
Linking Transportation Policy and Public Health

November 13-14, 2008

Doubletree Crystal City ÉArlington, VA

Injury Prevention and Transportation

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1. What are the most compelling established and/or emerging connections between this area of transportation policy and health and equity issues and outcomes?

In 2007 traffic crashes accounted for over 41,000 deaths, 2.6 million injuries, and \$230.6 billion in total economic cost (in 2000 dollars). More Americans under the age of 34 die from traffic crashes than from any other cause of death. There are clear disparities in traffic-related injuries and fatalities. As a percentage of all deaths, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and Latinos die more from traffic crashes than white populations. Over the age of 16, white bicyclists and pedestrians have fewer traffic fatalities than people of color. Injury prevention among seniors is a growing focus as a large segment of the American population enters the over-65 age range.

Many injury prevention strategies have benefits beyond the reduction of traffic injuries and deaths. For example, strategies to increase pedestrian/ bicyclist safety and public transportation, may also increase the likelihood that people will choose to walk and bike, disable access. This in turn promote physical activity, reduce vehicle miles traveled and thus air pollutants and greenhouse gases. The partnership between the injury prevention field and other health and environmental disciplines is one of great promise. In many cases, the same solutions serve all and in other cases, the benefit comes from supporting one another.

2. What are key opportunities to improve public health by changing transport policy in this area?

Ensuring the safety and security of the traveling public is a primary charge of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). Strategies that mutually support injury prevention, chronic disease, and other health goals include:

- Improve the physical environment:
 - Adopt traffic calming physical measures to reduce traffic speeds. Measures include widening sidewalks, raising medians, or narrowing driving lanes.
 - Complete the Streets for the safe and convenient travel of *all* users by enhancing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and establishing connected networks of roads, paths, and trails.
 - Implement Safe Routes to School to support infrastructure and programming efforts to get more children safely bicycling and walking to school everyday.
 - Establish land use strategies to promote mixed-use residential areas, increase density to shorten the distance between key destinations, and support transit-oriented design.

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- Improve public transit to make it a safe, accessible, and convenient alternative to single occupant vehicles. Public transit improvements are particularly important for improving accessibility and mobility for seniors and an aging population, disabled Americans, and low-income populations that have reduced access to single occupant vehicles.
- Reduce impaired driving (i.e., under the influence of alcohol or other drugs) through strategies such as enforcing existing blood alcohol content laws and minimum legal drinking age laws to improve both motorized and non-motorized travelers safety.

Further traditional injury prevention strategies:

- Improve occupant protection strategies that promote safe behaviors such as seat belt laws, motorcycle and bicycle helmet laws, and child safety seats.
- Strengthen vehicle design regulations (e.g., airbags, bumper design).
- Incentivize graduated licensing laws to ensure teenage drivers gain experience driving before obtaining a full drivers license.