

**To:** Transport & Health Policy Makers, & Practitioners  
**From:** Professor Adrian Davis  
**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024  
**Subject:** Essential Evidence 4 Scotland No.94 Road Space Re-allocation

---

Top Line: Road space reallocation can improve health and help reduce health inequalities. However, consideration is needed to ensure sufficient alternatives to car use are supported and the reallocated space is accessible for people with different needs.

Road space reallocation involves re-distributing space away from motor vehicles, including car parking and carriageway space, towards other uses like active travel infrastructure, bus lanes, local retail, play space and greenspace. Reallocation measures may include removal of parking spaces, removal or narrowing of road lanes, replacing roads with pedestrian or cycling infrastructure, bus gates, modal filters that restrict through traffic, signage and restricting vehicle use. Space can be reallocated permanently, temporarily, or at specific times, for example creating play streets or safer access to school at the start and end of the day. Changing road priority, reducing dominance of car traffic and a placemaking approach can support more sustainable modes and improve liveability. Reallocation may aim to discourage use of motor vehicles and/or encourage more sustainable travel modes, to improve public space, or have other aims. This is likely to positively affect health through multiple pathways.

In 2022 researchers conducted a health impact assessment (HIA) to identify and assess the potential impacts of road space reallocation on health and health inequalities in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> This involved a facilitated scoping workshop to identify potential impacts, collation of routine data, interviews with 13 key informants and a rapid review of research literature. HIA is a recognised process to identify and assess the impacts of policies and actions across sectors on health and health inequalities, to inform decision making and improve health and equity. Best practice principles state that HIAs should consider a comprehensive range of health determinants including impacts on equity and sustainability, involve stakeholders appropriately and use a range of evidence sources impartially.<sup>2</sup>

This HIA highlighted that road space reallocation can benefit health and health equity through multiple pathways, with little evidence of harmful effects but displacement of private motorised traffic can occur, partially mitigated by the overall reduction in motor traffic. Impacts may take 2–3 years to be fully realised as people take time to adjust and change travel behaviour. Road space reallocation is often contentious and the HIA identified concerns raised by some stakeholders. Reallocation schemes should be considered as part of a wider inclusive approach to road transport supporting active travel and public or community transport. Road space reallocation should contribute to wider place-making initiatives aiming to improve quality of local environments and meet community needs.

The HIA recommendations include supporting alternative transport modes, using reallocated space to create quality environments that benefit communities and ensuring good practice in community consultation and engagement. As well as enhancing the health benefits, these actions may increase public support. However, given the car dominant culture and the lag time to fully realise the benefits, road space reallocation may remain contentious for some time. This suggests that strong political will and leadership from decision makers is needed to support these schemes to achieve their potential to improve health, wellbeing and equity.

---

<sup>1</sup> Douglas, M. et al, 2023 Road space reallocation in Scotland: A health impact assessment, *Journal of Transport & Health*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2023.101625>

<sup>2</sup> Winkler, M., et al, 2021 Health impact assessment international best practice principles, International Association for Impact Assessment. Fargo, USA.