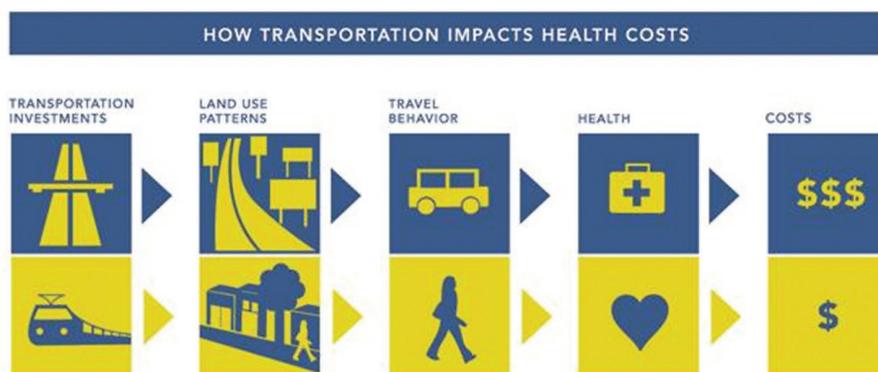


Transportation and Public Health

Reinvent the transportation system to better promote health, safety and equity

Transportation decisions affect our individual lives, economy and health. All Americans use highways, streets, sidewalks and trails to get to work or school, to get medical attention, to access healthy foods at a grocery store and to participate in countless other activities every day. However, too many Americans are negatively impacted by transportation decisions that are detrimental to public health.



Source: *Hidden Health Costs of Transportation*, Urban Design 4 Health, Inc. and the American Public Health Association (2010).

Get the Facts

Both transportation infrastructure and transportation policies affect the public's health in myriad ways, partly via roadway fatalities and injuries, air pollution impacts and opportunities for physical activity.

In 2008, there were 37,261 traffic fatalities in the United States, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)¹. Preliminary numbers from NHTSA for 2009 show a slight decline in fatalities, but this number remains unacceptably high, especially among minority populations.

Active transportation, such as walking and cycling, also can promote a healthy environment by decreasing air pollution when selected instead of motorized transport.

Numerous communities across the United States have limited access to healthy foods and limited opportunities for physical activity; improving active transportation options raises the prospect of preventing health problems, including heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure and cancer. Every day, diverse populations are impacted by traffic

fatalities, injuries and other negative health impacts as a result of poor transportation decisions made in their communities. Consider the following:

- Sixty percent of American adults are overweight with 30 percent estimated to be obese.²
- Only 21 percent of U.S. adolescents participate in daily physical activity.³
- Physical activity reduces the risks of chronic diseases and disorders related to lifestyle. These risks include increased triglyceride and cholesterol levels, obesity, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease and stroke.^{4,5}

Actions Needed

The reauthorization of the federal surface transportation bill in the coming year presents the nation with an opportunity to reinvent its transportation system to better promote health, safety and equity across vast regions, whether urban, suburban, or rural.

APHA Supports

- **Building long-term and meaningful relationships** between transportation and public health stakeholders and advocates
- **Supporting the use of the Complete Streets methodology**, which considers health effects on all transportation users
- **Expanding Safe Routes to School programs**, which encourage children, including children with disabilities, to walk and bike to school safely
- **Funding research to evaluate the public health impacts** and the true costs and benefits of various transportation policies
- **Encouraging the development of healthy communities** and incentives for transportation projects that promote health
- **Promoting health impact assessments (or health benefits assessments) as a tool** to help decision-makers determine the public health impacts of transportation activities
- **Supporting active transportation options**, such as walking and biking, that are accessible and affordable for all users

Sources:

1. NHTSA. 2008 Traffic Safety Annual Assessment, <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811172.pdf>, accessed 4-20-2010.
2. National Center for Health Statistics, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1999–2002.
3. Katz DL, O'Connell M, Yeh M, et al. (2005). Public health strategies for preventing and controlling overweight and obesity in school and worksite settings. *Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report* 2005; 54 (RR-10):1-11.
4. Pratt M, Macera CA, Blanton C. (1999). Levels of physical activity and inactivity in children and adults in the United States: current evidence and research issues. *Med Sci Sports Exerc.* 1999; 31:S526-33.
5. Gordon-Larsen P, McMurray RG, Popkin BM. (2000). Determinants of adolescent physical and inactivity patterns. *Pediatrics.* 2000; 105:e83.

