

## BELFAST HEALTHY CITIES NEWS RELEASE: BELFAST AT CENTRE OF EUROPEAN DEBATE ON ACTIVE TRAVEL

On Monday afternoon, Regional Development Minister Danny Kennedy, MLA opened a seminar entitled 'Creating Healthy Communities; Active Travel' comparing Belfast with major European cities and aimed at sharing best international practice.

The seminar shared experiences from leading active travel cities, exploring the policies and approaches which have underpinned their success. The event featured speakers from Copenhagen, Freiburg (Germany), local academics from Queens University and Belfast Healthy Cities, the World Health Organization body, which organised today's seminar.

Belfast Healthy Cities Chief Executive Joan Devlin said the seminar, part of a series supported by the Public Health Agency, is an important event.

"Active travel has to be easy and convenient for the citizens of a city. The health and economic benefits of an active transport network are significant and they are measurable. A sustainable transport plan and network should include public transport, bicycle lanes and parking, as well as good walkable routes.

"A walkability pilot project recently undertaken by Belfast Healthy Cities, with older people, highlighted the importance of creating a built environment that supports walking, a barrier free environment can improve connectivity, enhance social contacts and increase physical activity levels for all, and is something which Belfast can strive to achieve.

"We are very pleased to be joined by experts from Germany and Denmark as well as our own transport Minister. In Northern Ireland, we are currently implementing new transport and travel policies and initiatives and it is important to look to our neighbours for best practice where we can."

Belfast and the UK currently fall way behind major European cities when it comes to use of active travel as a mode of transport with just over 1.5% of journeys to work or school undertaken on 2 wheels. By contrast in Copenhagen 36% of journeys are by bike and in Freiburg the figure is 28%.

In terms of journeys on foot, Belfast fares slightly better with around 21% travelling to work or school in this way, but as the research shows there is still significant potential for improvement.

Danny Kennedy said,

"I am determined that my Department will play its part in putting walking and cycling at the heart of our local transport arrangements. My Department is currently driving sustainable transport work forward by increasing Park and Ride/Share provision and Rapid Transit. I recently established a DRD Cycling Unit to increase focus and priority to the needs of cyclists, and pedestrians, and to encourage greater participation in cycling. DRD's Travelwise team continues to promote active travel through awareness raising and smarter travel initiatives, working with schools, employers and the public.

"It is great to see speakers here today from Copenhagen and Freiburg, as well as from closer to home, to share their experience and expertise with us."

Presentations from the event are available at [www.belfasthealthycities.com](http://www.belfasthealthycities.com)