

Walking is Fundamental

Walking is the first and most fundamental form of transportation. Everybody is a pedestrian at some point in each day, even if it's just walking from the car to the office. Americans make about 9 percent of all trips on foot,¹ and 107 million American adults walk regularly to get to work, school, run errands, or visit friends.² Walking is a critical component of the transportation system, serving not only as a major mode of transportation in its own right, but also by providing connections between destinations and other modes.

Economic conditions and concerns about health and the environment mean more and more Americans are interested in increased options for getting around besides the automobile. Since 1995, public transportation use has grown at nearly triple the rate of population growth and almost twice as fast as the number of miles driven. Communities across the country are responding to this demand by planning for new rail lines, launching commuter bus and train services and expanding bus routes. Walking is a part of just about every trip taken on public transportation.

Furthermore, the growing popularity of town centers and Main Streets – even once automobile-oriented suburbs are building them – means that more Americans are living and working in



existing walkable communities. Young adults are 30 percent more likely to live within 3 miles of central business districts in 2008 than they were in 1980, and are thus more able to access jobs, educational opportunities, people and shops.³ Whether or not Americans walk, and whether they are safe and comfortable when doing so, is a matter of growing urgency for our health, energy and climate, aging population and the livability of our cities.

Walking Improves Health

Walking is a vital form of transportation, connecting people to a variety of transportation modes and providing options for getting around. At the same time, research shows that walking is fundamental to improving health, with a role in preventing obesity, some cancers, heart disease, diabetes and a host of other diseases.⁴ More than two-thirds of U.S. adults are obese or overweight according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. Current estimates show

1 NHTS 2001. A trip is defined as travel from one address to another, with switches to different modes, and each stop along the way counted as separate trips.

2 FHWA. Travelers Opinion Survey 2005.

3 U.S. Census. July 1, 2008 Population Estimates.

4 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). The Surgeon General's call to action to prevent and decrease overweight and obesity. Rockville, MD: Office of the Surgeon General, 2001.



that more than 33 percent of children and adolescents, approximately 25 million, are overweight or obese. Being overweight was not always the norm in the U.S. Since 1980, the prevalence of obesity among American adults doubled, while tripling for children.⁵ These trends come with grave consequences: Americans who are obese or overweight are at an increased risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers and stroke.

Despite these health concerns, we have engineered the incidental exercise of walking out of most Americans' lives. The deterioration of the American diet and a sedentary lifestyle have contributed to the growing American waistline. But the way our streets, cities, towns, and suburbs are designed also deserves significant blame. A peer-reviewed national study examining the relationship between sprawl and the incidence of weight

problems and obesity found that people living in counties marked by sprawl were more likely to weigh more and become obese.⁶

One in four of all transportation trips in the U.S. are one mile or less, and are the easiest to shift from driving to walking or bicycling.⁷ Active transportation, such as walking, is a key component to combating our nation's obesity epidemic and chronic lack of physical activity. A long-term study funded by the National Institutes of Health found that people living in highly walkable neighborhoods averaged 35 to 45 minutes more physical activity per week than their counterparts in less walkable areas.⁸ And a recently published study of land use and physical activity in eleven countries concluded: "Neighborhoods built to support physical activity have a strong potential to contribute to increased physical activity. Designing neighborhoods to support physical activity can now be defined as an international public health issue."⁹

Researchers have found that moderate exercise, such as walking or bicycling, contributes significantly to a healthy lifestyle. A one-mile trip is a twenty-minute walk, or two-thirds of the daily exercise regimen of 30 minutes recommended by

5 U.S. CDC. (2004) Physical Activity and the Health of Young People. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. U.S. Obesity Trends 1985 – 2008. <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/trends.html>

6 Frank, Lawrence, Andresen, Martin and Schmid, Tom (2004). Obesity Relationships With Community Design, Physical Activity, and Time Spent in Cars. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* Vol 27. No 2. June, 2004, pp. 87-97.

7 Federal Highway Administration, National Household Travel Survey, 2001.

8 J. Sallis, Neighborhood Quality of Life Study, March 2009.

9 J. Sallis, et al. "Neighborhood Environments and Physical Activity Among Adults in 11 Countries," *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. 2009; 36 (6): 484-490.

Study: Pedestrian & Cycle Paths Increase Levels of Walking and Bicycling

One community has seen lots more people out walking and bicycling after making provisions for them. Construction of an almost three mile walking and bicycling path, in conjunction with construction of a major bridge project just outside Charleston, SC, have substantially increased levels of walking and bicycling in the area. Two-thirds of people who walk, run, or bike on the new bridge say they're exercising more since the opening of the pedestrian path. That figure was even higher — 85% — among African-Americans, indicating their enthusiastic adoption of the bike and pedestrian path as a place to exercise. And this is a step forward in a state where one in four adults is obese and three out of five adults are obese or overweight.

The Arthur Ravenel Bridge opened for traffic on July 15, 2005 and connects the Charleston peninsula with the town of Mt. Pleasant in South Carolina. Initial designs for the new bridge did not include provisions for pedestrians and cyclists. However, community efforts and a public campaign around the slogan “Can’t Wait to Bike/Walk The New Bridge,” as well as support from Charleston Mayor Joseph Riley successfully changed the project.

While the popularity of the path has been no secret and its success has been widely hailed by public officials, researchers conducted a study from January through July of 2007, taking on-site interviews with 393 users of the facility. Among the study’s additional findings were that 10% of the participants indicated that they utilized the path in order to commute to work or conduct chores. Many indicated they used the path because it is safe, and because the scenery is beautiful.

The study was designed by and supervised by Deborah McCarthy, Associate Professor of Sociology at the College of Charleston, assisted by Yvonne Gilreath, Senior Planner at the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments.

Source: News 2. “Ravenel Bridge encourages exercise” Published: March 26, 2009

the U.S. Surgeon General. In fact, because people may be more apt to walk places than go to a gym, public health researchers are focusing on exercise as an integrated part of getting through the day. The CDC estimates that if 10 percent of adults

began a regular walking program, \$5.6 billion in national cost associated with heart disease costs could be saved.¹⁰

10 CDC 2003. Preventing Obesity and Chronic Diseases Through Good Nutrition and Physical Activity. Accessed at: http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/pe_fact-sheets/pe_pa.htm

Solutions are in Demand

Sidewalk and bicycle traffic concerns topped the 2009 “Hot Spot” list in Tippecanoe County, Ind. Each year officials with the county’s Area Plan Commission gather input from residents to create a database of area concerns about traffic and transportation. The 2009 Hot Spot list includes numerous requests for new sidewalks and bike lanes. Pedestrian safety concerns also dominated, such as a request to ban “right turn on red” options at more campus intersections and traffic calming projects to slow speeds.

The list is shared with transportation and law enforcement officials with the state, county and cities with the hopes that efforts can be made to address the concerns.

Source: JCOline News. “Walking, Biking Safety Top Traffic Concerns. By Dorothy Schneider. October 22, 2009

Just as shifting short trips to walking would help keep us healthy, it also would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the air pollution that makes us sick. Cars and trucks are responsible for 81 percent of carbon monoxide emissions, 49 percent of nitrogen oxide emissions, and nearly one-third of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. These harmful pollutants from cars and trucks exacerbate asthma and cause respiratory illnesses and some cancers. Although individual cars are much cleaner today than they were in the 1970s, the staggering growth in miles driven has offset much of those gains. Moreover, cars and trucks burn millions of barrels of oil – a non-renewable energy source – every day, accounting for almost half of the nation’s fossil fuel consumption.¹¹

Walking Increases Transportation Options

American drivers spent 4.2 billion hours stuck in traffic congestion at a cost of \$82.7 billion in 2007, according to the most recent study from the Texas Transportation Institute. But building new roads or widening existing ones is neither practical nor effective at reducing traffic congestion in the long run. As America’s population concentrates ever more in growing metro areas, transportation planners are forced to figure out how to move more people, rather than cars. One obvious solution is to make more places where people can safely walk to their destinations or to public transportation. Another solution is to make it safer to shift short trips to walking or bicycling: As we noted earlier, one in four trips is one mile or less, but today only 21 percent of those short trips are made on foot. If even half of those short trips were made through walking, hundreds of millions of car trips could be avoided.

11 Environmental Protection Agency, “Greenhouse Gas Emissions from the U.S. Transportation Sector 1990-2003.” March 2006.

The recent economic recession and spike in gas prices prompted many Americans to lace up their sneakers in lieu of filling up their gas tanks. Making trips on foot and reducing the number of miles driven in a car has the potential to save families money. Americans spend, on average, 18 percent of their annual income on transportation. The average annual operating cost of a car is \$8,220 and the AAA estimates that the cost of driving in 2009 is \$0.54 per mile (for drivers traveling 15,000 miles per year).¹² Taking just one one-mile trip by foot instead of by car each day could save families almost \$200 per year.

People Want to Walk

Polls consistently show that Americans recognize the benefits of walking and would like to walk more than they do. One poll found that if given a choice between driving more and walking more, 55 percent of respondents would choose to walk more.¹³ Seventy-one percent of Americans report that they would like to bicycle more and 53 percent favor increasing federal spending on bicycle lanes and paths.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the lack of safe walking facilities and convenient destinations prevents most Americans from walking. In a poll conducted for AARP, 40 percent of adults age 50 and older reported inadequate sidewalks in their neighborhoods and nearly 50 percent reported

that they could not cross main roads close to their home safely. At the same time, half of those who reported such problems said they would walk, bicycle, or take the bus more if these problems were fixed.¹⁵ Indeed, a 2005 survey by the FHWA found that 85 percent of respondents believed their community would be better served by expanding sidewalk and bicycling infrastructure.¹⁶

Public ballot measures to increase funding for walking, bicycling and public transportation projects have enjoyed broad public support in recent elections. Voters in communities across the country recognize the benefits from increasing transportation options by providing safe and convenient opportunities to walk, bicycle, and use public transportation. In the 2008 election, voters across the country in 16 states approved 23 out of 32 state and local ballot initiatives related to walking, bicycling and public transportation, authorizing expenditures approximating \$75 billion. In Los Angeles, voters approved a \$40 billion measure to finance new and existing bus and rail lines, along with other transportation projects. Seattle-area voters approved \$17.8 billion to expand commuter rail and express bus service and create a 55-mile light rail system, and in Honolulu, voters approved \$3.7 billion for a commuter rail system. Safe walking and bicycling will be an integral part of making these and similar investments work.¹⁷

12 AAA. Your Driving Costs 2009. <http://www.aaaexchange.com/Assets/Files/200948913570.Driving-Costs2009.pdf>

13 Surface Transportation Policy Project. "Americans' Attitudes Toward Walking and Creating Better Walking Communities." 2003.

14 Royal, D., and D. MillerSteiger, 2008, National Survey of Bicyclist and Pedestrian Attitudes and Behavior, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Belden Russonello & Stewart. "Americans' Attitudes Toward Biking." Survey. April 2003

15 Laura Skufca. Is the Cost of Gas Leading Americans to Use Alternative Transportation? AARP Knowledge Management. August 2008.

16 FHWA TOP survey.

17 Center for Transportation Excellence. November 2008 Election Results. Press Release. November 5, 2008.