

Health Impact Assessments

A tool to ensure that health and equity are considered in transportation policy and systems

Transportation policy can impact the health of all Americans in both good ways and bad. Air pollution from motorized transportation can worsen health problems such as asthma and heart disease. On the other hand, roadways provide critical access to jobs, education, goods and services. U.S. transportation policies and plans traditionally have been shaped without keeping health and equity in mind. As a result, the current transportation system often harms health and costs taxpayers billions of dollars. Consider:

- Polluted air contributes to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, and accelerates climate change. The health costs associated with poor air quality from the U.S. transportation sector is estimated at **\$50–\$80 billion** per year.
- Motor-vehicle related fatalities and injuries, whether impacting drivers, passengers, pedestrians or cyclists, cause an estimated **\$180 billion** annually in both property damage and health impacts.
- The costs of obesity account for approximately nine percent of total U.S. health care spending (i.e., \$2.4 trillion in 2008, **\$3.1 trillion estimated in 2012**). These costs are partly attributable to auto-oriented transportation and land use developments that limit physical activity and access to healthy food.

Source: APHA, *The Hidden Health Costs of Transportation* (<http://www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/F84640FD-13CF-47EA-8267-E767A1099239/0/HiddenHealthCostsofTransportationShortFinal.pdf>)

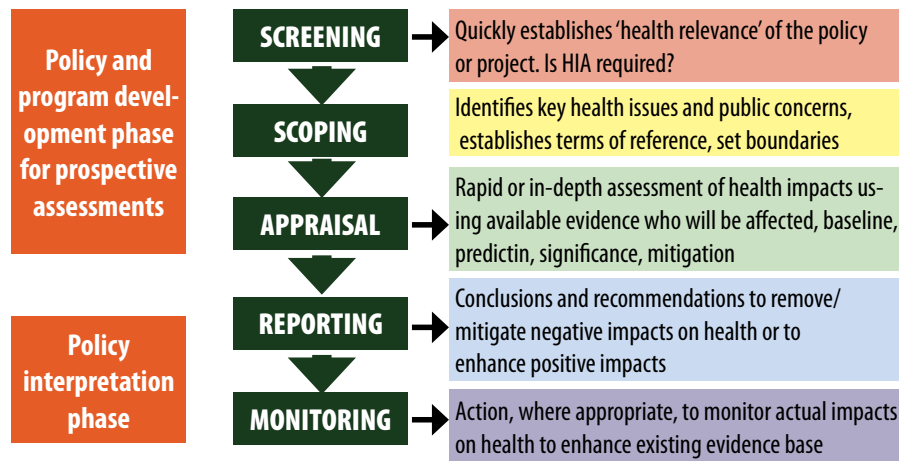
How HIAs Can Help

A health impact assessment (HIA) offers a timely opportunity to ensure that health and equity are considered when shaping future transportation policy and systems. These assessments present a common-sense, evidence-based approach to ensure that impacts are appropriately addressed before decisions are made. HIAs are “a combination of procedures, methods, and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population. HIA identifies actions to manage those effects.”

Source: 1999 Gothenburg consensus statement (<http://www.euro.who.int/document/PAE/Gothenburgpaper.pdf>).



HIA Basics



Source: Adapted from WHO, *Health Impact Assessment Tools and Methods*

Source: <http://www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/171AF5CD-070B-4F7C-A0CD-0CA3A3FB93DC/0/HIABenefitHlth.pdf>

HIA's have been conducted across a broad cross-section of transportation projects and policies in the US. For example:

In **Oregon**, a HIA was used to evaluate policies intended to reduce car use by reducing **vehicle miles traveled (VMT)** and greenhouse gas emissions. The HIA demonstrated that a combination of policies that decreased VMT would maximize health benefits.

A HIA is scoping the health issues related to road pricing proposals in **San Francisco**. **Road pricing proposals** charge drivers a fee to access specific roadways, sometimes at peak travel hours, and may provide an opportunity for decreased traffic-related noise and air pollution and traffic injuries and fatalities.

In **San Francisco**, the East Bay Greenway was proposed as twelve miles of **pedestrian and biking trails** under the elevated Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) tracks; it would connect neighborhoods to employment centers, schools and public transit. The HIA showed that the potential to increase physical activity, build social cohesion, encourage people to drive less and create a landscaped, natural space all could lead to improved health outcomes. The East Bay Greenway Concept Plan subsequently won an award from the American Planning Association.

Interstate 710 is a vital transportation artery that links the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles to **Southern California**. The expansion of part of the I-710 **freeway** has been proposed. An extensive coalition scoped the potential health impacts of this proposed freeway expansion project; the impacts were communicated to CalTrans and other decision-making agencies. As a result of these efforts, decision-makers voted to conduct a HIA as part of the I-710 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

In **Minnesota**, local community organizations are examining the health effects of future developments from a St. Paul **light-rail line**. ISAIAH, a Minneapolis faith-based organization, leads the project and is conducting research and collecting data on the potential health effects. The data consists of community surveys that collect information on income, education, transportation habits, employment and health.

In **Atlanta**, authorities used HIA to guide plans for a major redevelopment along the city's **beltline**. The results of the study encouraged city officials to fund design elements such as improved transit services, access to green space and healthy foods, new opportunities for physical activity and affordable housing.

Sources: <http://www.healthimpactproject.org>, www.humanimpact.org, www.upstreampublichealth.org/Exec_Summary_HIA_VMT.pdf, http://www.sfphes.org/HIA_Road_Pricing.htm, www.cqgrd.gatech.edu/projects/beltline_hia/pdfs/beltline_hia_final_report.pdf

APHA Supports

- A designated agency in the White House or Health and Human Services (HHS) to lead and coordinate HIA efforts broadly in the United States
- HIA-trained policy-level staff in agencies that plan, review or fund transportation projects
- Investment in HIA-based research and practice
- Identification and implementation of an HIA research agenda
- Building of HIA technical capacity at local, state and federal levels
- Grants for demonstration and research projects to better understand the health costs and benefits of transportation solutions
- Establishment of guidelines for HIA practice
- Incentives to encourage the practice of HIA as part of transportation policy and planning