

Case Study (from Why Place Matters report published by PolicyLink and The California Endowment, p.37)

Looking at Transportation Planning Through a Health Lens

The Coalition for a Livable Future (CLF) wants transportation planners to look beyond traffic volume and bus ridership when laying out new roads and rail lines. This Portland, Oregon-based group says health should be considered, too.

Build a system that fosters walking and biking for short trips, and light rail for longer ones, and you'll do more than reduce the congestion and commute times, the coalition says. People will be healthier, too.

The coalition has two rare opportunities at hand. First, the area's Regional Transportation Plan is in the works. The plan sets the direction for future investments in the region's transportation system and establishes policies and priorities for all forms of travel—motor vehicle, transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and freight. When completed, the plan will direct the spending of \$4.2 billion over the next 20 years. The coalition is bringing in doctors and other health experts to shape the debate.

“We've brought new voices into the process and that has caught people's attention,” says Jill Fuglister, executive director of CLF. “Involving the health community has created a new constituency that might make a real difference in transportation decisions.”

The second opportunity is a new crossing over the Columbia River between Portland and Vancouver, Washington. Residents of neighborhoods around two existing bridges tend to have lower incomes and poorer health. Asthma and other respiratory problems associated with airborne toxins are twice as prevalent in these communities as in the general population.

The coalition wants bridge planners to consider the well-being of these communities. For example, it wants funds set aside for health clinics, along with dollars earmarked for bike routes and sidewalks to encourage exercise. Crucial to the coalition's effort is getting transportation mavens to see how they can improve health on a regional scale. That's where the health experts come in. With them at the table, the debate over placement of roads, rails, and new bridges will never be confined to “people-moving.”