

**Response on behalf of The IBS Network** [www.theibsnetwork.org](http://www.theibsnetwork.org)  
*Mrs Gillian Kemp, MA,*

## **Introduction**

### *The IBS Network*

The IBS Network is a national charity which supports people of all ages who are suffering from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Irritable Bowel Syndrome or IBS is the name doctors have given to a collection of otherwise unexplained symptoms relating to a disturbance of the colon or large intestine. IBS affects around a third of the population at some point in their lives. The symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome are various but include an urgent need to visit the toilet with very little time to find one. The ability to access toilet facilities when travelling to work and whilst at work is therefore of great concern to people suffering from IBS with urgency problems.

Unfortunately there is still a taboo about discussing bowel and bladder functions. The unwillingness of people to talk clearly and openly about their illness, even to their GP, means they can feel alienated from family, friends and work colleagues and may become depressed and isolated as a consequence.

### *Mobile Workers*

The health and wellbeing of mobile workers such as lorry drivers and other delivery personnel, police officers, postal workers, taxi drivers, shift workers can be affected because of the lack of toilet provision particularly if they suffer from IBS. In addition, the difficulties of finding a toilet in times of need can reduce concentration and affect the safety of other road users. Mobile workers operate in cities as well as in towns and rural communities.

### *Some facts*

- Around 14 m people in the UK suffer with urinary problems, symptoms & incontinence [National Assembly for Wales, March 2012: *Public health implications of inadequate public toilet facilities - report of evidence* ]
- Around 7 m of those suffer with bowel problems[National Assembly for Wales, March 2012: *Public health implications of inadequate public toilet facilities - report of evidence* ]

More people suffer from some form of bladder and bowel problems than with asthma, diabetes and epilepsy put together. [*Bladder & Bowel Foundation*].

Anyone can develop health problems at any age but bladder and bowel issues, because they are not considered a suitable topic for conversation, can have a huge impact on how people enjoy not only their leisure time but also operate at work and this in turn can affect the economy.

### **Question 1**

What are the key benefits – for the economy, investment, innovation, productivity and public finances – of shifting to a multi-polar growth model, in which our major cities are key players in the nation's economy?

The key benefits of the multi-power growth model depend on the detail of its proposed method of operation. As the City Growth Commission is focusing on labour market reform, the needs of those who will be active participants within the labour market itself need to be considered, ie a 'bottom up' approach in addition to a 'top down' model.

For the nation to benefit from the proposed changes there needs to be an awareness of lifestyle opportunities in addition to the workplace environment. In order for the model to be successful, the health and wellbeing of people who are and will be working within these areas must be catered for.

#### *An example:*

Lorry drivers are an important feature of a city landscape because their ability to make successful deliveries impacts on both the local and ultimately the national, economy. However, their health and wellbeing is often ignored because their workplace is on the road and regulations pertinent to in-house staff do not include visiting delivery personnel. The current lack of parking and poor access to welfare facilities whilst at work needs to be addressed and would go a long way to creating a culture of inclusion which would actively encourage support of cities being a key player in the nation's economy. An improvement in the working conditions and lifestyle of mobile workers would bring both health and financial benefits to our cities and to the nation.

### **Question 2**

What does the international evidence show about the role of cities in driving growth and catalysing innovation? What are the key success factors that we can learn from?

One particular success factor that is often ignored or is not considered is the provision of public toilet facilities. A survey carried out in the UK by *The Association of Town Centre Managers* in 2001 showed that towns with good toilet facilities have a higher retail turnover than those without.

It appears that as far as mobile workers are concerned, the UK is far behind the facilities offered to drivers in other countries. This not surprisingly affects not only their health but also their morale.

#### *Australia*

The Australian Government Department of Health operates a Public Toilet Map <https://toiletmap.gov.au> as part of the National Continence Program and shows the location of more than 16,000 public toilets. With this facility it is possible to find toilets in a variety of areas and identify toilet stops for a

particular journey. The toilet map is available for use for everyone including workers and tourists and is particularly helpful for those with medical conditions such as IBS. An app or download to a mobile device is also available.

Comment from a lorry driver: *'I am carting containers to many places in our city [Perth, Australia]. There is never a problem with using a toilet. Some places even have drivers' rest rooms to make coffee while we are waiting. It sounds so very different to what you have to put up with in the UK'*

## Europe

Comments from lorry drivers indicate that

- *'with regards to haulage attitudes [in mainland] Europe is far in front!!!! Trucks are accepted as necessary and truckers as professionals!!! Here [UK] we are an unwanted pain. All motorways services abroad welcome trucks no charge!!! There are truck stops that charge but [these] tend to be specialist places; there is plenty of off road parking every 10-15 miles that is not just a layby, it's actually off the road with basic toilets but cars and trucks mingle, picnic benches, plenty of bins. All basic stuff that the UK can't provide'*
- *'facilities [UK] nowhere as good [as] in Europe. They cater for everyone not like here all they seem to want is to drive us off the road'*

## The Netherlands

A concept called '2theloo' [www.2theloom.com](http://www.2theloom.com) which began in The Netherlands has now spread to other countries such as Portugal, Israel, Spain and Poland. It is a 'toilet shop' situated in city centres where people know they will have a pleasant toilet experience. By providing clean, well maintained facilities, visitors do not have to rush elsewhere because they need a toilet but know that clean, well maintained toilets are available. This is particularly helpful to those with medical conditions such as IBS and encourages people to stay which in turn encourages further spending and helps boost the economy of the area.

## Finland:

Further comments from drivers:

- *'In Finland, we do not pay for parking at truck stops. Toilets are clean and working. Shower facilities (when there is a shower available) mostly have locks on their doors to have privacy. If not locks, female driver usually hangs her bra at the door knob and the male drivers know to keep distance LOL'*
- *'There is a fair amount of truck parking available here [Finland]. Most service stations have a space for trucks, and like I said it's always free. And because we use the same toilets as the regular car drivers, stations tend to keep them clean. Showers and saunas are behind lock and key, and usable only for truckers. One chain of stations even has a magnetic key card for truckers that you can have (it costs 5€ when acquired) and the truckers rest area with facilities is behind that key card even if the station is closed. Some places ask for your truck key for exchange of the shower/sauna key, and some places have a small fee for sauna but shower is free.'*

- *I found the best place for drivers couple of weeks ago! This company that I had visited before, very nice personnel and toilet on the other side of the warehouse... Now there was a room-toilet-shower combination built so that it could be accessed from outside! (Fully fenced yard) The room had small kitchenette, table and large sofa, and toilet and shower were clean and just WOW! ‘*

### *US & Canada*

- *‘Generally the US is pretty good and Canada is patchy. If there's a truck stop then there will be toilets and shower facilities and I only found one where I didn't fancy the hygiene too much. The US has rest areas on interstates, for both trucks and normal traffic and the loos are fine there too.’*

### *UK*

- *‘Thinking about it, I find as a woman driving about just normally in the UK that the lack of loos is appalling, it must be dreadful for truckers.’*

In spite of the lack of suitable rest stops and toilet facilities, many mobile workers in the UK including lorry drivers and taxi drivers are being refused access to toilet and handwashing facilities at the companies they visit. This is because there is no obligation on the part of that business to allow a third party to use their facilities. With public toilet closures, insufficient suitable parking, the lack of adequate facilities at bus and train stations and on board trains, many people as a consequence find that travelling to work, shopping and socialising, can become almost impossible.

Those workers with medical conditions such as IBS find it even more difficult as some of the routes into our cities fail to provide basic facilities and even new transport buildings and trains are purportedly being constructed without toilet facilities. For members of The IBS Network, this adds an additional burden to an already difficult situation and reduces many opportunities to participate in everyday life including work.

Some towns and cities have established ‘community toilet schemes’ where businesses allow the public to use their facilities but often these are poorly signposted, or facilities are not wholly suitable; many are only open at certain periods of the day and are therefore not suitable for many mobile workers who also require suitable parking. With a large number of cities wanting to welcome visitors and encourage workers into the area in order to boost their economy, the introduction and maintenance of suitable public toilets should be part of the developmental plan.

### *Road links*

Road links into cities should also, like Europe and other countries, have truckstops available for large delivery vehicles in order to facilitate the adherence to regulations that drivers have to comply with. Currently truck stop facilities and public services are generally located only on or around motorways - although the M25 is one route that is particularly poorly served. Those drivers who travel on lesser major but still busy roadways find facilities to allow a positive rest experience are very few and far between

### **Question 3**

What is the relationship between public service reform and economic growth at city level? How can more effective demand management – through public service reconfiguration and integration for instance – help to drive social and economic productivity? Can this enable our cities to become more financially sustainable?

Employment opportunities for people with IBS can be limiting. One reason is the difficulty of being able to travel to the workplace. For those with toilet urgency issues travelling to work can be a nightmare. The lack of toilet facilities at transport hubs affects both their social and economic productivity – the constant worry of finding a toilet en route affects their daily life. It's no good saying to someone with IBS 'you should go before you go out' – unfortunately the condition can be erratic and embarrassing. Having to plan employment and social activities on toilet access limits where they can work and the type of work available to them.

Reconfiguring public service and integration should include an understanding of basic human requirements that affect everyone, whether they are workers such as delivery personnel, taxi drivers and shift workers, or visitors to a city. This would certainly help to improve social and work opportunities and ultimately drive productivity. One hundred per cent of the population needs a toilet several times a day – those with conditions such as IBS have a more frequent need of toilet facilities - it is not a minority issue.

### **Question 4**

How can decision making and responsibility for public policy and public services be better aligned with the reality of local labour markets? How can policies around employment support, childcare, skills policy, welfare strategy and economic development better reflect the needs of local people and businesses?:

#### *The reality of local labour markets:*

In order to attract people to take up employment in areas away from home they need to be able to get to work with the minimum of difficulty. Transport interchanges should include facilities such as toilets in order to allow them to do this. Facilities such as toilets are vital for people with a variety of medical conditions including IBS. They need to feel confident in coping with their condition when considering opportunities away from home. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is still embarrassment about toilet related issues. The fact that the provision of toilets remains a non-statutory requirement means that closing toilets are considered an easy option by many local councils who are trying to save money. This affects a wide range of working people.

#### *Supporting policies*

The health and wellbeing of lorry drivers and other mobile workers is ignored when it comes to policies. There are recommendations to help their wellbeing such as providing welfare facilities, but unlike policies for 'static' employees, these are not statutory and therefore some companies find it easier not to implement them to the detriment of the health of workers concerned. Postmen, carers, bus crews, delivery personnel, taxi drivers, lorry drivers, police officers and other mobile workers need access to welfare facilities such

as toilets as they carry out their duties. They form a large sector of the working population. The lack of public toilets impinges on their ability to carry out their work effectively and having to return to base in order to use a toilet is costly. Alternatives are often unsuitable and unregulated. To combat this problem an article in the *Daily Mail* dated 31 May 2011 suggested that police officers in a particular county in England were being advised to '*Try to restrict fluids to prevent visits to the bathroom*'. This is extremely bad advice which can have serious health implications.

### *Women*

Many mobile workers, especially in the cleaning and caring industries are women who constitute a considerable part of the mobile workforce. They are affected by the issues already discussed above. However, women's toileting needs are different to those of men due to biological differences. Their needs especially during menstruation are being neglected. The night time economy – which forms part of a vibrant city environment - caters more for the male population than for women. In many areas, urinals are provided at night with no provision for women. The headline in a local newspaper dated 31 October 2011, was '*Use new Swansea urinals or get arrested*'. No mention of any toilet facilities made available for women!

### *Exercise*

In these days of being environmentally friendly we are being encouraged to leave our cars behind and either become a cyclist or a pedestrian. Neither activity is suitable without publicly available toilets open at times that people need them. A toilet opening at ten o'clock in the morning is no good if you're on your way to work five hours earlier!

### *Planning*

One of the problems is that those in councils who are involved with planning policies have little association with those who are responsible for public toilet provision.

## **Question 5**

How can growth in other English cities complement London's economic success? What should be the interrelationship between devolution, growth and reform strategies in London and in our other major cities?

### *Tourists*

Tourists include elderly people, disabled people, women, men, and children, and amongst them will be those with various medical conditions, such as IBS. All require access to a toilet. Tourists arrive in a variety of transport and their visit may include walking tours and beaches as well as visits to specific places of interest. The growth of festivals requires thought given to temporary toilet provision – and gender equality – to avoid fouling the area, particularly where there are a lot of people crowded together. Short city break holidays are rising in popularity and are particularly enjoyed by those over 55 – an age group most likely to need public toilet facilities. Families on beach holidays also require easy access to toilets. Research carried out by ENCAMS [now Keep Britain Tidy] found that the availability of public toilets was an important

factor in choosing a beach to visit – and city ‘beaches’ are popular in the summer months.

Cities are competing with London in attracting visitors and once tourists arrive they are competing with London in finding ways to encourage them to stay. To be a visitor or tourist to any area just getting there will probably involve a visit to a toilet. Tourists always remember their toilet experience – especially if it is a bad one - as illustrated by letters to numerous local newspapers. With public toilet closures, there is concern in some areas about the effect of closures on tourism which is vital to the UK economy.

### **Question 6**

What needs to change between Whitehall and our cities to make multi-polar growth a reality? What does the Centre need to do to enable this and what economic and revenue levers do cities require?

#### *Make toilet provision a statutory requirement.*

Public toilet provision is not a statutory requirement and as a consequence the type of provision varies greatly from area to area. For many people, including mobile workers and visitors, finding a toilet in a new area is not easy. For those with medical conditions such as IBS, the choice for many is to stay at home rather than risk an ‘accident’. Grandparents out with their children face similar problems. For public places to be ‘inclusive’ the services provided must include public toilets to ensure they are accessible to all.

Making public toilet facilities a statutory requirement would have a positive impact on our cities. It would improve life for 100% of the population. It would improve working conditions for mobile workers and improve the health and wellbeing for the general public.

The population of towns and cities greatly increased as a result of the industrial revolution. This brought about a need for a dramatic change to the poor standards of health and hygiene of the times. The provision of public toilets grew out of the need to combat contaminated water and diseases such as cholera and typhus. Today, with the population rising even further and with people living longer, Britain no longer leads the way in public toilet provision.

#### *Equality for women*

Women, as we have mentioned, need more provision than men, due to their biological needs and the fact they are the majority of the population but they are not properly catered for, especially during evening hours. Research by *Goldsmith, (1992)* suggests that as men have a higher level of toilet provision they drink more fluids than women and therefore may never see the need for a toilet as a problem!

#### *Invest in Community Toilet Schemes*

These are toilets in private premises such as pubs, cafes and offices which can be used by the public without having to make a purchase. The Local Authority pays the owner of the premises for providing the facility which is cheaper than maintaining public toilets. However, some people do not want to enter pubs for a variety of reasons and children may not be welcome.

Community toilet schemes should not be used to replace public toilets but may be a useful addition to a particular area if properly signposted. However, they may not be able to cope with large groups of people and the premises may not be open when needed. Some local authorities are now finding there are fewer companies willing to allow the public into their premises without purchasing anything but just to use the toilet. With public toilet closures and no other facilities available those who need frequent access to a toilet are restricted in the length of time they can risk being away from home.

Mobile workers who drive large vehicles may also be unable to use the Community toilet scheme facilities available because of the lack of suitable parking so alternative provision should be made

### **Question 7**

What other practical, organisational, cultural and systemic barriers stand in the way of a fundamental shift in economic power to our cities and how can these be overcome?

#### *Councils: the problems*

There is no special funding for toilet provision. In these days of budget cuts, councils are having to make decisions about ways of maintaining statutory services. Even though 100% of the population needs access to a toilet several times a day, toilets are not a statutory requirement and they continue to be under threat as a result. This needs to change.

Another problem regarding councils is that there is no centrally designated department in charge of public toilet provision. Departmental responsibility varies from council to council. This leads to confusion and the view that toilets are not important to every day life of the community

With no recognised structure those responsible for toilets have little involvement in planning policy. This results in inadequate consultation processes which often contribute to facilities being closed with no suitable alternatives offered to the detriment of the area.

#### *Councils: the solutions*

Another reason for toilet closures is the cost of dealing with misuse such as vandalism and drug abuse. However there are ways of reducing these problems and a free booklet from the British Toilet Association [www.britloos.co.uk](http://www.britloos.co.uk) offers a number of suggestions. Word spreads about good toilets as it does about bad and having access to clean, well maintained facilities encourages people into the cities.

Gaining a Loo of the Year Award [www.loo.co.uk](http://www.loo.co.uk) is one way that many councils in towns, cities and rural areas have found not only engenders civic pride but all brings with it a boost to the local economy

#### *The importance of hygiene*

The lack of access to toilet and handwashing facilities ignores a basic human requirement and encourages unhygienic practices. Mobile workers are particularly vulnerable and being refused access to toilet and handwashing

facilities at the companies they visit means that alternatives have to be found. These include the use of bin bags and bottles which are left by the roadside because there are no bins available in which to deposit them.

In addition the lack of handwashing facilities encourages the contamination of surfaces and goods touched and infections as serious as *clostridium difficile* can spread. Homeless people within towns and cities are particularly vulnerable

Every worker should have facilities available in order to keep themselves clean.

#### *The effect on the environment*

The methods drivers are currently forced to use impact not only on themselves and others but also on the environment. It is no good making laws stating that fouling is prohibited when there is nowhere else to 'go'. The costs of cleaning up a soiled area bite into tight budgets.

#### **Summary**

Failure to include toilet and handwashing facilities in plans for our cities and towns ignores a basic human requirement which keeps us healthy and enables us to work effectively. It impacts on health costs

The advantages of toilet provision include

- A contribution to the sustainability of communities
- The provision of a vital link enabling public transport usage
- The provision of opportunities to participate in community life
- The support of a 24 hour economy
- The production of a higher retail turnover [7]
- An increase in visitor numbers to tourist attractions
- An encouragement to stay & spend
- A reduction in environmental damage
- A reduction in health costs
- The enabling of potential / employees to take up work opportunities
- An encouragement to engender good hygienic practices

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submitted: 7 January 2014

#### *The Author*

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