Transport policy as health policy: a multiple streams analysis of policy change in London

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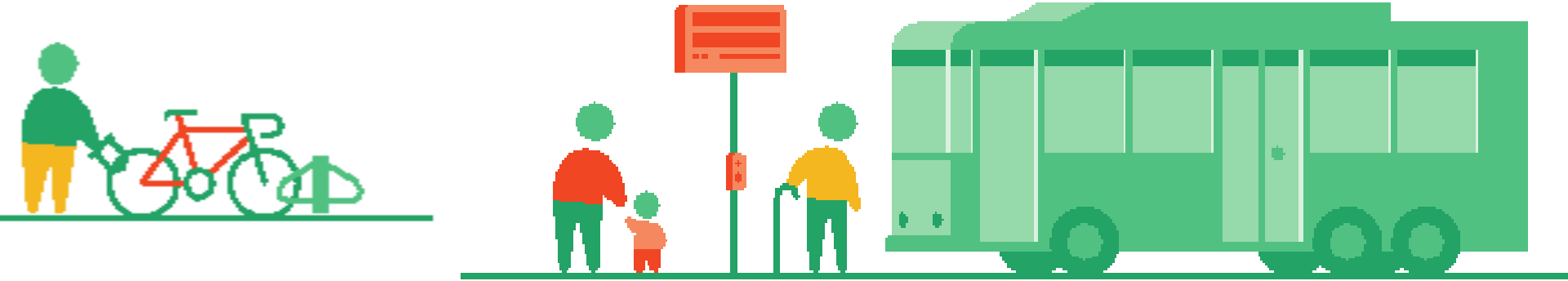


Transport and health

The transport system…

Generates significant harms: injuries, fatalities, noise, air pollution, loss of green space etc

Drives chronic disease, contributing substantially to mortality / morbidity burdens

Capacity for large positive health benefits through reduced car use and a shift to active travel



(Gössling et al., 2021; Mueller et al., 2017; Miner et al., 2024; Nieuwenhuijsen & Khreis, 2019; Khreis et al., 2016.)



But…

Health exerts limited influence in transport policy and planning

- Institutional silos
- Translation of evidence
- Transport appraisal methods
- Political self-interest

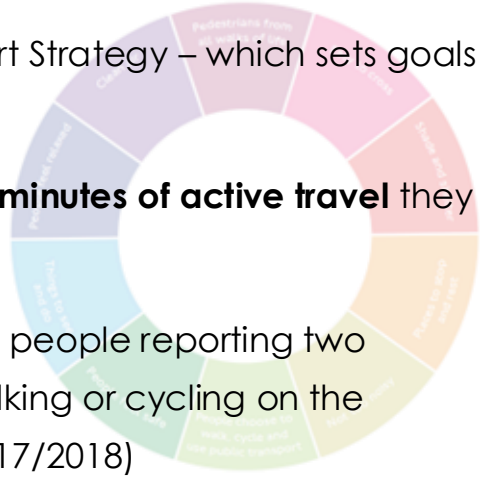
"*physical activity as a pathway to health and its health outcomes are rarely explicitly expressed*" in mobility plans despite a robust evidence base (Kasraian et al., 2024, p. 12).

(Jones, 2025; Castillo et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2019; Giles-Corti et al., 2016; Negev et al., 2022)



The Healthy Streets Approach

- A multi-dimensional framework "for putting human health and experience at the heart of planning the city"
- The core theme of London's Transport Strategy – which sets goals to 2041. Including:
  - All Londoners do at least the **20 minutes of active travel** they need to stay healthy each day
  - demonstrated by 70 per cent of people reporting two periods of ten minutes spent walking or cycling on the previous day (up from 38% in 2017/2018)
- rare empirical example of health-oriented transport policy



Healthy Streets Indicators: 10 evidence-based indicators of what makes streets appealing, healthy, inclusive places.

The core **aim** is to improve Londoners' physical and mental health - through walking and cycling as part of daily travel,



Source: Lucy Saunders

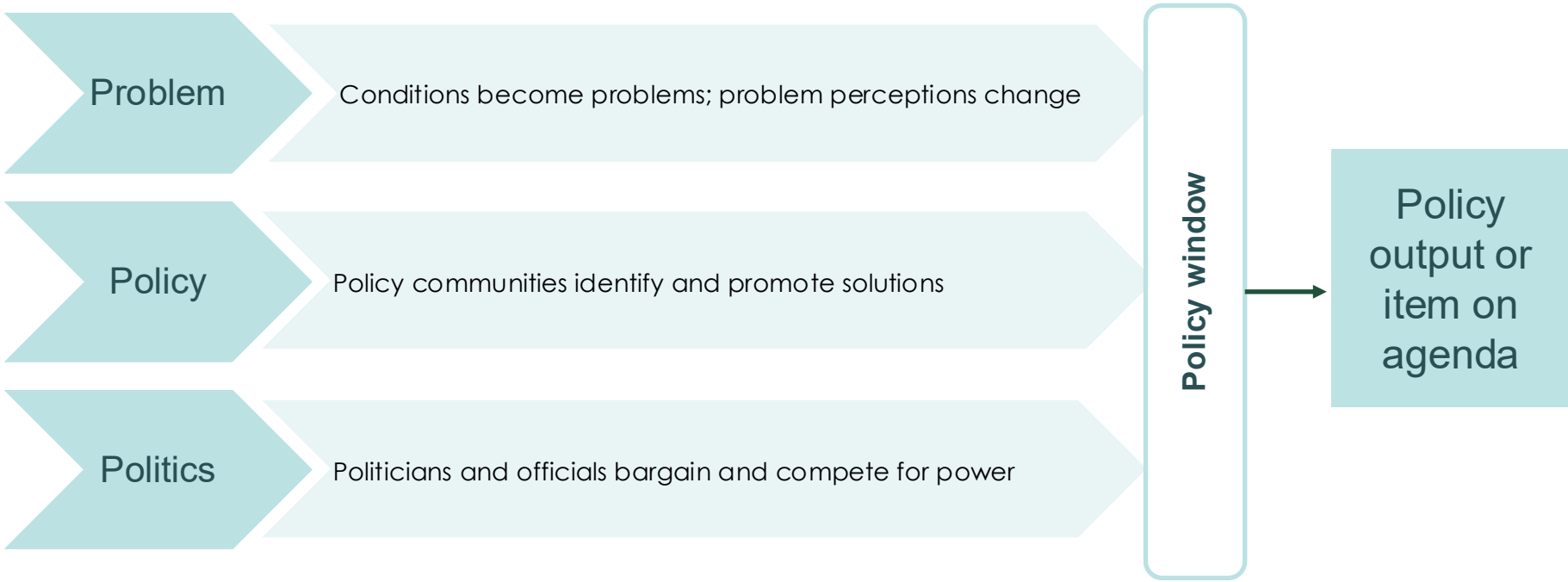
Research questions

- What were the key factors that contributed to public health gaining a prominent position on London's transport policy agenda?

- How can this case help us to understand how policy change towards sustainable mobility can be achieved?



An overview of the Multiple Streams Framework



a policy window can open when "a problem is recognized, a solution is available, and the political climate makes the time right for change" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 93).

Source: Kim Saks

Findings

Problem	The traffic ‘problem’ was gradually reframed from efficiency and economic impact of congestion to public health: air quality, inequality, road danger - a physical inactivity ‘crisis’

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Over 1,000 cyclists stage die-in protest outside Transport for London HQ



“London is facing an inactivity crisis"

Findings

Policy

Maturity/visibility of active travel policy; Healthy Streets offered an inclusive, multi-dimensional policy solution - championed by a public health specialist working within TfL and an active policy community

CYCLE HIRE

CYCLE SUPERHIGHWAY

CYCLING WORKS LONDON



Findings

Politics

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Maturity/visibility of active travel policy; Healthy Streets offered an inclusive, multi-dimensional policy solution - championed by a public health specialist working within TfL and an active policy community
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Findings

Policy window

- Healthy Streets gained credibility over time, became an 'available alternative' that was ready to be deployed to fit the political current
- A change in the political composition necessitated a new policy direction, opening a window of opportunity in the politics stream
- Policy entrepreneurs positioned Healthy Streets as a unifying framework that could enable the Mayor to satisfy multiple agendas simultaneously

"a ready package of problems and solutions to policymakers at the right moment" (Knaggård, 2015, p. 450)

Key policy lessons from this case

- Transport-related problems can be framed in different ways - **Strategic problem reframing to gain political support**

- And to build **advocacy alliances;** Active travel has many varied benefits - use them

- **Health narratives** can resonate with politicians – and challenge visions of mobility that promote sustainability while still relying on automobility (e.g. electrification and automation)

Key policy lessons from this case

- Political support key - but **policy entrepreneurs** have agency at the local level to influence the policy agenda: Key here:
  - Ability to wield **agency across policy domains** – overcoming communication / knowledge translation issues
  - Leveraging the **institutional context** – TfL as part of the GLA; Mayor had a remit for health inequalities
  - adaptation of proposals to fit with the **prevailing ideology** of the organisation (ZohInhöfer et al., 2016) – here physical activity as part of PT use: *"this is how you change a system – you harness the thing that people feel good and proud about and then you show them how they can do more with that"*

Thanks!

