

## **Final Comments**

### **Invited comments from the floor**

**Speaker: Rodney Tolley, CAST - UK**

#### **Invited comment on the research of walking**

##### **Rodney Tolley**

"It does seem to me we are at a very interesting time as far as researching walking is concerned. There is an explosion of interest, but as yet not an explosion of funding and resources. But I think we are beginning to understand much better the what issues are, and for me, if we are trying to look at an agenda for a future research programme we should look no further than the results of the 'Delphi' survey that CAST has just completed on the opinions of Europe's walking experts on what walking in Europe will be like by 2010. Some of you will be familiar with the results of that, they have been alluded to at this conference and they will be in the Proceedings when they come out later in the year.

"One of the key conclusions was that you, the walking experts, looking ahead for the next 10 years in Europe, saw a continuing decline in utilitarian walking - and indeed a decline overall in the amount of walking that is going to be taking place. But within that decline there would be a shift in balance with more walking for leisure, health and recreation and tourist purposes, and less walking for ordinary services and to the shops. So that is what the experts are predicting that the future holds, and for me that IS the research agenda, because for many of us that is an unacceptable future. And we have got to find ways of developing research to inform ourselves better, to change some of those futures.

"One of the things that I personally have been very interested in here is in research to try to see whether we can build on the successes within that future. More people are walking for leisure and health but the challenge is: can we get those people who walk for leisure and health to become 'everyday' urban walkers? In other words - is there a sort of 'theory of evolution' here, that once somebody starts to walk for fun or pleasure or health, we can then get them to walk to the shops or school or to the office? Now that is an idea that Jim Walker of the London Walking Forum and I have bounced around for a while. And I think it is something which needs to be explored, not just in the UK but across Europe, because all European countries (and indeed other countries) also have their own perspective on this - different climates, different cultures, different approaches to walking. So I would very much like to see a research effort to develop different frameworks which individual cities can apply to see whether they can evolve their health and leisure walkers into everyday

urban walkers. That seems to me to be a very useful programme for the future. And partly for that reason we are now establishing a European walking research foundation, which has been launched at this conference to try to improve the communication between various European researchers.

"The last thing I would say on this is just to refer you to my guru - now long dead - a man by the name of John Roberts. I don't know whether anyone in the room from the transport dimension remembers John Roberts? He had a small research organisation called 'TEST' and he died in 1992. But for many of us John was coming up with the sorts of key connections that have actually driven the research agenda through the 1990's. He published in the late 1980's a book called 'Quality Streets - how traffic calming can benefit urban centres'. And part of the reasoning underneath that work was the economics of walking, and the economics of pedestrians in urban areas. And it seems to me after 10 years of being a dormant idea it is about time we picked it up again. It has been commented on a couple of times at this conference that pedestrians are the ones who buy things, not people in cars, and that good pedestrian centres, good walking places are good economic places as well. That is an idea of John Roberts from 10 years ago and I think it is an important one to drive us forward as far as the research agenda is concerned."

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### **Nick Crane**

"Thank you very much, Rod. I wonder if I could ask you a supplementary question? Being a researcher you are standing back slightly from policy and so on, how optimistic are you that in 10, 20 years that everyday walking is going to be a part of our lives once again?"

### **Rodney Tolley**

- "I am very optimistic, if we can build on the strengths that we see coming in the future. The Delphi showed quite clearly that the experts expect there will be more data available on walking, that the facilities for walking will be better, the infrastructure available for walking will be better as well. And they also noticed that right across the board - all the professional groups whether they be planners or engineers or managers - all of them thought that walking was going to be more important on the public agenda than it is at the moment. And the Delphi in fact showed that even the public and the media thought it would be more important but they were perhaps less convincing in their comments. So we have this great swell of optimism. I think that people think walking is going to become more important and yet at the same time we have still got this long-term background decline in everyday walking. So the trick is going to be building on the successes, the improvements that the

professionals see and turning that tide of everyday walking decline."

