



The Vermont Legislative Research Shop

Healthy Communities

Background

Many lawmakers and organizations are recognizing the connection between public health and community planning. A 1998 study from the Centers for Disease Control reports that approximately 29% of adults in the US are considered “sedentary” and 50% are considered overweight, creating what some consider a formidable health burden (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). Many interest groups and professionals agree that physical inactivity can be remedied in part by healthy city planning, but differ on the best way to implement changes.

Healthy Residents

There are proactive ideas to help community members become more active, most prominent is the push to include walking and/or bicycling into one’s daily routine (Killingsworth 2001). Walking is perhaps the most accessible form of exercise for all people, and studies suggest that it can be beneficial. For instance, in a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, it is reported that “among retired, nonsmoking men, those who walked less than 1.6 km a day had a mortality rate nearly twice that of those who walked more than 3.2 km per day” (Hakim et al, 1998).

Bicycling is another popular form of exercise that can allow people to get school and work every day. The League of American Bicyclists reports that about 42 million Americans own bicycles, but many people use them recreationally rather than as a primary form of transportation (Killingsworth 1998). Killingsworth also reports that “in the United States, nearly 25% of all trips are less than 1 mile, but more than 75% these short trips are made by automobile, so it is reasonable to expect that many trips could be made on foot or bicycle” (1998).

Community Layout

The planning and design of cities and towns impacts the feasibility of routine walking and biking. Many communities are trying to figure out how to have safe biker- and walker-friendly

space on roads and sidewalks. Active Transportation, a Canadian organization, offers the following list of actions that are characteristic of communities that promote active transportation:
designated bicycle lanes and r

Walk and Bike Trips vs. Automobile Trips (1977-1995)

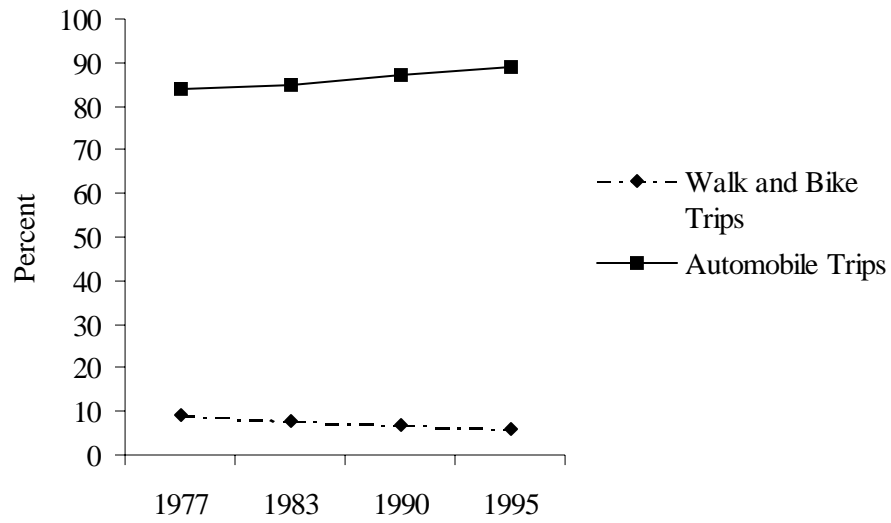


Figure 1: Percentage of trips made by automobile versus percent made by walking or bicycle. Source: US Department of Transportation, *National Bicycling and Walking Five Year Study* (1999).

Appendix

Urban Design Challenges

Literature from various disciplines suggests that community design and transportation systems often neglect pedestrians and bicyclists because destinations of interest are distant and not very well connected, making safe and convenient walking and bicycling difficult, if not impossible. Aspects of community design impart

Collaborative efforts. Community design and transportation choices are important factors to consider when developing policies. Public health, city planning, and transportation officials, therefore, should continue to collaborate on developing designs that promote and encourage physical activity.

Additionally, it is important for public health practitioners to become involved with organizations such as the American Planning Association (<http://www.planning.org>), the Institute of Transportation Engineers (<http://www.ite.org>), the Urban Land Institute (<http://www.uli.org>), the Congress for the New Urbanism (<http://www.cni.org>), and the Environmental Design Research Association (<http://www.telepath.com/edra>). Advocating for public health and physical activity with such organizations is a vital health promotion strategy.

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