Health, Land Use, and Transportation

FACT SHEET FACT SHEET FACT SHEET FACT SHEET

Studies published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association, Lancet, New England Journal of Medicine*, and other medical journals find a strong link between physical activity and personal health. In fact, physical fitness is a more accurate predictor of mortality than smoking, heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol, or other risk factors.

These studies also note a strong connection between our personal health and the way we build our communities. Every hour spent in the car per day raises the likelihood of being obese by six percent, while every mile walked each day is associated with a five percent reduction in obesity. Communities which incorporate sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use trails, and bus stops allow residents to be more physically active and improve their overall health.

Most residents support community design that makes physical activity a safe, convenient life-style option.

Seventy-three percent of respondents to the *2010 Future of Transportation National Survey* reported having "no choice but to drive as much as they do". Sixty-six percent of all respondents said they "would like more transportation options", and 79 percent of rural residents preferred investing tax dollars in sidewalks, bike paths, and public transportation rather than new or expanded roads.

What are some of the planning and design practices that communities can use to integrate physical activity into residents' daily routines?

Mixed Use

Studies show that people who can walk conveniently to stores, jobs, schools, and safe, well-maintained parks have a 35 percent lower risk of obesity than residents without such services near by. On average, a person living in low-density residential areas weighs about six pounds more than a person living in a compact, mixed-use community.

Did You Know…

People who use public transit walk an average of 19 minutes per day to and from a bus stop, and many achieve the recommended 30 minutes per day of physical activity simply by walking to transit.

Complete Streets

Streets that are "complete" — safe, inviting, and people-friendly — encourage physical activity. By contrast, streets designed solely for motor vehicles do not make people feel safe walking or biking, adding barriers to physical activity. Increasing the amount of safe, well-maintained sidewalks between home and school from a quarter to a third increases the likelihood a child will walk by about 20 percent. An increase in residential density from two to two-and-a-half units per acre increases the chances a child will walk to school by seven percent.

Connectivity

A mixed-use town, village, or neighborhood center may be near by, but it is not accessible if a major road or a cul-de-sac stands between it and where people live. When planning for transportation infrastructure, communities should consider connections between roads, sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and public transit access.

Health, Land Use, and Transportation

Inclusionary Zoning

Seniors, children, low-income families, and people with disabilities are often most in need of options to the car, but have limited choice of where to live. To support the economic and social well-being of everyone in a community, we need to integrate mixed-use, housing choice, safe routes to school, parks, and complete streets so that healthy lifestyle choices are easier for everyone to make.

Other Health Benefits of Communities Designed for Active Living

Improved air and water quality: More driving and vehicle idling increases air pollution, as well as water pollution from runoff from streets and parking lots. Vehicle emissions are contributors to respiratory illnesses, certain forms of cancers, and other health complications.

Decreased stress: Our sense of community and belonging increases when we can greet each other as we walk down a street. Lots of time spent in the car fighting traffic or chauffeuring others can increase stress.

Improved safety: Streets with sidewalks and dedicated bikeways can increase our personal safety and decrease the rate of injuries caused by traffic accidents.

New York State Law

State law includes pedestrians and bicycles in its definition of traffic. This means that it is perfectly legitimate for municipal site plan reviews to include an analysis of pedestrian and bicycle facilities on local roads, as well as the typical review of motor vehicle circulation and parking. For new or reconstructed state- and federally-funded roads, Complete Street design must be considered, according to state law.

Active living strategies can be as simple as making stairways more attractive and easier to find through colorful signs that call out the health benefits of taking the stairs (photo courtesy of the CDC)

Resources

Strategies to Prevent Obesity and Other Chronic Diseases: The CDC Guide to Strategies to Increase Physical Activity in the Community, 2011 (www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/PA_2011_WEB.pdf)

Healthy Community Design Checklist (www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/factsheets/healthy_community_checklist.pdf)

Active Living for Design (www.activelivingbydesign.org)

All data in this fact sheet from the Centers for Disease Control unless otherwise noted.

- Genesee Transportation Council, October 2012