

Active Transportation

Benefitting health, safety and equity

Transportation decisions affect our individual lives, economy and health. Transportation networks either can promote or hinder the public's health. Poor transportation policies and systems can negatively impact the public via higher incidences of obesity, asthma and cardiovascular disease and reduced levels of daily physical activity. Furthermore, the nation's most vulnerable populations – such as the elderly, children, low-income communities – typically bear the greatest burden when it comes to these negative health impacts.

Communities and transportation systems primarily accommodate the automobile. However, transportation systems and the built environment also can significantly improve the public's health when designed to include and encourage **active transportation**. Active transportation includes non-motorized transportation options such as walking and biking, and is ideally linked with transit (e.g., bus, rail, ferry) networks. Making active transportation a realistic, affordable and convenient option for all transportation users would help reduce health impacts and also promote physical activity, recreation and environmental preservation. Well-connected streets with safe pedestrian and bicyclist paths and infrastructure can promote a healthy and active lifestyle for everyone.

Facts

Consider the following alarming statistics:

- Three-quarters of American adults will be overweight or obese by 2015¹, while childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years²
- Physical inactivity can lead to chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, osteoarthritis, cancer, stroke, and diabetes³
- Obesity costs account for approximately nine percent of all health care spending in the U.S., and part of these costs are attributable to auto-oriented transportation that inadvertently limits opportunities for physical activity⁴
- According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), roughly 23 percent of U.S. children do not participate in at least 60 minutes of weekly physical activity and 44 percent do not attend physical education classes in an average school week⁵

The anticipated reauthorization of the federal surface transportation bill presents the nation with an opportunity to reinvent its transportation system to promote health across urban, suburban, and rural communities. Consider these opportunities for health from an enhanced transportation network:

- Women who walk or bike 30 minutes a day have a lower risk of breast cancer⁶
- Active commuting that incorporates cycling and walking is associated with an 11 percent reduction in cardiovascular risk⁷
- Active transportation as part of everyday travel is as effective as structured workouts for improving health⁸
- Teenagers who bike or walk to school watch less TV and are less likely to smoke than their peers who are driven to school, in addition to getting more overall physical activity daily⁹
- Public Transit users take 30 percent more steps and spend roughly eight more minutes walking each day than drivers¹⁰
- A 30-minute round-trip bicycle commute is associated with better mental health in men¹¹
- New Yorkers save \$19 billion per year because they rely less on cars than residents of other major U.S. cities¹²

APHA Supports

- **Active transportation options that are accessible and affordable for all users**
- **Transportation and land-use policies that provide opportunities for all people to be active and engaged in their communities**
- **The Complete Streets approach, where streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users**
- **The expansion of Safe Routes to School programs, which encourage children, including children with disabilities, to walk and bike to school safely**
- **The development of healthy communities and incentives for transportation and transit projects that promote health**

References:

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