
Linking Transportation Policy and Public Health

November 13-14, 2008

Doubletree Crystal City ÉArlington, VA

Non-Motorized Transportation and Health

Author's Name: Susan Handy

Author's Position/Organization: Professor, University of California Davis

Web Link for More Information on Author: <http://www.des.ucdavis.edu/faculty/handy/>

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

Walking and bicycling as modes of transportation are important forms of physical activity. A fifteen minute non-motorized commute twice a day is enough to meet the CDC's recommendations for physical activity for adults. The health benefits of achieving these levels of physical activity are numerous: prevention of weight gain, improved cardio-respiratory and muscular fitness, and lower risk of Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and other conditions. Non-motorized transportation is important from an equity standpoint as well. Non-motorized modes can improve equity of access to needed activities, including jobs, healthcare, and shopping. Non-motorized modes also enhance access to transit, which in turn further enhances access to needed activities. Health disparities are also influenced by walking and bicycling, which provide an important source of physical activity for lower income and minority populations. Increased non-motorized travel produces numerous economic benefits: reduced household spending on transportation, improved access to jobs, and stimulation of local economic development. Environmental benefits from a shift from motorized to non-motorized modes are also abundant, including less air pollution, less water pollution, less noise, and lower greenhouse gas emissions, with benefits for health. There are few downsides to non-motorized transportation, as long as safety is ensured.

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

Starting with the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, the federal government has provided support for non-motorized transportation through a number of different policies. At the same time, many federal programs and policies hinder efforts to increase non-motorized travel, and an overarching concern with congestion undervalues non-motorized modes. Opportunities include:

- Help to provide state, regional, and local governments with the tools they need to plan for non-motorized modes, including improved data collection and forecasting models.
- Make it easier to spend federal funding on non-motorized modes by reducing bureaucratic obstacles and increasing flexibility of funding programs.
- Encourage or require greater attention to non-motorized modes through, for example, a routine accommodation policy and financial incentives for adoption of supportive land use policies.
- Shift focus from congestion to other measures of performance that reflect health, equity, economic, and environmental benefits.