# Access to Public Transportation and Active Transportation Opportunities

Transportation options that promote and facilitate physical activity, such as walking and bicycling, benefit individual and community health. ASTHO previously developed a series of cross-sectoral policy guides that describe the link between transportation and health. This policy guide provides examples of housing-related programs and policies that incorporate opportunities for active transportation and physical activity.

Over the last several decades, urban sprawl and suburbanization in the U.S. have lead to a reliance on cars. At the same time, a lack of investment in low income neighborhoods has resulted in whole communities that are unable to access high quality jobs, goods, and services. Both occurrences have hindered individual and community health.

Creating diverse and active transportation options can improve population health in a number of ways. Simply walking to and from public transportation can often provide significant daily physical activity. More biking and walking translates to fewer cars on the road and reduced greenhouse gas emissions, which can improve air quality.[1] These health benefits require cross-sector collaboration and a commitment to reinvesting in transportation infrastructure and low income communities. The following are strategies for improving access to public and active transportation.

## Transit-Oriented Development

Transit-oriented development (TOD) is a community development model that incorporates housing, retail, and commercial growth into walkable neighborhoods within a half mile of high quality public transportation.[2] TOD can promote health by reducing transportation costs, freeing up money to be used for other essential goods and services. TOD can also improve access to services and jobs and provide opportunities for physical activity through carefully planned neighborhood design and accessible active transportation options.

ASTHO's TOD policy guide highlights successful policies and programs that support TOD.

## Planning Tools

Planning professionals play a critical role in creating healthy communities. They are at the center of decisions on neighborhood development or where to build highways or new bus routes. Public engagement is embedded in the regional planning process through public surveys, town halls, meetings, and public hearings. Community input raises issues such as safety, affordability, and access to goods, services and jobs.

Planners can promote access to transit and active transportation through the use of development plans (on all scales), zoning codes, and development regulations. ASTHO's comprehensive regional planning transportation policy guide provides additional information on the importance of integrating public health concepts into regional plans to create healthier communities.

## Regional Planning Grants

Cities across the United States have used HUD Regional Planning Grants to bring healthier transportation opportunities to their residents. These grants are provided through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, an interagency effort aimed at increasing access to housing, transportation and economic opportunities.

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Regional Planning are designed to promote social equity, inclusion, and access to opportunity by funding activities resulting in location-efficient and more equitable communities.[3] In 2013, Puget Sound Regional Council used a $5 million Regional Planning Grant to enhance and apply its regional growth strategy at the community level through its new Growing Transit Communities project, a compact of 39 partners from local government, business, and other sectors. The project has a particular focus on building communities along transit routes.[4]



### Infill Development

Infill development is another strategy that can improve access to public and/or active transportation. Infill development is new construction built on, or sometimes on top of, underutilized and vacant lots within an existing neighborhood.[5] This type of development increases the overall density of the community and may provide justification for creating or expanding transit routes and stations.

One benefit of infill development is that it decreases the need to drive to access goods and services. Fewer vehicle miles traveled in turn decreases roadway congestion and air pollution, which both have downstream health benefits by decreasing motor vehicle accidents and incidence of respiratory illness, respectively.[6]

In January 2014, Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley called for the formation of a state infill, redevelopment and revitalization initiative to identify best practices for creating healthy communities that offer a range of housing and transportation options.[7] The final product of this effort will be an interactive toolkit called the Infill, Redevelopment & Revitalization Tool Box."[8]

### Tools for Health & Transit

*Walkscore.com*

Walk Score is an online tool that provides walkability and transit accessibility information by neighborhood.[9] This tool can be a useful resource for house and apartment hunters. However, it also serves a useful resource for public health, transportation, and planning professionals.

Researchers can use Walk Score data to explore the links between the built environment and public health. Walk Score offers a variety of data, including:[10]

- Walkability measurements based on walking routes to destinations like grocery stores, schools, parks, restaurants, and retail locations.

- Transit scores that measure transit accessibility based on the closest stop on each route, route frequency, and mode of transit.

- Bike scores that measure bike accessibility based on bike infrastructure, topography, destinations, and road connectivity.

- Travel time analysis maps that identify food deserts, park deserts, play deserts, and distance to schools and places of employment.

- Pedestrian friendliness metrics, including population density, average block length, intersection density, and route directness.

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## The H+T Affordability Index

Housing is considered affordable if it costs less than 30 percent of a household budget, but many analyses do not factor in the cost of transportation.[11] Designed to better understand the relationship between transportation costs and affordability, the H+T Affordability Index helps users estimate the transportation cost associated with living in a given neighborhood. The index can help planning professionals identify challenges associated with sustainability and expected community growth and can help decisionmakers communicate true costs associated with policy and program recommendations.[12]

[1] ASTHO. "Healthy Transportation Policies." Available at http://www.astho.org/Programs/Health-in-All-Policies/Environmental-Health-in-All-Policies/Healthy-Transportation-Introduction/. Accessed 9-3-2014.

[2] Reconnecting America. "2010 Inventory of TOD Programs." 2011. Available at http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/resource-center/books-and-reports/2011/2010-inventory-of-tod-programs/. Accessed 8-20-2014.

[3] HUD. "Leveraging for Livability: A Guide to HUD Programs and the Livability Principles Region X." March 2014. Available at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=LeveragingforLivability.pdf. Accessed 9-30-2014.

[4] HUD. "Leveraging for Livability: A Guide to HUD Programs and the Livability Principles Region X." March 2014. Available at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=LeveragingforLivability.pdf. Accessed 9-30-2014.

[5] PolicyLink. "Infill Incentives." Available at http://policylink.info/EDTK/Infill/. Accessed 9-25-2014.

[6] Reconnecting America. "Building Capacity: Helping Communities Create Vibrant, Healthy and Economically Prosperous Neighborhoods." December 2013; p. 29. Available at http://www.cnt.org/media/ReconnectingAmerica_BuildingCapacity.pdf. Accessed 8-21-2014.

[7] State of Maryland. "Letter from Governor Martin O'Malley to Jon Laria, Chairman of the Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission. January 2014. Available at http://planning.maryland.gov/PDF/YourPart/773/IRR/GovLG-LetterToGrowthComm01222014.pdf. Accessed 9-30-2014.

[8] Maryland Department of Planning. "Infill, Redevelopment & Revitalization." Available at http://planning.maryland.gov/YourPart/773/infill.shtml. Accessed 9-25-2014.

[9] Walk Score. "About Walk Score." Available at http://www.walkscore.com/about.shtml. Accessed 8-20-2014.

[10] Walk Score. "Walkability, Real Estate, and Public Health Data." Available at http://www.walkscore.com/professional/research.php. Accessed 9-30-2014.

[11] Center for Neighborhood Technology. "The H+T Affordability Index." Available at http://htaindex.cnt.org/. Accessed 9-30-2014.

[12] Reconnecting America. "Building Capacity: Helping Communities Create Vibrant, Healthy and Economically Prosperous Neighborhoods." December 2013; p 9. Available at http://www.cnt.org/media/ReconnectingAmerica_BuildingCapacity.pdf. Accessed 9-3-2014.