

CASE STUDY

ACTIVE LIVING



According to the Active Living Research program from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, active living integrates physical activity into the daily routines of people. Its goal is for youth to accumulate at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day, and for adults to get at least 30 minutes through: walking or bicycling for transportation, exercise or pleasure; playing in the park; working in the yard; or using recreation facilities. In order to facilitate and support opportunities for active living, a focus on the built environment and good urban design is essential—including neighborhoods, transportation systems, buildings, street and sidewalk design, parks and open space.

BENEFITS

PERFORMANCE

- Encourages population density and employment through urban design
- Stimulates mixed land-use development
- Encourages accessibility to transit and traffic safety through active living policy

EQUITY AND COMMUNITY

- Encourages activity of neighborhood residents with public areas and exercise programs
- Increases social capital, sense of community and perception of safety
- Provides individual savings by offering alternative modes of transportation

ECONOMIC

- Expands housing choices (compact, mixed-use neighborhoods can provide smaller, more efficient homes and multi-family developments, reducing overall infrastructure and housing costs)
- Promotes healthy economies

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

INSTITUTIONAL

Local zoning regulations (particularly in suburbs) may restrict density and mixed land use, thereby preventing compact development. Highly regulated land-use markets limit the supply of compact developments. Lack of coordination between health, land-use, and transportation policies makes implementing compact, mixed-use developments difficult.

FINANCIAL

Private developers often lack incentives to develop affordable multi-family projects, due to lower profits. Residents of low-income communities have limited resources to develop the built environment infrastructure necessary to encourage healthy behaviors such as pedestrian infrastructure and places where they can be physically active: sports facilities, parks, bike paths and lanes, walking trails, and public pools.

POLITICAL

Local governments often do not support compact developments due to political resistance from homeowners worried about congestion, local taxes, or home values. Often city programs are single policy driven, making both holistic design and agency coordination (housing, land use, health, and transportation) complicated. Walking and bicycling often are not considered municipal priorities, face lack of funding and staffing challenges, and are not sufficiently supported by residents. These barriers are more prevalent among rural municipalities.

PERSONAL

People are less willing to walk in their neighborhoods when they have to deal with stresses (traffic congestion, noise, violence, injuries, falls and traffic accidents). Lack of time and energy, poor health and childcare responsibilities discourage physical activity.

SOCIAL

Not having company, not seeing other people exercising, lack of interest, self-consciousness about one's appearance, and cost of structured physical activity programs prevent people from being physically active. Low-income communities often lack market control policies such as rent control or inclusionary zoning, which may help to reduce potential involuntary displacement due to neighborhood redevelopment projects.

URBAN

Highways may be difficult to cross by foot due to infrequent pedestrian crossings. Turn lanes that affect bus access to a bus stop reduce willingness to use public transit. Lack of sidewalks also prevents physical activity.

CASE STUDY: SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Starting in 1997, this Congress-funded program has set to make walking or bicycling to and from school safer for children through education and infrastructure improvements. In addition, schools and local governments look for ways to reduce the number of children who are driven to school, reducing traffic congestion and air pollution, and getting children to be more physically active. In 2011, the program benefited 11,100 schools and 4.8 million children.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Federal government, state departments of transportation, local governments, school systems, parents, local school boards, state and local departments of education, and health agencies and organizations.

FINANCING

Almost \$950 million has been allocated from the federal government to state transportation departments between 2005 and 2011. Current funding is \$183 million per year. State departments of transportation also contribute to the funding of the program.

IMPLEMENTATION

State departments of transportation award federal funds to local governments and school systems to improve safety and get more children walking and bicycling to school. Between 70 and 90 percent of funding is spent on infrastructure improvements (sidewalks, bike paths, crosswalks, school zone signage, and traffic calming) within a two-mile radius of schools. The remaining 10 to 30 percent is allocated for programs such as teaching children traffic safety skills, ensuring that motorists are driving safely around schools, and running programs that encourage more children to walk and bicycle. Because this program considers broader goals connected to health, education, and social justice issues, it has been necessary to go beyond traditional transportation partners to engage a range of organizations and agencies.



LESSONS LEARNED

- Neighborhoods that offer programs to encourage physical activity in public parks increase residents' active living.
- Improvements can include enhancing street aesthetics by widening and maintaining sidewalks; promoting street connectivity and short blocks; having trees, benches, waste receptacles and good lighting on sidewalks and having maximum parking requirements.
- In suburban areas, older strip malls can be rebuilt as mixed-use projects (retail, office and residential together) to retain and attract work, shopping and leisure activities and to encourage walking.
- Conflict points need to be controlled through road design elements: medians, alleys, traffic signals, movement restrictions, intersection design, turn/merge lane, free-flow, corner radio, and bicycle infrastructure.
- Traffic-calming measures such as speed limits, narrow car lanes and streets, speed bumps, altered road alignments, and traffic circles discourage automobile traffic.
- Adopting ordinances that increase street connectivity spreads vehicle traffic throughout the network, providing smaller and safer roads for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Promoting higher-density land use and increasing the number of destinations—places to work, shop, and recreate—in walking or bicycling distance reduces the distances traveled by motor vehicle and increases walking rates.

OTHER EXAMPLES

- KANSAS CITY, MO Perceptions of Neighborhood Park Quality: Associations with Physical Activity and BMI
- NATIONWIDE (49 COMMUNITIES) Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities
- PORTLAND, OR Understanding Barriers to Bicycling in Low-Income Communities of Color

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