, varied and complex ways. People are more likely to make healthy behaviour choices when these choices are easily available to them, and thus environments [including built environments] that support or discourage health behaviours critically influence health"

"There is an accumulating body of evidence on how physical environments affect physical activity"

“There are several urban form characteristics (natural and built environment) that tend to be associated with physical activity:

- *Mixed land use and density*
- *Footpaths and cycle ways and facilities for physical activity*
- *Street connectivity and design*
- *Transport infrastructure and systems, linking residential, commercial and business areas”*

In a number of studies, parents have indicated that general safety concerns were a barrier to children being more physically active in their local community².

We wish to acknowledge and support the ‘Walking School Bus Project’³, an initiative of the Central Coast Community Environment Network which aims to provide a safe and healthy alternative to driving children to school. We see this project as a positive step towards better health for children and adolescents. We acknowledge that this initiative reduces parents concerns about safety for children in high traffic areas, but because it relies on volunteers, it is unlikely to be as effective as the built environment itself being safe.

We trust that you will find this information useful and relevant in regards to the committee’s inquiry. If you should need to contact us about this letter, please telephone Ms Helen Taylor, on (02) 4320 2057.

Yours Sincerely,

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References

¹ Gebel, K., King, L., Bauman, A., Vita, P., Gill, T., Rigby, A. and Capon, A. (2005) *Creating healthy environments: A review of links between the physical environment, physical activity and obesity*. Sydney: NSW Health Department and NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity.

² Hesketh, K., Waters, E., Green, J., Salmon. And Williams, J. (2005) *Healthy eating, activity and obesity prevention: a qualitative study of parent and child perceptions in Australia* Health promotion International. Vol 20, No. 1. Oxford University Press.

³ The Walking School Bus Project. Central Coast Community Environment Network