

Public Transportation

A Link to Better Health and Equity



The U.S. public transportation system needs to meet the nation's present and future demands by providing affordable, safe and equitable access to work, education, nutritious food, health services and social activities. Improving public transportation not only links people to these goods and services, but also helps communities achieve public health benefits. These include increased physical activity, reduced pollution, reduced fatalities and injuries on our transportation networks and greater community cohesion.

Get the Facts

Balanced transportation choices, including improved and expanded public transportation systems, bring health and equity benefits to communities across the nation. An equitable public transportation system is one that allows its users equal opportunity in mobility, independent of age, ability, income or race. Promoting public transportation use is associated with health, social and environmental benefits. Results indicate that:

- On average, public transportation produces 95% less carbon monoxide, 92% fewer volatile organic compounds and 45% less carbon dioxide compared to private automobiles¹.
- Communities that are walkable and have access to transit generally have a lower dependence on automobiles and encourage physical activity².
- The fatality rate associated with transportation-related injuries in public transportation is approximately 1/25th that associated with automobiles³.
- Studies have found that men who commute to work on public transportation are 44.6% less likely to be overweight or obese due to increased active commuting⁴.



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- A health impact assessment (HIA) of public transportation demonstrated that increased spending on public transportation and sustainable modes of transportation can benefit health and reduce social inequalities⁵.
- A study found that commuting by public transportation instead of by car increased energy expenditures equivalent to the loss of one pound of body fat per six weeks⁶.

Actions Needed

The federal surface transportation authorization presents the nation with an opportunity to reinvent and improve its transportation network — including public transportation — to better promote health and equity across cities and towns, whether urban, suburban or rural.

APHA Supports

- Building long-term and meaningful relationships between public transportation and public health stakeholders and advocates
- Supporting the use of the Complete Streets methodology, which includes public transportation users and considers health effects across all ages and abilities
- 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 via increased physical activity, reduced pollution and improved safety
- Promoting health impact assessments as a tool to determine the health and equity impacts of public transportation decisions
- Ensuring that a variety of community members and health organizations are involved meaningfully in public transportation planning processes



Sources:

- 1 American Public Transportation Association. 2002. *The benefits of public transportation: the route to better personal health*. Washington, DC: APTA
- 2 Rodriguez DA, Khattak AJ, Evenson KR. 2006. Can new urbanism encourage physical activity? *Journal of the American Planning Association*; 72(1):43-54
- 3 American Public Transportation Association. 2007. *Public transportation: benefits for the 21st century*. Washington, DC: APTA
- 4 Zheng Y. 2008. The benefit of public transportation: physical activity to reduce obesity and ecological footprint. *Preventive Medicine*; 46(1): 4-5
- 5 Gorman D, Douglas MJ, Conway L, Noble P, Hanlon P. 2003. Transport policy and health inequalities: a health impact assessment of Edinburgh's transport policy. *Public Health*; 117(1): 15-24
- 6 Morabia A, Mirer FE, Amstislavski TM, Eisl HM, Werbe-Fuentes J, Gorczynski J, Goranson C, Wolff MS, Markowitz SB. Potential Health Impact of Switching From Car to Public Transportation When Commuting to Work. *American Journal of Public Health*; 100(12): 2388-2391

