

## Chapter 2. Policies that Enhance Community Design and Promote Active Transportation

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### **2 Introduction: Policies that Enhance Community Design and Promote Active Transportation**

Active transportation is self-powered or human-powered transportation that engages people in healthy physical activity while they accomplish the task of traveling from place to place. When an active transportation trip—walking or bicycling—replaces a motor vehicle trip, there is the added benefit of reduced congestion and harmful emissions, and improvements in quality of life.

Physical activity lowers the risk of early death, heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, adverse blood lipid profile, metabolic syndrome, and some kinds of cancers. Lack of

physical activity contributes to obesity in conjunction with dietary factors. Remaining physically active can help prevent falls and reduce depression among older adults.<sup>126</sup>

Chapter 2 explores policy changes to encourage greater use of active transportation on a population-level scale, resulting not only in greater physical activity, but also in fewer car trips. We must make active transportation easier, more convenient, and more attractive. One way this can be done is through the creation of new community environments that have: improved connectivity between destinations; infrastructure that encourages walking and bicycling; community design that incorporates the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists as legitimate road users; and strengthened connections between public transit and walking and bicycling. These measures can change the shape and nature of our communities, so that active transportation can become a more attractive choice for all Americans.

### **Opportunities for Enhancing Community Design and Promoting Active Transportation**

Through policies already known, very substantial progress can be made toward enhancing community design and promoting active transportation. We have identified 15 such policies within four areas. The four areas are:

- Provide better connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Increase investments in infrastructure that supports active transportation
- Consider the needs of all road users in planning and design standards
- Make public transit easier to use for pedestrians and bicyclists.

#### **Provide Better Connectivity for Pedestrians and Bicyclists**

Land use, development patterns, and the need for and preference for motor vehicle travel have combined to create community environments in which many Americans rarely walk to a destination, in many cases because they believe that distances are too long.<sup>127</sup>

Among school-aged children in the U.S., the share who walk or bicycle to school has dropped by more than half since 1969,<sup>128</sup> while the share of children traveling to school by car more than tripled, so that, now, half of all children travel to school by car.<sup>129</sup> Distance and community

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<sup>126</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008. *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*. Available at: <http://www.health.gov/PAGuidelines/Report/Default.aspx> [accessed May 2, 2011].

<sup>127</sup> National Household Travel Survey. 2010. NHTS Brief. *Active Travel*. December 2010. Available at: <http://nhts.ornl.gov/briefs/ActiveTravel.pdf> [accessed May 2, 2011].

<sup>128</sup> Ham, S., S. Martin and H. W. Kohl, III. 2008. Changes in the percentages of students who walk or bike to school—United States, 1969 and 2001. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 5 (2): 205-215.

<sup>129</sup> National Household Travel Survey. 2008. NHTS Brief. *Travel to School – The Distance Factor*. January 2008. Available at: <http://nhts.ornl.gov/briefs/Travel%20To%20School.pdf> [accessed May 19, 2011].

design are factors in these choices. In 1969, a little more than half of students lived within a mile of their schools. By 2001, that was down to 25 percent.<sup>130</sup>

Reducing the size of street blocks, locating key community destinations in closer proximity to home and work, and providing incentives to develop land in dense, mixed-use patterns will enhance community design and support active transportation.

### **Increase Investments in Infrastructure that Supports Active Transportation**

In recent years, federal transportation policy has begun a more concerted investment in infrastructure that makes active transportation easier. Facilities include sidewalks, multi-use trails, bicycle lanes and paths, pedestrian crossing improvements, and street designs that narrow roadways and reduce traffic speed.

Expanding the existing Safe Routes to School national program and encouraging development of an investment in Complete Streets design will provide support for active transportation infrastructure investments. Additionally, encouraging development of bicycle boulevards—a way to integrate bicycle transportation into the street network while maintaining safety—and encouraging more signage aimed at pedestrians and bicyclists will make community design more conducive to active transportation.

### **Consider the Needs of All Road Users in Planning and Design Standards**

Transportation projects have historically placed the highest priority on achieving efficiencies for motor vehicles, coming at the cost of safety and comfort for pedestrians and bicyclists, and having the effect of reducing the practicality and comfort of active travel.

Incorporating active transportation users' needs into transportation planning and design can be accomplished by setting goals for pedestrian and bicycle levels of service in any project, and encouraging route analysis to include pedestrian and bicycle access. Finally, adjusting vehicle design standards to incorporate elements that are more forgiving to pedestrians and bicyclists in the event of crashes would make walking—and bicycling—safer.

### **Make Public Transit Easier to Use for Pedestrians and Bicyclists**

A recurring obstacle to transit use is the so-called last/first mile problem, which refers to barriers transit users experience in either reaching a transit facility to start their journey, or completing the final leg that brings them to their destination. Walking and bicycling are modes that are suited for

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<sup>130</sup> McDonald, N. 2007. Children's Mode Choice for the School Trip: The Role of Distance and School Locations in Walking to School. *Transportation*, 35 (1): 23-35.

short trips. While federal support for transit has increased over the past decade or so, there has been little effort to coordinate pedestrian and bicycle facilities with transit spending.<sup>131</sup>

Public transit can be made easier for pedestrians and bicyclists to use by making ample room for bicycles on trains and buses, making transit stops and stations more accessible by foot and bicycle, providing route maps and other information about routes and schedules, and by fostering transit-oriented development.

## Chapter 2 at a Glance

In this chapter we will examine four policies that could enhance community design in order to promote active transportation. They are:

### **2.1 Provide Better Connectivity for Pedestrians and Bicyclists**

### **2.2 Increase Investments in Infrastructure that Supports Active Transportation**

### **2.3 Consider the Needs of All Road Users in Planning and Design Standards**

### **2.4 Make Public Transit Easier to Use for Pedestrians and Bicyclists**

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<sup>131</sup> Schneider, R. 2005. *TCRP Synthesis 62: Integration of bicycles and transit*. Transportation Research Board: Washington, D.C. Available at: [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp\\_syn\\_62.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_62.pdf) [accessed on June 19, 2011]