

# Introducing a health evidence base with Transport for Greater Manchester

## The issue

The impact of the urban environment on public health is well researched, yet using this knowledge to implement changes in practice is less so. We know that the ability to walk and cycle, the effect of traffic noise and pollution, access to public transport and location of trees and green spaces all impact population health. Translating that into on-the-ground change requires joined up and concerted effort, overcoming political, economic and organisational challenges. Several of the challenges may be most relevant at the scale of a metropolitan area.

Here we examine those issues as they affect the metropolitan scale, specifically in the Greater Manchester area, to show those who connect and facilitate city-wide development how to engage with the healthy urban development agenda and how this knowledge might be better used during implementation.

## Our response

The TRUUD programme set out to understand healthier urban development and how to overcome barriers. The project has investigated how the many different aspects of urban development work and attempted to find critical points within the system(s) where concerted or innovative action could tap in to the opportunities and mechanisms for change.



In Greater Manchester, we are working with the Combined Authority and Transport Authority, metropolitan scale institutions, to help to navigate and capture understanding of the complex organisational environment which deals with the development of streets. A comprehensive strategy, [Streets for All](#) was developed by Transport for Greater Manchester and includes what is now known as the [Bee Network](#), a network of integrated active travel infrastructure across the conurbation. Streets for All extends beyond active travel, it places a strong emphasis on reducing traffic and road danger and improving the environment for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. It intends to be a people-centred approach to street planning, design and network management and an attempt to support growth and productivity and enable Greater Manchester to meet decarbonisation targets.

Working closely with Transport for Greater Manchester, TRUUD's initial research identified that introducing a health evidence base would be useful to measure the impact of changes on health. However, this would not be a basis for impactful change as a standalone project, it would need to be an integral part of the approach, owned by those developing and delivering streets development.

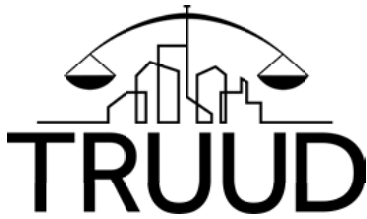


### Local authority partners



### University consortium





## The evidence

Through having a research team embedded with Transport for Greater Manchester, we're able to tap into the body of knowledge from across the TRUUD consortium.. We have learned that connecting academia and practitioners is not straightforward and as well are learning that the push of knowledge from academia and the pull of knowledge from practitioners do not always work effectively. We describe a third space for joint-working and knowledge-sharing as a 'collaborative space'. This space creates support for those responsible for the implementation of healthier streets, to ensure the health evidence is useful and useable. It also supports those in the academic partnership to use essential tacit knowledge and introduce their work in the way it can be worked upon. **Our aim is to ensure all research activity links to firm action rather than nice words.**

We know that Local Authorities have reduced capacity as their skills bases, funding and other resources are under extreme pressure. Planning regulations and other governance structures can create surprising frictions. Managing conflicting local opinions and interests is difficult for officers and elected decision makers. We know that a clear demonstration of health impact is of interest and potentially of value in the overall process.

Working with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Transport for Greater Manchester we have identified three areas of focus for TRUUD to help make an impact through their work:

- Measuring: enhancing the quality and impact of health measures using the latest academic research;
- Action research: working with all partners to identify and make system related changes that continue beyond the research project;
- Tools and visualisations: creation of tools and visualisations that can help stakeholders and decision-makers use health data to make informed decisions

We have shown how an embedded research approach has helped to navigate effective knowledge exchange. We identify that using the approach in projects with a large multi-disciplinary research team offers important exchange opportunities but also raises potential incompatibility of research methodologies. Drawing on action-learning approaches we present a hybrid collaborative model **to illustrate how academics and practitioners can nevertheless facilitate the exchange of knowledge in a nominal collaborative space to overcome these difficulties and potential confusion.** We find that the researcher in residence approach plays a key facilitation role in this, particularly where research teams may otherwise default to methods that are not participative

We conclude that the model could be applied in other urban contexts to support the incorporation of health into complex planning and development policy and decision-making by accommodating a wide range of important research from across disciplines in collaboration with practice.

## Next Steps

TRUUD are developing an interlayer to a streets design checklist for Streets for All. This will be piloted by those who are involved in decision-making on street development across Greater Manchester. The process of development, reflecting on learning as the project progresses will continue and allow long term changes in a dynamic policy environment.

Transport for Greater Manchester are co-developing a series of planning tools and visualisations that help them and other stakeholders and decision-makers who use health data routinely to make informed decisions.

## Contact the author

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