

# Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

## A Tool to Promote Health in Transportation Policy

**HIA is 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>); International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA). Health Impact Practice Principles. IAIA Special Publication Series No. 5. September 2006.*

Transportation policy affects health in both positive and negative ways. Air pollution, for example, can worsen problems such as asthma and heart disease. On the other hand, roadways provide critical access to goods and services. Transportation also indirectly affects health by influencing the way communities are designed and built. Transportation policy determines whether a community has mass transit, bike lanes, or walking paths. It affects whether a neighborhood has sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks, or traffic circles, each of which has implications to the public's health.

For the most part, U.S. transportation policies and plans have been shaped without evaluation of the full spectrum of health implications. The omission of health considerations in policymaking and planning has produced a transportation system that is often harmful to public health, and costly to society in both lives and dollars. HIA can help ensure health is considered when shaping future transportation policy.

### Get the Facts: The Effects and Costs of Transportation on Public Health

The U.S. transportation system is largely focused on building highways and roads, resulting in the construction of communities built far away from town centers and public transit. These communities which rely too heavily on driving, and have only limited access to public transit, walking or bike paths, harm the public's health. Negative health effects and costs include:

- **Reduced opportunities for physical activity, which** contributes to rising obesity, overweight and type 2 diabetes, and costs our nation an estimated \$177 billion per year.
- **Polluted air that contributes to respiratory and cardiovascular disease and accelerates climate change.** The health costs associated with poor air quality caused by transportation is estimated at \$40–\$60 billion per year in the U.S.
- **Higher levels of traffic accidents, death and related injury,** causing an estimated \$163 billion annually in property damage and injuries.
- **Greater poverty and inequity in low-income urban and rural environments** where residents have limited access to public transit which impedes access to key human needs that affect quality of life, such as employment, health care, and supermarkets.

*Sources: APHA, At the Intersection of Public Health and Transportation: Promoting Healthy Transportation Policy <http://www.apha.org/advocacy/priorities/issues/TransportationIssues.htm>*



# HIA in Action

In **Oregon**, an HIA was used to evaluate policies intended to reduce car use (or vehicles miles traveled, VMT) and greenhouse gas emissions.

The HIA demonstrated that a combination of policies that decreased VMT would maximize health benefits.

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, in response to health considerations.

Sources: Upstream Public Health [www.upstreampublichealth.org/Exec\\_Summary\\_HIA\\_VMT.pdf](http://www.upstreampublichealth.org/Exec_Summary_HIA_VMT.pdf), [www.cggrd.gatech.edu/projects/beltline\\_hia/pdfs/beltline\\_hia\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.cggrd.gatech.edu/projects/beltline_hia/pdfs/beltline_hia_final_report.pdf) Baltimore Department of Health [http://www.gobaltimoreredline.com/downloads/Red\\_Line\\_Health\\_Impact.pdf](http://www.gobaltimoreredline.com/downloads/Red_Line_Health_Impact.pdf), Complete Streets <http://www.completestreets.org>

In **Baltimore**, the city's Department of Transportation and City Health Department used HIA to examine the health effects of a proposed intercity transit line. The study produced a recommendation to build the transportation system's *Redline* to advance health benefits including:

- The use of *light rail*
- Increased *green space* along the line, and
- Collaboration with *biking* and *pedestrian* planners to develop the line with "complete streets" in mind.

## 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, including in the transportation sector
- HIA trained staff in policy-level positions 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 technical capacity at local, state, and federal levels
- Grants for demonstration and research projects to:
  - Better understand the health costs and benefits of transportation approaches*
  - Evaluate non-motorized transportation pilot projects*
  - Identify best practices for transportation planning and policy*
- Establishment of guidelines and standards for HIA practice
- Incentives to encourage the practice of HIA as part of transportation policy and planning



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