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Dear colleagues,

I am happy to provide a letter of support for the proposed Commute Trip Reduction Initiative. While the sub-title is “Implementing Efficiencies in Transportation for a Green Future”, I would argue that it is also for a healthier future.

To provide some context for my views, you should know that I recently retired and am now a Professor Emeritus at the School of Public Health and Social Policy at UVic. Over the course of my career I have played a leading role in establishing the now-global healthy Cities and Communities movement, as well as co-founding the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. In particular, I have published widely and given keynote speeches at national and international conferences for decades on the links between health and sustainability, both in the built environment of urban settlements and at the level of the Earth’s natural ecosystems.

Most specifically, I led the Canadian Public Health Association’s work leading to a major 2015 discussion paper on the ecological determinants of health, am on the Editorial Board of the journal *Cities and Health*, and a member of the Planetary Health Global Working Group of the International Union of Health Promotion and Education. My work has been recognized by being awarded an Honourary Fellowship in the UK’s Faculty of Public Health in 2015 and in 2017 I received the Defries Medal, the CPHA’s highest award, presented for outstanding contributions in the broad field of public health

There is no doubt that climate change is a major public health concern; the World Health Organization has described it as “the greatest threat to health in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. As the research makes clear, transportation is an important contributor to GHGs, so reducing transportation emissions make eminent sense.

But there are many other adverse health effects of transportation, and especially of heavy private vehicle commuting, including increased mortality and morbidity caused by poor air quality; reduced physical activity and thus reduced cardio-respiratory fitness and increased obesity; deaths and injuries from motor vehicle crashes; stress and loss of both family and community time and social cohesion. Of these, a switch to electric vehicles only addresses the issues of GHGs and air quality – all the other problems remain. Commuter trip reduction is one obvious way to address many of these other issues.

That is why public health organisations have long supported active transportation and public transit as important ways to improve health and create healthier communities. There is a

considerable body of evidence and reports of good practice in this regard, both in Canada and globally.

A related aspect of trip reduction with which I am particularly familiar are the travel miles avoided through telemedicine. Research and practice, including right here in BC, has shown the potential to reduce patient travel by millions of kilometers; there are added benefits of reduced risk of both patients and staff being injured or killed in motor vehicle crashes, as well as more efficient use of staff time if they do not have to travel to remote sites.

One particular aspect of trip reduction I want to highlight is the creation of tele-commute centres. Concern has been raised that working at home is problematic for a variety of reasons, including isolation and loneliness, disruption of family life and space, transfer of occupational health problems and costs to the home setting, and the potential to create work-life imbalance.

A neighborhood telework centre may not only solve many of those problems, but confer a number of social benefits. People could bike, walk or take transit to the centre, thus being more active and outdoors. The centre might trigger the need for or support existing food services, stores, day care centres and other services, contributing both to the local economy and to social capital. And if these centres were available to public, private and non-profit organisations, the potential for local and cross-sectoral network building would be enhanced. Imagine what might have happened if the \$100 million spent on the McKenzie Interchange in Saanich had instead been used to build or support the building of telecommute centres in the Western Communities, for example.

So I strongly urge the BC Government – and governments elsewhere in Canada – to give serious consideration to the measures proposed in this report, and to make commuter trip reduction an important part of their ongoing work to not only reduce GHG emissions and all the other problems associated with our existing transportation systems, but to contribute to healthier and more sustainable communities.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Hancock', written in a cursive style.

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