



ALPHA Resolution

2009-02 Improving Health through Transportation and Land Use Policies

Transportation and land use policies are significant factors in the built environment and impact rates of injury and death due to traffic crashes, ease and safety of physical activity, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and access to key community resources such as health care and healthy food. Transportation and land development patterns have historically favored automobile travel, spawned sprawling development, and have taken an unnecessary toll on human life.¹

This resolution considers four major health impacts of transportation and land use policies that take the largest tolls on health, social equity, and the economy: (1) traffic injuries and fatalities, (2) physical activity and non-motorized transportation, (3) air and water quality, and (4) the disparate impact on vulnerable populations.

Traffic Injuries and Fatalities

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death in Alaska for people younger than 35.² Annually in Alaska, traffic injuries and fatalities account for more than 86 deaths and over 3,000 nonfatal injuries.³ In 2007, there were 13 pedestrian and 2 bicyclist fatalities in Alaska, and over 600 reported combined injuries from non-motorized travel.⁴

Traffic injuries and fatalities can be *prevented* through effective traffic safety policies, designs and practices.⁵ Providing for safe walking, bicycling, and public transportation can result in fewer traffic injuries than building for motor vehicles alone.⁶ Contrary to the belief that increased bicycle and foot traffic lead to more cyclist and pedestrian injuries, increasing the numbers of non-motorized travelers may actually make walking and bicycling *safer*.⁷ There is also evidence that residents of communities designed to facilitate non-motorized transit have lower per capita traffic fatality rates.⁸

Physical Activity and Non-Motorized Transportation

According to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, 42% of Alaskan adults do not meet recommended levels of physical activity, and 20% are completely sedentary.⁹ The causal link between physical activity and health is well established; physical inactivity is a major contributor to the rising rates of chronic illnesses such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.¹⁰

An emerging body of evidence shows that transportation and land development patterns influence people's decision to engage in physical activity, making transportation and land-use decisions an opportunity to increase levels of physical activity.^{11,12,13,14,15,16} These land-use characteristics include higher-density and mixed use development, good public transportation, and proximity to destinations such as shopping, schools, and workplaces.¹⁷ Bicycle and pedestrian facilities, good street connectivity, presence of parks and open space, and residents' perceived safety also enhance physical activity.^{18,19,20,21}

Air and Water Quality

Particulate matter and other pollutants are present at high concentrations along traffic-heavy roads,²² especially when a large fraction of this traffic uses diesel fuel.²³ Several studies have documented that children attending school near major roadways have higher rates of respiratory symptoms²⁴, asthma diagnoses, and allergic sensitization,^{25,26} and children living near major roadways are more likely to suffer from asthma.^{27,28} Adults living or working near major roadways are also more likely to suffer from asthma²⁹ and other respiratory diseases, as well as atherosclerosis and other cardiovascular problems.^{30,31} Roads, highways, and bridges are a source of significant contributions of pollutants to our nation's waters. Runoff of oil and gasoline pollutes waterways, and increasing the amount of impervious surfaces, such as roadways and parking lots, generates further runoff pollution.³²

Health Equity and Disparate Impact on Vulnerable Population

Nearly one-third of the American population, including children, older adults, people with disabilities, low-income people, women, and rural residents do not have access to transportation or cannot purchase transportation).³³ Low-income households may spend up to 40 percent of their income on transportation expenses, further perpetuating the gap in economic disparities and isolation from essential opportunities and resources.³⁴

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Public Health Association supports the following transportation and land use goals:

1. Federal transportation policy must include health, equity, and safety as a high priority for all travelers. Roadways should be safe and accessible for all travelers rather than being designed exclusively for motorized travelers. Maintenance of transportation infrastructure should be adequately funded in all seasons.
 - a. A greater portion of federal, state, and local transportation dollars should be invested in safe infrastructure for walking and bicycling.
 - b. A greater portion of federal, state, and local transportation dollars should be invested in public transportation (including transit operating funds).
 - c. All new construction and redevelopment of roadways should apply the *Complete Streets* model³⁵ to make roadways safe for *all* users.
 - d. Federal, state, and local policy should create incentives for investing in underserved communities, particularly those that spend a disproportionate percentage of their household income on transportation as well as those communities with existing infrastructure to support non-motorized travel and transit-oriented development.
 - e. Roadways should be designed to maintain lower speeds that encourage people to walk and bike and create greater distances and attractive barriers between moving traffic and non-motorized travelers (i.e., pedestrians and bicyclists).
 - f. Community residents, public health, social justice, housing experts, developers, and other diverse stakeholders should be engaged in transportation policy, planning and design.
2. Transportation policy and subsequent implementation must set a high priority on using cleaner energy sources and reducing harmful emissions, including greenhouse gases.
 - a. Reducing the transportation sector's contributions to global climate change should be prioritized at the federal, state, and local level.

- b. Environmental justice goals to reduce the disparate exposure to harmful emissions from mobile sources should be honored and advanced in transportation and land use activities.
3. Community development and redevelopment activities should preserve historic, environmental, agricultural, and aesthetic resources.
4. State Departments of Transportation and local agencies should partner with community groups to conduct Health Impact Assessments for major transportation and land use activities.
 - a. All agencies that make decisions that impact health should be held accountable and be responsible for these health outcomes.
 - b. Public health should work with transportation and city planners to identify the health indicators and performance measures by which to evaluate such activities.
5. State and local transportation and land-use decisions should promote equity by:
 - a. Improving multimodal linkages between housing, employment centers, health care facilities, healthy food retailers, and schools, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color.
 - b. Encouraging high-density, mixed-use, and transit-oriented development with affordable housing and transit options in major employment and neighborhood centers.
 - c. Building roadways to accommodate safe non-motorized travel of people with disabilities, older adults and children.
 - d. Prioritizing local and regional food transportation networks and infrastructure over long-distance transportation.
 - e. Ensuring that jobs in the transportation and land use sectors are open to all, including people of color, immigrants, and women.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED as an organization ALPHA, as well as individual Board Members and other Members will engage in low and no-cost advocacy efforts to promote **Improving Health through Transportation and Land Use Policies thorough**, but not limited to:

- Circulation of advocacy action requests to membership,
- Circulation of advocacy action requests to partners and other individuals,
- Posting of ALPHA resolutions on the Alaska Public Health Association’s website,
- Participation in email advocacy campaigns,
- Contact with policy makers via phone, letter, email and/or in-person meetings,
- Public testimony in legislative hearings, town hall meetings, and other public forums,
- Contribution of op-ed articles and/or letters to the editor,
- Contributions to radio programs via calling-in or scheduled interviews,
- Distribution of this resolution statement to policy makers and key officials.

Fiscal Impact

The fiscal impact on ALPHA by the proposed resolution will be minimal. This action will result in minor costs associated with sending this resolution and accompanying cover letter to the Governor and key political leaders.

Public Health Impact

This action will benefit public health by reducing traffic crashes and fatalities; improving opportunities to be physically active in safe, healthy places; improving air and water quality; and reducing the health disparate impact of vulnerable populations.

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