

Benefits of Active Transportation

What is Active Transportation?



Active transportation means getting around on foot or by bike (and also by wheeling or rolling as, for example, in a wheelchair or on a push scooter). It is another term for non-motorized or human-powered transportation” – and perhaps a better term, since it expresses the important connection between healthy, active living and our

transportation choices. For people to choose active transportation as a way of getting around, communities must provide a system of sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, traffic-calmed streets, safe crossings and other facilities that connect the places where people live, work, study, shop, play and visit.

Why Active Transportation?

Many communities throughout California and elsewhere have seen greatly increased interest in walking and biking on the part of residents in recent years, not only for recreation but also for transportation. At the same time, there has been a growing acknowledgment by decision-makers and the broader public that active transportation contributes positively to quality of life and should therefore be encouraged and promoted.

Active transportation has many benefits. The main ones can be grouped into five broad categories:

- Health
- Mobility
- Neighborhood livability
- Economy
- Environment

In recognition of the benefits of active transportation, the Tulare County Association of Governments is preparing a Regional Active Transportation Plan for the county. The main purpose of the plan, called **Bike 'n Walk Tulare County**, is to recommend specific projects to make active transportation around the county safer and more convenient. The recommendations will be based in large part on input to be received from Tulare County residents regarding their needs and concerns related to walking, biking and disabled access.



Health

By definition, active transportation allows people to build physical activity into everyday life, by enabling them to walk or bike to their destinations. Even a moderate amount of daily exercise has an impressive range of benefits to both physical and mental health. These benefits range from lower risk of heart disease, adult-onset diabetes, high-blood pressure and stress to more energy, flexibility and muscle strength. Of course, physical activity can also help combat our much-publicized obesity crisis. In addition, by enabling people to drive—and pollute—less, active transportation can reduce the number of traffic collisions and lead to lower asthma rates.

Did you know...?

- 55% of American adults do not meet minimum recommended levels of physical activity.¹
- Two-thirds of adults, and nearly one-third of children, are considered overweight or obese, with obesity-related health care costs now estimated at \$160 billion per year.²
- Residents in communities with sidewalks are 65% more likely to walk.³
- Teens who walk or bike to school watch less TV and are less likely to smoke.⁴
- The health benefits to individuals of walking and biking have major financial implications for society, since the federal and state governments pay 44% of health care costs.⁵

Mobility

Active transportation gives people who cannot drive more and cheaper options for getting around independently to meet everyday needs. Those who benefit most from improvements to walking and biking include children (particularly for going to school); many seniors and people with disabilities; and low-income people, for whom the cost of owning and operating a car can be prohibitive.

Transportation options are also important for drivers who would like to spend less time behind the wheel shuttling themselves or others around. Drivers also benefit from less congestion and demand for parking, as even a small number of people shifting to walking and biking can have an impact on traffic. (Think of how a slow-draining sink or bathtub can fill up and spill over from even a small change in water flow.)

Did you know...?

- In a typical community, roughly a third of people cannot drive due to age, disabilities or low income.⁶
- In 1969, almost half of children went to school on foot or by bike; by 2009, only 13% did.⁷
- Seniors who do not drive make 65% fewer trips to visit family, see friends or go to church.⁸
- 28% of all trips are one mile or less yet two-thirds of these trips are made by car.⁹
- The 3% drop in vehicle miles traveled in the economic crisis of 2008 produced a 30% drop in peak-period congestion during that year.¹⁰

Neighborhood livability

To the extent that promoting active transportation leads people to walk and bike more and to drive less, it can improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods in important ways. When residents are out on foot or by bike, they interact more with neighbors. Residential streets become calmer and quieter, which, again, encourages interaction. Streets become safer, not only in terms of traffic but also in terms of crime, since pedestrians and cyclists “put more eyes on the street.” In ways that are rarely appreciated, walking and biking build community and create “social capital.”



Did you know...?

- Improving sidewalks, trails and other places for active transportation creates more attractive and vibrant communities. It is in such places that people typically interact in public, as they stand, wait, socialize and window-shop.¹¹
- Perhaps contrary to popular belief, per capita crime rates tend to be lower in more walkable communities. Better conditions for walking (and for cycling) increases the number of active participants, who act as deterrents to illegal or anti-social behavior and are readier to report threats.¹²

Economy

Active transportation can benefit the bottom line of households, businesses and cities. The economic benefits of walking and biking include lower transportation costs for individuals and families; increased property values in traffic-calmed neighborhoods; savings to cities from less wear and tear on streets and less demand for roadway improvements and parking lots; a greater ability for cities and the region to attract new residents and employers; and a potential boost to regional tourism.

Did you know...?

- The average annual cost for owning and operating a car is almost \$9,000¹³, whereas walking is essentially free and bicycling is very low cost.
- Car-dependent households devote 20% more income to transportation than households in communities with more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly streets.¹⁴
- Homes in neighborhoods with a high WalkScore sell for \$4,000 to \$34,000 more than the average home.¹⁵
- 81% of millennials (generally people born in the 1980s and 1990s) say affordable and convenient transportation alternatives are at least somewhat important when deciding where to live and work.¹⁶

Environment

In enabling people to make short trips on foot or by bike instead of by car, active transportation can help us address a number of environmental challenges. The most discussed, and perhaps most critical, environmental benefits of active transportation are reduced air pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases. They are not the only ones, however. Other environmental benefits include energy savings; less noise pollution; less water pollution; and even reduced pressure to develop agricultural and open space.

Did you know...?

- 30–45% of Americans live in areas impacted by traffic-related air pollution.¹⁷

- Short car trips pollute more per mile because engines are less efficient during the first few minutes of operation. Because walking and biking tend to substitute for short trips, they provide relatively large energy savings: a 1% shift from driving to walking or biking reduces fuel consumption 2–4%.¹⁸
- Driving can lead to water pollution from car fluids washing off streets and highways in the form of run-off; and from air pollution “depositing” into water bodies.¹⁹
- Driving requires 15 times as much space—in the form of roads and parking—than biking, and about 100 times as much as walking.²⁰

¹ www.atpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Complete%20Streets%20Benefit%20Public%20and%20Environmental%20Health.pdf

² www.partnership4at.org/why/benefits

³ www.atpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Complete%20Streets%20Benefit%20Public%20and%20Environmental%20Health.pdf

⁴ www.atpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Complete%20Streets%20Help%20Youth%20Stay%20Active.pdf

⁵ www.railstotrails.org/policy/active-transportation-for-america/quantifying-benefits/#healthben

⁶ www.vtppi.org/nmt-tdm.pdf

⁷ www.atpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Complete%20Streets%20Help%20Youth%20Stay%20Active.pdf

⁸ www.atpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Complete%20Streets%20Benefit%20Older%20Adults%20and%20People%20with%20Disabilities.pdf

⁹ www.atpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Complete%20Streets%20Benefit%20Public%20and%20Environmental%20Health.pdf

¹⁰ www.railstotrails.org/policy/active-transportation-for-america/quantifying-benefits/#healthben

¹¹ www.vtppi.org/nmt-tdm.pdf

¹² www.vtppi.org/nmt-tdm.pdf

¹³ American Automobile Association’s annual “Your Driving Costs” study for 2012

¹⁴ www.atpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Complete%20Streets%20Make%20Economic%20Sense.pdf

¹⁵ www.atpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Complete%20Streets%20Make%20Economic%20Sense.pdf

¹⁶ “Investing in Place for Economic Growth and Competitiveness;” American Planning Association, May 2014

¹⁷ www.atpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Complete%20Streets%20Benefit%20Public%20and%20Environmental%20Health.pdf

¹⁸ www.vtppi.org/nmt-tdm.pdf

¹⁹ water.epa.gov/lawsregs/lawsguidance/cwa/tmdl/airdeposition_index.cfm

²⁰ www.vtppi.org/nmt-tdm.pdf