



## FACTS

### Physical Activity Promotion in Neighborhoods and Transportation

#### Overview

It's not a new idea to merge public health with transportation and city planning—the practice dates back to the 1800's. Today we realize that transportation systems, development patterns, community design and planning decisions have a profound effect on everyone's level of physical activity.

In order to change the landscape for healthier living, many individuals and agencies need to rethink the way they plan and develop communities. Transportation and community designs show great promise to change sedentary routines into more active ones. Bicycling and walking should and will play a bigger role if we make it a priority to build active transportation systems, networks of bicycle lanes, paths, shared-use trails and sidewalks, connecting the places where substantial numbers of people live, work, shop and play.<sup>i</sup>

#### The Hard Facts-Biking and Walking are Underutilized as Transportation

America's obsession with the automobile is obvious. Increasingly, development is geared toward people driving to destinations—work, school, play, leisure or faith.

- Half of the trips in America can be completed within a 20-minute bike ride; one quarter are within a 20-minute walk. Yet, the vast majority of these short trips are taken by automobile.<sup>i</sup>
- For the price of a single mile of a four-lane urban highway, approximately \$50 million, hundreds of miles of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure can be built, an investment that could complete an entire network of active transportation facilities for a mid-sized city.<sup>i</sup>
- Many communities are designed in a way that renders bicycling and walking unfeasible, or even dangerous.<sup>i</sup>
- Currently, only 31 percent of all trips of one mile or less are made by bicycling or walking, while two-thirds are made by car. Ninety percent of all trips between one and three miles are taken by car.<sup>i</sup>

#### Site Selection of Schools and Recreation Facilities

Each year, across the country, scores of new schools and community recreation facilities are built in addition to old ones being renovated. Many decisions made on behalf of such construction and renovation have important implications for increasing physical activity.<sup>ii</sup>

A wide variety of institutions and governments are responding to the decrease in biking and walking to school by paying more attention to the factors they believe make a difference, including the quality of the walking environment.<sup>ii</sup> Schools often anchor neighborhoods and they can drive home-buying decisions and traffic patterns.<sup>ii</sup> Locating schools and recreation facilities closer to their users helps to facilitate them staying active. Improving the quality of the built environment around and between schools, recreation facilities and homes encourages more users to bicycle and walk—reducing necessary car trips.<sup>ii</sup>

- In 2001, less than 15% of students (ages 5-15) walked to/from school, and 1% biked. In 1969, 48% of the students walked or biked to school.
- In 2001, 31% of children (ages 5-15) who lived within a mile of school walked or biked while in 1969 that number was almost 90%.<sup>ii</sup>
- School proximity to students matters. Students with shorter walk and bike times to or from school are more likely to walk and bike.<sup>ii</sup>
- The built environment influences travel choices. Students traveling through higher-quality environments are more likely to bicycle and walk.<sup>ii</sup>

#### Policy Changes to Increase Physical Activity-A National Physical Activity Plan

The United States first National Physical Activity Plan (Plan) was launched in 2010 with a vision: One day, all Americans

will be physically active and they will live, work, and play in environments that facilitate regular physical activity.<sup>iii</sup> The Plan, a public-private sector effort, consists of a set of policies, programs, and initiatives directed to increasing physical activity in all segments of the American population. It provides a roadmap to get America moving. The Plan addresses the physical infrastructure, policy, educational, behavioral, and medical issues that affect how and why so many Americans are not moving. It unites professionals across sectors – in transportation and urban planning, education, recreation, sports, fitness, medicine and public health, and business – in a massive effort to collaborate and solve the problem. Countless numbers of organizations are working together to change our communities in ways that will enable every American to be sufficiently physically active.

### **Immediate Priorities for the Education Sector**

- **Identify new partners and strengthen existing partnerships to adopt approaches that support bicycling, walking, and active community environments.**
  - Encourage national, state and local organizations to develop partnerships that focus on supporting active community environments to increase the prevalence of walking and bicycling.
- **Improve community-planning processes to integrate and prioritize opportunities to increase bicycling, walking, and other physical activity related outcomes.**
  - Enlist a minimum of 100 city and county planning and public health departments to implement a multi-disciplinary planning process in collaboration with city planning, transportation, and other disciplines. Process will yield a comprehensive plan that has incorporated all departments interests to increase levels of walking and bicycling in their communities to 15 percent of all trips by 2015.
- **Implement policy approaches that target and prioritize resources to increase walking, bicycling, and other physical activity.**
  - Actively work to increase federal transportation funding that supports walking and bicycling.
  - Gain commitments from minimum of 25 states' Departments of Transportation (DOTs) and 100 metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) implement complete street policies by Dec. 2015.
- **Increase accountability of government agencies to increase walking and bicycling with established annual targets and performance measures.**
  - Establish National Transportation Objectives (NTO) that will increase bicycling and walking by 15% by 2015 and 20% by 2020.
  - Identify best practices in active transportation, complete streets, and context-sensitive solutions support increased levels of walking and bicycling.
  - Catalyze the development of a surveillance system that will collect data (national, state, local) on levels of use and safety for walking and bicycling.

- **Improve infrastructure access to and site location of schools, recreational facilities, and public transportation to increase walking and bicycling.**
  - Define and identify how state DOT's make Safe Routes to School (SRTS) an integral part of their operations by Dec. 2011.
  - Perform a feasibility analysis to identify the readiness of implementing safe routes to high schools by Dec. 2011. Encourage funding to expand to include SRTS to include high schools.
- **Increase the awareness, knowledge, and skills of professionals, elected officials, and citizen advocates who will implement approaches to support active community environments.**
  - Enlist professional organizations to provide standardized training on implementing the principles of complete streets and active community environments to increase levels of walking and bicycling.
  - Gain commitments from minimum of 25 state governors and 100 mayors to recognize and support the benefits of active community environment and prioritize initiatives that will increase walking and bicycling by Dec. 2015.
  - Launch an awareness campaign targeting citizen advocates and community leaders to focus on the importance of walking and bicycling by Dec. 2015.

*The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity (NCPA) is the leading force in the country promoting physical activity and fitness initiatives. NCPA is a diverse blend of associations, health organizations, and private corporations, advocating for initiatives and policies that encourage Americans of all ages to become more physically active. NCPA is providing the leadership for implementation of the National Physical Activity Plan. For more information, visit <http://www.physicalactivityplan.org>*

<sup>i</sup> Gotschi T and Mills K. Active Transportation for America: The Case for Increased Federal Investment in Bicycling and Walking. Washington, DC. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and Bikes Belong. 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting. Washington, DC: US Environmental Protection Agency; 2003.

<sup>iii</sup> U.S. National Physical Activity Plan (2010). National Physical Activity Plan. Retrieved January 5, 2011, from <http://physicalactivityplan.org/theplan.php>

#### **For More Information Contact:**

Sheila Franklin  
 The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity  
 1100 H Street, NW • Suite 510 • Washington DC • 20005  
 202.454.7521  
[www.ncppa.org](http://www.ncppa.org) • [sfranklin@ncppa.org](mailto:sfranklin@ncppa.org)

