

Transportation Policy and Public Health

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Public health is of increasing concern to planners nationwide. Research suggests the built environment significantly impacts levels of physical activity and health.

"Active living" integrates physical activity into daily routines. These activities include walking or bicycling for transportation, exercise or pleasure, playing in the park, and taking the stairs.

Federal transportation funding is a major source of support for bicycle and pedestrian facilities. These sources of funding support improvements in the built environment; understanding how they are distributed and used is particularly relevant to transportation planning.

Identified transportation policies to support public health outcomes:

- 1) Explicit recognition of how transportation policy affects public health.
- 2) Improved data monitoring and access to data on the implementation of bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- 3) Improved bicycle and pedestrian planning and implementation assistance for underserved communities.

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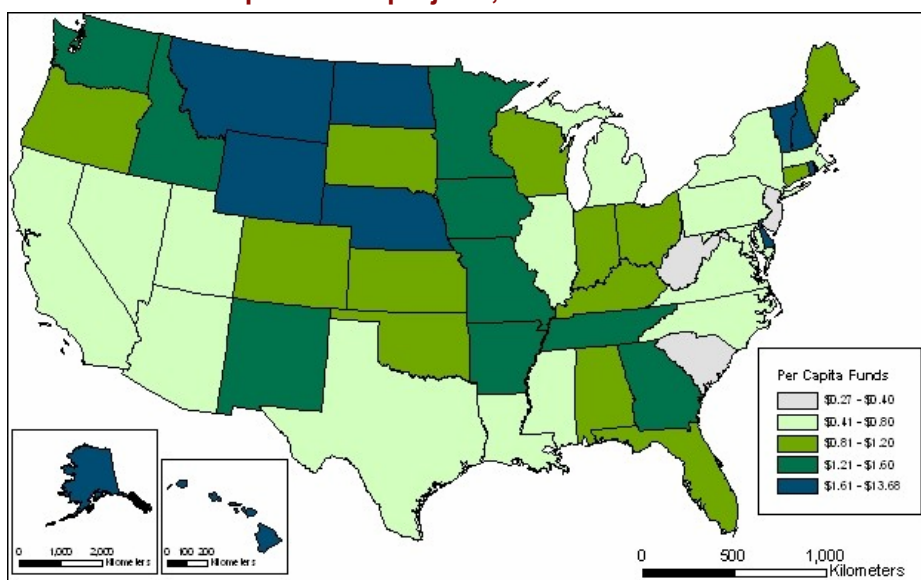
Why is public health relevant to transportation planners?

To prevent disease and promote well-being, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days a week. One way to meet this goal is to walk and bicycle as part of one's daily routine. Recognizing that access to safe and convenient places for walking and bicycling makes this approach possible, states and local communities are using capital funding of multimodal transportation facilities, land use policies, and programming. Sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly traffic patterns, and accessible trails and parks are just some of the features communities are seeking to encourage active living.

Study Findings

While local and state funding is crucial, federal involvement in transportation funding is often the primary catalyst for improvements to the built environment. Our research finds that between 1992 and 2004, states and local governments were awarded \$3.17 billion in federal transportation funding to implement over 10,000 projects. These projects included improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities and the creation of bicycle and pedestrian safety and education programs. Of all U.S. counties, 62% had implemented at least one bicycle or pedestrian project. However, counties characterized by low educational attainment, persistent poverty of residents, or higher proportions of households with two or more vehicles were significantly less likely to have implemented projects.

Average annual per capita federal obligations by state for bicycle and pedestrian projects, FMIS 1992-2004



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Federal programs for bicycle and pedestrian project funding include:

Transportation Enhancements

(TE): The primary source of funding for bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program

(CMAQ): In addition to promoting general air-quality improvement projects, used for bicycle facilities, pedestrian walkways and projects promoting safe bicycle use.

Transportation and Community and System Preservation Program

(TCSP): Provides funding for innovative projects including bicycling, walking and traffic calming.

Recreational Trails Program

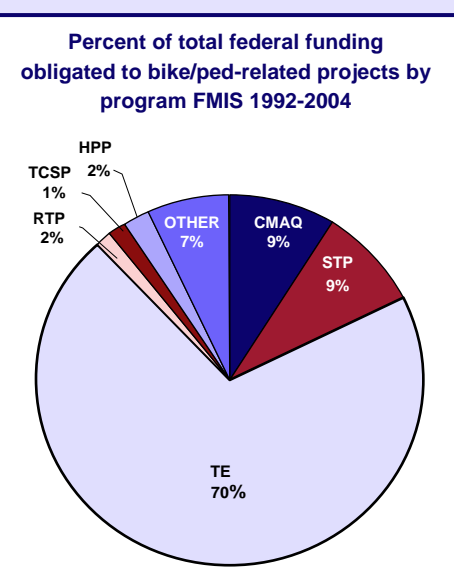
(RTP): Used to develop and maintain trails and facilities for both motorized and non-motorized recreational use.

High Priority Projects (HPP):

earmarked projects identified in federal legislation.

Surface Transportation Program

(STP): In addition to funding motorized transportation, provides funds for independent and incidental bicycle and pedestrian projects.



Federal funding sources

According to the Federal Highway Administration's Fiscal Management Information System (FMIS), most improvement projects were initiated through the Transportation Enhancements program. Other important federal sources of transportation funding include the Surface Transportation Program, and the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ). Smaller percentages of programs were supported via the Recreational Trails Program, High Priority Projects, the Transportation and Community System Preservation Program and a combination of other transportation line items.

Important Federal Transportation Legislation

ISTEA: Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (1991–1997)

- \$155 billion initially authorized overall
- New objectives, programs and planning requirements for bicycle and pedestrian activities
- State bicycle and pedestrian coordinator offices established

TEA-21: Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (1998–2004)

- \$218 billion initially authorized
- Expanded program funding options, eligible activities

SAFETEA-LU: Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (2005–2009):

- \$244 billion initially authorized
- Bicycle and pedestrian highlights-Safe Routes to School funding to foster safe and active lifestyles for children and youth

Policy and Research Recommendations

The following recommendations illustrate that there are many opportunities to maximize the use of transportation funding for projects that promote public health.

Recognize the role of transportation policy in public health:

Strategies emphasizing links between transportation policy and public health (e.g. scoring criteria that rewards funding applications that recognize such ties) will support projects that encourage walking and bicycling for transportation.

Improve data access and quality:

Greater public access and improved data quality (e.g., creating and standardizing reporting criteria for bicycle or pedestrian projects) will promote transparency in assessments of how federal transportation dollars support motorized and non-motorized forms of transportation. Data access and quality improvements may also facilitate needed research.

Target transportation funding to underserved communities:

Low-income areas may require specifically targeted strategies to encourage bicycle and pedestrian planning and project implementation at the local, community or regional level.

1 The Synthesis Project, Policy Brief No. 11, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: "The built environment and physical activity: What is the relationship?"