

TRANSPORTATION HEALTH IMPACTS- BUILD HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Our transportation system has been shaped without the consideration of the impacts on public health. Our system has been designed mostly to move people and goods efficiently, without understanding the resulting damage to our health and subsequent medical and environment costs.

However, there is a growing awareness across communities and policymakers that transportation systems directly impact physical activity, air quality, and its relationship to quality of life and health. Expanding the availability of, safety for, and access to a variety of transportation options by integrating healthy choices into transportation policy has the potential to save lives by preventing chronic diseases, reducing and preventing motor-vehicle-related injury and deaths, improving environmental health, while stimulating economic development, and ensuring transportation access for all people. Wise investments in healthy transportation choices will save millions of dollars in future health care costs.



Invest in safe, reliable and efficient alternatives that support all communities.

Problem

The current U.S. transportation infrastructure focuses on motor vehicle travel and provides limited support for other transportation options for most Americans. In short, opportunities to be physically active have been engineered out of daily life. The healthy choice is clearly NOT the easy choice for Washingtonians.

Physical activity and active transportation have declined compared to previous generations. The lack of physical activity is a major contributor to the steady rise in rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke and other chronic health conditions in the United States. Public and private medical costs of obesity for our state are now estimated in excess of \$3 billion.

Motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of injury-related death for many age groups. Pedestrians and bicyclists are at an even greater risk of death from crashes than those who travel by motor vehicles. Many Americans view walking and bicycling within their communities as unsafe because of traffic and the lack of sidewalks, crosswalks, and bicycle facilities.

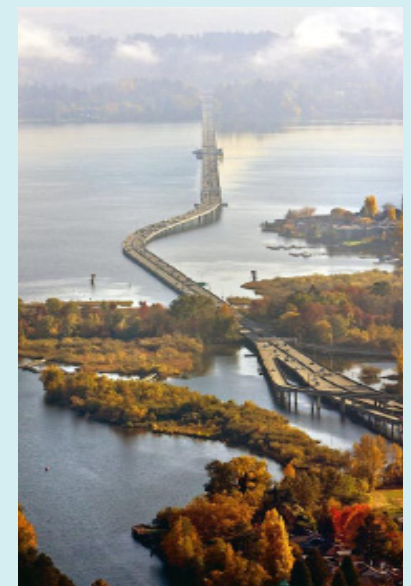
The US transportation system - roads, highways, bridges, ferries, ports, public transit, planes and bike and walking paths - is beneficial and essential to society to reach jobs, schools, shopping and recreation. It allows its people and goods to get from one place to another. The design and construction of the transportation system shapes communities and affects the health of the people who live, work and play in them.

(Continued on reverse)

Healthy Moses Lake

In Moses Lake, the community adopted a Healthy Communities Action Plan, in direct response to a 127% increase in the adult obesity rate there. New zoning rules require wider sidewalks and other features that improve accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists.

Twenty five and half percent of adults in Washington are obese, the number of overweight or obese American children nearly tripled between 1980 and 2004. Health experts agree that a big factor is inactivity – 55 percent of the U.S. adult population falls short of recommended activity guidelines, and approximately 25 percent report being completely inactive. Inactivity is a factor in many other diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Incomplete streets mean many people lack opportunities to be active as part of daily life.



The Solutions

- » Promote Safe, Active Transportation.
- » Consider health when planning and making transportation investment decisions.
- » Expand Public Transportation.
- » Transit oriented development.

(Problem continued)

Unfortunately, the lack of a fully dynamic transportation system that includes opportunities to drive, walk, bicycle or use transit exacerbates our poor health status. The negative results of a limited transportation system include:

- Reducing opportunities for physical activity and contributing to rising obesity and resulting chronic diseases.
- Polluting air, which in turn contributes to respiratory and cardiovascular illness, and accelerates climate change.
- Increasing traffic accidents and death and injury.

- Exacerbating poverty and inequity by placing heavy burdens on vulnerable populations and disproportionately locating transportation projects in low-income areas.

- Increasing noise and severing community connections in residential neighborhoods creating health impacts.

Solutions

By working together as a broad coalition and using collective action to achieve our goals we can develop policies and prioritize funding to address the health impacts of transportation.

Social and Health Inequities

At the core of public health service is the goal of achieving equal health for all especially the most vulnerable: the poor, the elderly, children, disabled individuals, and underserved communities of color. Providing public and non-motorized transportation options for transit dependant and low income communities is paramount in ensuring all citizens have opportunities to live healthy lives.



Transportation systems should connect the places where people live, learn, work, shop, and play by providing safe and convenient walking and bicycling facilities. The safety and health of all can increase as more people choose active transportation. This can be done through existing grant programs such as Safe Routes to Schools, Bike and Pedestrian Safety, and Complete Streets grants program.

We must shift our focus and avoid costly health impacts early in the design process and the funding prioritization. Transportation projects should work synergistically to promote health and safety. Health impact assessments or cost-benefit analysis should be done for major transportation projects around the state.

Public transportation infrastructure reduces the necessity for single occupancy vehicle trips, curtails the production of automobile emissions, increases incidental physical activity, and ensures transportation access

for people with physical, economic, or other limitations. People who take transit on the average get 20 minutes of physical activity per trip.

Transportation-related air pollutants are one of the largest contributors to unhealthy air quality. Exposure to traffic emissions has been linked to many adverse health effects including; premature mortality, cardiac symptoms, exacerbation of asthma symptoms, diminished lung function, and increased hospitalization.

Conclusion

Washington must address our obesity epidemic and provide individuals of all ages to live the healthiest life possible. We must also cut the high medical costs associated with chronic disease resulting from our current transportation system. Transportation must be part of the overall solution to obesity and cannot be ignored as a cause and solution to this growing epidemic and subsequent chronic disease .

The Facts

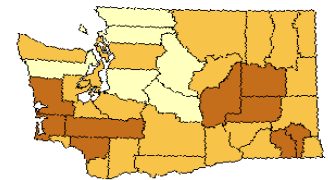
The total US economic cost of being obese and overweight was estimated to be \$147 billion (2008 \$).

Health costs associated with poor air quality caused by transportation are between \$40 billion and \$60 billion/year in the US.

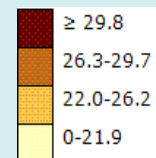
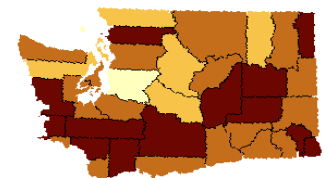
Over the last fifteen years WA's obesity rate has nearly doubled, making our state the 28th most obese state in the nation.

WA Obesity Rate

2004 Obesity Rates



2008 Obesity Rates



Partners

- » Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition
- » Transportation Choices Coalition

More information:
<http://t4washington.org>