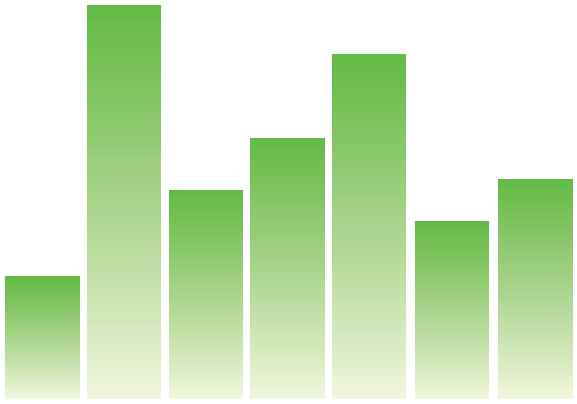
Safe Routes to School National Partnership



INVESTING IN HEALTH

Robust Local Active Transportation Financing for Healthy Communities

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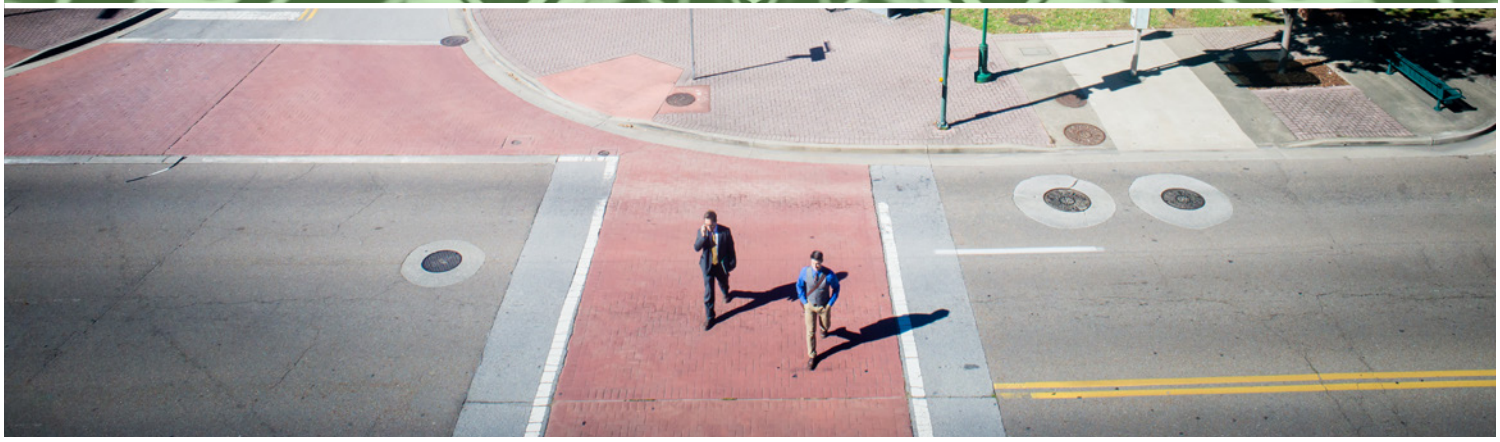
Introduction

To transform our communities into healthy places, we need to invest in creating streets and neighborhoods that make regular physical activity easy to achieve through healthy walking and bicycling. Healthcare and public health professionals can play important roles in working for active communities that support healthy residents. This report will help health professionals and others understand why we need robust active transportation financing, what the evidence shows, and how we can use funding to create healthy, active communities.

Healthy people require places that support healthy habits. One core aspect of a healthy community is having streets and neighborhoods that make it safe and easy for people to walk and bike to get around. That means streets with sidewalks and separated bicycle lanes, well-marked crossings, and good lighting. Our current communities are largely designed and built for cars, and have little in the way of infrastructure or support for safe walking and bicycling. When people walk and bike for transportation, they incorporate physical activity into their daily routines, which improves a variety of health outcomes. Having safe and convenient opportunities for active transportation produces health and other benefits for communities. But communities can't develop robust active transportation networks that support a range of users without adequate funding. The good news is that local governments can employ proven active transportation financing strategies to create active communities, improving health and well-being for everyone in communities—children, families, and older adults.

This report provides an overview of the key role that active transportation financing can play in developing healthy communities. In **Section 1**, we set out the evidence regarding the need for and benefits of increased active transportation financing in local government. In **Section 2**, the report delves into what active transportation financing is and how transportation funding works. **Section 3** examines different approaches that local governments have taken to funding active transportation, exploring best practices, successes, challenges, and equity issues. **Section 4** explores important considerations regarding policy goals and campaign directions. In the **Conclusion**, the report discusses a diverse cohort of supportive stakeholders, including the healthcare sector, have the capacity to strengthen the potential for success in both strategy development and implementation. This report seeks to demystify active transportation financing initiatives and set the stage for strong health partnerships that can generate healthy, active, equitable communities.

1 The Evidence Behind Investing in Walking & Biking



Active transportation describes any way of getting around that relies upon our own physical movement. This includes walking, bicycling, wheelchair rolling, skating, and other ways of traveling under our own power. Because active transportation requires physical activity, it has broad benefits for health. Active transportation also supports thriving people and vibrant communities in a variety of other ways, supporting social connectivity and neighborhood vitality. Low levels of physical activity in the United States are contributing to a variety of troubling health trends. Research and studies have definitively shown that walking and bicycling are key ways for community members to get sufficient physical activity[1] as part of their daily lives, helping combat the eight percent of deaths in the U.S. associated with inadequate levels of physical activity and leading to reduced risks of stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, some cancers, premature death, and depression.[2] Among people who walk on a regular basis, about 60 percent meet the national physical activity guidelines (through walking alone or in combination with other forms of physical activity), compared with 30 percent of those who do not walk regularly.[3]

Almost one-third of transit users get their entire recommended amount of physical activity just by walking to and from transit stops.[4] Conversely, people who travel by car are more sedentary, which is associated with chronic disease and premature death.[5] Studies show that walking or bicycling to school is related to higher overall physical activity for youth.[6] Other benefits of more walking and bicycling may include an increased sense of community, less social isolation, higher cognitive functioning, lower rates of depression, less air pollution, fewer climate changing emissions, and more.[7,8]

An increased focus on active transportation and greater investments in safety improvements are particularly likely to bring benefits for people in low-income communities and communities of color.

People in low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to walk and bike to everyday destinations and often walk and bike out of need.[9] But troublingly, people in low-income communities and communities of color also have considerably higher injury and fatality rates from traffic crashes. African Americans, Latinos, and low-income people are twice as likely to be killed while walking.[10] These communities also have higher rates of chronic diseases.[11] These inequities emerge in significant part from the differences in availability and quality of sidewalks, bike lanes, and other neighborhood features that support safe walking and bicycling—inequities that can be remedied through community-informed investment in infrastructure improvements, in conjunction with other programs.

Active transportation is any means of getting around that is powered by human energy, usually involving walking and bicycling, but also including other non-motorized forms of transportation, such as the use of wheelchairs, roller skates, and skateboards.

The overall benefits from increased funding for safe walking and biking include:

Safer Children & Families

Safer street design reduces traffic injuries to community members by reducing conflicts and slowing speeds. As residents become more likely to walk and bike to everyday destinations, their presence helps to draw others out to walk and bike and increases eyes on the street that help in deterring crime and violence.[12]

Better Health & Reduced Health Disparities

People living in more walkable cities have lower blood pressure and hypertension risks than do people who live in less walkable cities.[13] The health benefits of walkability are more pronounced in low-income neighborhoods, suggesting that quality, pedestrian-friendly design in low-income areas may meaningfully reduce health inequalities.[14]

Community Connections

By walking or bicycling, residents boost their social connection by encountering each other and neighbors. The result is an improved sense of community, less social isolation, and stronger neighborhood connections.

Livability

Increasing access to safe places to walk and bike results in improved quality of life, creates a more efficient and accessible transportation network, and serves the mobility needs of communities and families.[15]

Sustainability

Healthy community design improves sustainability by reducing fossil fuel use, increasing water retention, and contributing to cleaner air. Community designs that narrow streets and include green space help decrease water runoff. Shade trees provide relief from the sun, filter airborne pollutants, and reduce ambient air temperatures.

Economic Advantages

When walking and biking routes become safer and more connected to destinations, businesses are more accessible to potential customers. Attractive public spaces and walkable streets benefit businesses. Walkers and bikers save money on gas, personal vehicle use, and public transportation fares.

Cleaner Air

Walking and biking eases traffic congestion and car use, reducing air pollution and contributing to a healthier planet and cleaner air to breath. Biking and walking can decrease passenger vehicle emissions of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, volatile organic compounds, and carbon dioxide.

Evidence-Based Community Guide Adds Active Travel to School to its Gold Standard Recommendations

The evidence of Safe Routes to School's health benefits is mounting. In 2018, following a systemic review of 52 studies, the Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) issued a recommendation supporting interventions to increase active travel to school based on strong evidence they increase walking among students and reduce risks for traffic-related injury. The CPSTF's Guide to Community Prevention Services (Community Guide) contains only evidence-based recommendations for preventative health measures with strong records of success. Safe Routes to School is also recommended as one of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's HI-5 Interventions, a handful of health approaches that are likely to result in high community health impact in five years.

Studies support the benefits of investing in active transportation:

Improved Infrastructure Increases Physical Activity

A 5 percent increase in neighborhood walkability—measured in terms of the completeness of the sidewalk network, safety of street crossings, directness of routes, and other measures—was associated with a 32 percent increase in time devoted to physically active travel.[16] Multimodal neighborhoods can have ten times as much walking and bicycling as automobile-oriented neighborhoods.[17]

We Invest Far More in Treating Bicycling & Walking Injuries Than Creating Safe Active Transportation Conditions

The U.S. spends seven times as much money on medical costs to treat people killed or injured while walking and biking than it does on preventing those deaths and injuries through construction of sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and other infrastructure that keeps people safe.[18]

Active Transportation Investments More Than Pay for Themselves in Health Care & Fuel Savings

An assessment of the benefits of Portland's past and planned investments in bicycling infrastructure showed that by 2040, $138 to $605 million in investment will result in health care cost savings of $388 to $594 million, fuel savings of $143 to $218 million, and reduced mortality savings of $7 to $12 billion, measured in value of statistical lives.[19]

Air quality and health benefits from averted car trips are substantial. If half of short trips in the summer months in Midwestern cities were taken by bike instead of car, the benefits of better air quality and higher levels of physical activity would be approximately $8 billion per year, based upon estimated savings from averted mortality and reduced health care costs.[20]

Investing in sidewalks would generate $1.87 from increased physical activity and improved air quality for every $1 invested over a 10-year period.[21]

Active Transportation Investments Increase Foot Traffic, Retail Sales, & Tourism Revenue

In New York City, construction of a protected bicycle lane on a retail corridor led to a 49 percent increase in retail sales compared to comparable streets over the same time period.[22]

Investing in Walking, Biking, & Safe Routes to School

For more information about the cost savings and economic benefits of investments in active transportation, refer to the National Partnership's Investing in Walking, Biking, and Safe Routes to School: A Win for the Bottom Line.

Case Studies

WASHINGTON STATE: Going the Distance to Secure Pedestrian and Bicycle Appropriations

Two communities in the state of Washington demonstrate the potential for active transportation financing to succeed in a variety of situations. In Kenmore, Washington, a series of local walking and biking fatalities served as strong motivation for 2016 Walkways and Waterways Bond Campaign. A small suburban town of 22,000 people, Kenmore is just north of Lake Washington. Despite some ups and downs, the campaign ultimately secured $19.75 million, supporting five significant bicycle/pedestrian and placemaking projects. Three of the projects focus on waterways and two are pedestrian/bicycle projects, connecting Kenmore to a neighboring city with a well-used bike route.

A different path led to success in Bellevue, a suburb of Seattle. Although the non-profit organization Washington Bikes invested time and resources to improve active transportation in Bellevue, they actually credit the company Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI) with catalyzing the passage of this $140 million, 20-year property tax levy. The precursor to passing the levy was the negotiation between the city and REI. REI was enthusiastic about Bellevue, but unwilling to relocate within the city limits without certain commitments from the city: construction of an eastside rail-trail corridor, creation of specific walking/biking connections, and a comprehensive walking/biking network. To meet these needs, financing in the form of a tax levy was proposed and the rest is history. The final levy, passed in 2016, addresses neighborhood safety, connectivity, congestion improvement, sidewalk, bicycle, technology, and maintenance needs.

NEVADA, MO: Thinking Outside the Box to Yield Rural Success

The county seat of Vernon County, Missouri, is the rural city of Nevada. Nevada is home to approximately 8,300 people, but every weekday its population swells to 20,000, as workers that live in the county commute into the city. Although the town is well loved, it suffers from a lack of places to be physically active.

Despite funding challenges, Healthy Nevada, a health-focused non-profit organization, used grit and determination to build momentum and excitement for the creation of safe places where residents can walk and bike. One project, a half-mile trail adjacent to Nevada Middle School, seemed viable with community support. Instead of waiting for funds from the state or county, Healthy Nevada used an innovative strategy to generate funding for a safe place where the whole community could increase their physical activity.

Though its first attempts to garner support raised more questions than buy-in, Healthy Nevada persevered. Its initial focus on increasing physical activity for health did not ignite residents' interest.

However, when Healthy Nevada highlighted the benefits of physical activity for academic achievement and the fact that Nevada Middle School had no designated space for students to play or be active, the community rallied together to remedy the problem. The school provided an in-kind contribution of adjacent land, Healthy Nevada contributed $10,000, a local foundation matched that amount, and the remaining $143,000 was crowdfunded by the community. In total, the community's determination raised $163,000 to finance the trail, creating the first Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant trail in the community and a great place for students and families to be active.

2 The Basics of Active Transportation Financing: What Is It & How It Works

To achieve the benefits of higher rates of walking and bicycling discussed above, we need streets and communities that are safe and comfortable for walking and bicycling. But most of our streets have been designed and maintained with a focus on travel by motor vehicle, not by active transportation. As a result, communities need a significant amount of funding simply to achieve a tolerable level of safety and comfort for people walking and bicycling, and a much higher amount of funding is needed to create street environments that make it highly appealing to walk or bike.

What do we use active transportation funding for? Funding is needed for planning and community engagement related to active transportation networks. It is needed for construction projects to build, fix, and improve sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes, as well as engage in street redesign to support safer traffic speeds and improve safety and mobility for different kinds of users. And, funding is needed for things other than construction, such as Safe Routes to School and active transportation programs that educate and encourage people to walk and bicycle.

Meanwhile, active transportation infrastructure development is generally far more affordable than motorized transportation infrastructure, and active transportation causes far less wear and tear on roads, decreasing the need for maintenance.[23] Bicycle and pedestrian projects are also good job creators, because the proportion of costs for labor rather than materials is higher than for road projects.[24]

Active transportation financing is funding that is dedicated to planning, infrastructure, or programs that support safety, comfort, and convenience for people walking, bicycling, or using other human powered means to get around, and can include taxes, bonds, fines and fees, and a variety of other mechanisms.

Transportation Funding at Different Levels of Government

Funding for active transportation generally comes through governmental action at the local, regional, state, or federal level. Active transportation financing can be achieved through voter action on local measures or state ballot initiatives, through legislative decisions, or through internal agency decisions and prioritization.

Active transportation financing exists within the larger context of overall transportation financing. It is widely acknowledged that our nation's infrastructure is suffering from systemic underfunding, aging, and lack of maintenance.[25] While the federal government is a significant source of transportation financing (including for active transportation), state and local transportation investments make up well over two-thirds of overall transportation funding. The federal share of transportation funding has been steadily declining since the federal gas tax, which funds transportation, has not been increased in 25 years. As important as the federal transportation dollars are, the need

Federal Funding for Active Transportation

The primary source of federal funding for active transportation comes from the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), part of the federal FAST (Fixing America's Surface Transportation) Act, up for renewal in 2020. TAP is the major source of federal funding for walking, bicycling, Safe Routes to School, and trails. Each year, more than $800 million in TAP funds is apportioned among all state departments of transportation (DOTs). The amount received by individual states ranges from $3 million to $82 million per year, depending on size and other factors. TAP funds can be used for sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and trails, as well as Safe Routes to School projects. Unlike regular walking, bicycling, and trail projects under TAP, Safe Routes to School projects can use funding not only for infrastructure (physical improvements to streets and sidewalks), but also non-infrastructure (such as education and encouragement programs), and can fund state or local Safe Routes to School coordinators. TAP funding is competitively awarded to eligible applicants, which include local governments, regional transportation authorities, school districts, tribal governments, and nonprofit organizations.

TAP funds are divided within a state according to a funding formula that is set out in the FAST Act, and cannot be modified at the state level. After a certain amount of money is set aside for recreational trails, half of the remainder is awarded by the state DOT to projects anywhere in the state. The other half is awarded through competitions run by the state DOT or metropolitan planning organizations, based on community size. Funding is divided into three pots proportionately based on population: urbanized areas over 200,000 people in population; communities between 5,000 and 200,000; and small rural communities with populations under 5,000 people. The apportionment is intended to give communities of all sizes a chance to compete for TAP money.

for active transportation investments are far greater than available federal resources. State and local active transportation funds have another benefit—these pots of money are usually more flexible than federal pots of money, and may not be as onerous to access.

At the state level, there is great variation in how transportation funding is approached and prioritized and how active transportation fares. States are increasingly approving substantial transportation packages in order to address decreased federal funding and significant needs for transportation improvements and maintenance.

A number of states have successfully established dedicated state funding for active transportation. Such funding is sometimes at fairly nominal levels—several hundred thousand dollars a year to support some Safe Routes to School programming, for example. In contrast, states such as Washington and California have passed far more robust packages, with Washington's active transportation funding amounting to $20 million a year. The sources of state active transportation funding are diverse—different states finance active transportation differently, and states often blend multiple sources to fund active transportation. The most common sources of funding include bonds, taxes, and fees and fines.

The insufficient and inconsistent funding of transportation, particularly active transportation, by the federal and state governments mean that local governments are also playing a significant role in funding active transportation. The next section explores the mechanisms by which they do so.

3 Approaches to Local Active Transportation Financing

How do local and regional governments fund active transportation? Increasingly, localities are creating funding mechanisms for transportation, either dedicating funding to active transportation or allowing active transportation to compete for funding. This section sets out a number of the approaches that local and regional governments use to fund active transportation projects. Decisions regarding which approach to use in a given community are often based upon a combination of considerations—state law, political palatability, other initiatives that are in the works, and more. Understanding the full range of options, and their pros and cons, can be important to these decisions.

Transportation Bonds

Local voters can pass transportation bonds. Bonds are, in essence, a loan. They are a financing mechanism involving long-term debt, in which the locality receives money up front from bond purchasers and pays them back over time with interest. There are two types of bonds that are commonly used for transportation. A general obligation bond is backed by existing general local funding sources, such as income tax or sales tax.

In contrast, a revenue bond is backed by a designated source of revenue for repayment, such as bridge tolls or transit fares. Bonds are a popular means for localities to raise money for transportation facilities, because they soften the financial pain by avoiding any need to raise taxes immediately and postponing the need to pay for the facilities.

It is not uncommon to see active transportation included as one of the designated beneficiaries of local transportation bonds. Among other cities, Chicago, Nashville, and San Francisco have each passed general obligation bonds funding bike lanes and bikeways. In 2017, Denver voters approved a $937 million general obligation bond program for new bike lanes, improvements to roads and bridges, park enhancements, and construction of cultural facilities. The bond will allow both new design and implementation of construction ready projects.

Local Taxes

Another way that localities can produce significant revenue for transportation is by passing dedicated increases to local taxes, including local sales taxes, property taxes, income taxes, or fuel taxes. Half-cent sales taxes to fund transportation packages are common. Twenty-nine states authorize local option sales taxes, with 18 requiring voter approval; however, only 16 allow local option fuel taxes. Because taxes are tied to economic cycles, revenue can fluctuate from year to year.[27]

Although elected officials are often wary of voter resistance to tax increases, historically more than 75 percent of local and state transportation financing measures are successful at the ballot box.[28] There can be significant differences in voter enthusiasm and in other consequences depending upon the type of tax in question. Local sales taxes and fuel taxes may lead purchasers to cross city or county lines to save money. Sales taxes enable collection of revenue from non-residents who use the local transportation system. They also collect money from all residents, meaning there can be less opposition to spending the collected revenue on active transportation infrastructure than with fuel taxes. Local income taxes also exist; these are more common in the Midwest than in other parts of the country.

As noted above, the ability of a local jurisdiction to enact these taxes depends on whether the state authorizes these for local jurisdictions. Additional limitations may also exist; some states require taxes to be approved by voters instead of elected officials, and may require a super majority of voters to agree to a tax increase.

In the 2018 midterms, Hillsborough County, Florida, passed a one-cent transportation sales tax for 30 years, resulting in the highest sales tax in the state. The tax will raise $276 million annually for sidewalks, intersection improvements, fixing potholes, and transit. Marin County, California, approved a half-cent transportation sales tax for 20 years in 2004; 11 percent of the proceeds go to support Safe Routes to School programs, infrastructure, and crossing guards. This sales tax has been successful in supporting the development of one of the most robust Safe Routes to School programs in the nation. Tulsa, Oklahoma, approved a 15-year sales tax that will generate $57 million to expand transit in the city. Snohomish County in Washington increased their property taxes to close gaps in the safe pathways within a mile of their 34 public schools. Each year about $550,000 from property taxes — about $5 a year for the owner of a $250,000 home — is used to widen roadway shoulders, create paths or build sidewalks and marked crosswalks near schools.

Development Impact Fees

Development impact fees are another approach that local governments have employed in order to raise money for infrastructure and other public services. The core idea is that local government assesses a fee on new development projects to pay for the increased costs that local government will bear of providing the facilities and public services needed by the development's users. These fees are common throughout the country, and are frequently used to pay for transportation infrastructure. Related mechanisms include in lieu of fees and negotiated fees or capital improvements agreed to by developers.

In San Francisco, a new development impact fee was approved in 2015. The Transportation Sustainability Fee is projected to raise $1.2 billion for transportation improvements over 30 years, with most of the money going to transit, but a meaningful amount going to improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The new fee represents the first time that San Francisco's impact fees include bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

Traffic Fines & Fees

Some communities are looking to traffic fines and fees as a source of funding for transportation needs such as Safe Routes to School programs, crossing guards, and infrastructure improvements. Red light cameras and speed cameras can generate significant amounts of money. For example, Seattle raised $13.2 million after expenses in 2016 from speed enforcement cameras in school zones, all of which went to school transportation safety projects.

However, using traffic fines and fees to address transportation needs also brings a set of concerns. Because fines and fees are rarely adjusted for the income of the person fined, these costs have little deterrent impact on those who are well to do, but can be financially devastating for people who are low-income. In addition, camera placement and dangerous infrastructure mean that fines often end up disproportionately targeting people in low-income communities and communities of color.[29]

State Law May Limit Local Government Options for Raising Dedicated Local Transportation Funds

In many states, local governments are limited in their ability to raise money on their own. State authorization or legislation may be required before local governments can pursue certain funding mechanisms. Local governments can usually use general revenues or tolls for transportation purposes without authorization, but frequently require authorization for local taxes and fees for such purposes. In some states, many relevant kinds of local fines and taxes have long been authorized, and are available options to raise local transportation funds. In others, they have not been, and so the legislature must authorize them. Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, and Rhode Island are among the states that do not authorize adoption of local revenue sources dedicated to transportation governments, and nonprofit organizations.[26]

Targeted District Financing: Business Improvement Districts & Tax Increment Financing

Another set of tools allows the generation of funds for particular districts or neighborhoods. Business improvement districts (BIDs) or other special districts established through legislation have the potential to generate financing through particular approaches. For example, many business or neighborhood improvement districts impose levies on businesses or residents in order to fund area-wide improvements within the geographic boundaries of the district. These districts often operate somewhat outside the government and the taxes are self-imposed.

A related approach involves tax increment finance districts (TIFs). TIFs provide a different way to generate money. They are used in neighborhoods where economic activity is limited due to deteriorated or inadequate infrastructure. Creation of a TIF allows the local government to borrow money based upon future anticipated tax increases, in order to generate investments or improvements that will allow the increased revenues to be created. The borrowed money is then repaid from the increased tax intake that is generated by the new economic activity the investment allows. TIFs are now authorized by statute in most or all states, although the parameters for when they may be used differ. TIFs may encounter local resistance, often around the economic assumptions in play. Such resistance may involve disagreements about whether tax revenues would have grown without the investment, as well as whether the increased tax revenues will be needed to address additional burdens produced by the development.

Both BIDs and TIFs frequently direct funds to improvements such as sidewalks, landscaping, bike parking, or bike lanes, often as part of larger efforts to address negative conditions, improve access for customers, and create a more attractive and functional area for business. An example can be found in Atlanta, Georgia's Midtown Community Improvement District (MCID). The MCID is a self-taxing district of commercial property owners. In response to strong interest in more bike lanes and bike projects conveyed by 75 percent of survey respondents, the MCID invested funding to develop protected bike lanes.[30]

General Funds

General funds, capital improvement budgets, and public works budgets ultimately come from the overall taxes and fees collected from residents and others, which are then allocated to various budgets. Maintenance and smaller capital improvement projects are often funded through general funds. This approach has been used by many cities across the country to fund bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, including Salt Lake City, Memphis, and Syracuse.[31]

Fundraising & Donations

Another approach to funding local programs and projects can be through donations, either from private individuals, foundations, or businesses. This approach is generally not the way to raise large amounts of money for public infrastructure. However, it can be very successful for funding specific types of active transportation needs. For example, foundations may be willing to fund a variety of types of program work that support active transportation, from Safe Routes to School coordinator salaries, to in-class bike and pedestrian safety education, to Bike to Work Day environmental education efforts. Private foundations may also be willing to fund some of the planning or grant-writing costs that often create initial barriers to entry for small, low-income, and rural communities that may want to access state or federal transportation dollars. Businesses are often willing to provide in-kind donations of staff time or materials for active transportation events or program activities, such as open streets events or tactical urbanism initiatives. And private individuals may be willing to give donations, especially for projects that are important to them, such as donating to a parent teacher association to fund safety improvements at their local school or raising money for an improved crosswalk at a dangerous local intersection.

Local governments use all of the above methods to fund active transportation infrastructure and programs. To figure out which might be a good option in any given community, it's important to talk to local policymakers and stakeholders, assess what state law permits, and compare your needs for active transportation improvements with the amount likely to be generated through various approaches.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY: Bold Sales Tax to Create Big Safety Improvements

Almost half of trips taken in Los Angeles (L.A.) County are an easy distance for walking or biking. But 39 percent of the fatalities in the county are walking and biking fatalities, more than double the state average of 16 percent. In order to decrease walking and biking injuries and deaths, in 2014 advocates began discussing a sales tax measure to fund the increase of safe active transportation options. Sales tax in L.A. County has been a historical source of financing for transportation projects, so advocates felt this was the most politically feasible way for active transportation to win a slice of transportation funds.

Local non-profit Investing in Place helped to lead the charge to pass the measure, with support from the Voices for Healthy Kids initiative, an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Heart Association that funds state and local public policy campaigns to help kids grow up healthy.

Investing in Place used a strong inside and outside advocacy game in its work. Not only did Investing in Place and its partners work with local stakeholders and residents for many months leading up to the vote, but they also earned buy-in from Mayor Garcetti, who turned out to be a huge proponent of Measure M, joining weekly calls to strategize as the election approached. Ultimately, more than 70 percent of voters supported Measure M, leading to its passage. The 2016 measure provided a new, dedicated half-cent sales tax, and does not have a sunset date. Over the next 40 years, the measure is likely to bring in $4 billion.

Now, the focus of Investing in Place's work has shifted from securing funds to making sure those funds are used in an equitable way for walking and biking. Investing in Place facilitates a group called the Just Growth Work Group and some of its members sit on the transportation department's policy advisory council, working to ensure that the guidelines to implement Measure M result in equitable and sustainable outcomes. Continued advocacy focuses on making sure that the Measure M guidelines prioritize low-income, high-need areas with higher rates of walking and biking fatalities, ensuring that the next steps replace a history of exclusion from the civic process with a resurgence of environmental justice for local communities.

4 Creating a Strong Active Transportation Financing Initiative

In order to be effective and successful, active transportation financing initiatives need strong policy goals, core campaign partners, and thoughtful campaign strategies.

What Does a Good Active Transportation Financing Initiative Include?

What are goals that are important to consider and achieve when working in the arena of active transportation financing?

Substantial Funding

Work to achieve a level of funding that will create meaningful improvements. That doesn't mean that incremental wins will not be important, but it's also important not to settle too quickly or without a longer term vision. Oftentimes, working towards an ambitious goal can change expectations and visions, even if it doesn't result in immediate success.

Long-Term & Sustainable Funding

Long-term and sustainable funding is multi-year funding that either does not sunset or is guaranteed for the length of a multi-year financing mechanism. Sustainable funding is financed through a reliable method. This ensures that communities can count on funding, rather than having to fight for it each year or struggle with uncertainty around program and infrastructure improvements.

Funding Both Street Infrastructure & Programs

In the long term, it is important to ensure that funding supports both infrastructure projects and non-infrastructure programs such as education and encouragement programs. Because approximately half of the states do not allow the core federal active transportation funding to be used for Safe Routes to School programs, it is even more important to make sure that local funding is available for these crucial programs. Local funding also provides a more stable, long-term source of funding for ongoing Safe Routes to School staffing, which is one of the key factors in effective Safe Routes to School programming.[32]

Prioritization of High-Need Communities

No matter how active transportation improvements are funded, getting funds to the highest-need neighborhoods and communities should always be a policy priority. Low- and moderate-income communities typically have fewer resources. Small, rural, and low-income communities often do not have the staffing or capacity to take advantage of funding opportunities, but may have endured decades of underinvestment, have inadequate walking and biking infrastructure, and experience higher levels of collisions and fatalities. To ensure that these communities are served, policy should focus on earmarking infrastructure and program funding for high-need communities and on prioritizing need in competitive decision-making. Additionally, programs should also create a mechanism for technical assistance and capacity building within lower-resourced neighborhoods or communities.

Community Engagement

An essential component of local active transportation financing campaigns is ensuring that your community engagement and community input opportunities are broad and deep, whether during the campaign, during policy development, or during subsequent implementation.

Community engagement requires bringing community members into decision-making early on, as ideas are still forming. It requires creating a wide array of different kinds of opportunities for input, from surveys, to booths, to online gamified input opportunities, to forums. Community members should be provided with the opportunity for input in locations and modes that are convenient for them, such as through visits to local businesses, conversations at bus stops, and pop up stations along bike paths. In addition, language accessibility and person-to-person introductions and conversations are key. There are many short- and long-term benefits of vigorous community engagement; chief among them is that it ensures that projects meet community needs and desires, and so receive more community support and less resistance.

Aligned Incentives

Avoid approaches that create disincentives for healthy behavior, such as bicycle registration fees. Such fees have the potential to discourage active transportation because they create a hassle, they are not part of what people are used to or expect to do, and they require people to pay for using a form of transportation that is good for our streets, our health care costs, and our environment. In the rare instances where such fees have been instituted, there tends to be widespread noncompliance, and frequently, the money raised does not go beyond paying for the costs of running the registration process itself. Additionally, the widespread noncompliance can then give the opportunity for pretextual police stops and racial profiling.

Strong Partnerships

Because the benefits of active transportation are often not top of mind for many community members or decision-makers, active transportation financing campaigns need to assemble partners and stakeholders who can speak compellingly about different benefits. Health stakeholders are some of the most significant and persuasive messengers available, with the ability to provide data, credibility, and stories about the importance of physical activity and the need to avoid injuries. Principals, teachers, and school district personnel can speak to the educational benefits of physical activity and the need for students to arrive at school without injury and on time. Local business owners can articulate the economic benefits of active transportation infrastructure for business and community vitality.

Data Needs

One data gap identified by Safe Routes to School and active transportation advocates is the need for a means to approximate the unmet active transportation needs within a state. Such a tool could be used for internal advocacy, to provide an overview of the national landscape, and more. For example, estimates of unmet need for Safe Routes to School initiatives could be generated by exploring the average costs of Safe Routes to School non-infrastructure programming (education and encouragement) as well as infrastructure needs. Non-infrastructure costs would be calculated for both minimal education and encouragement activities for all students in a community or state, as well as more intensive programming for students, so that a financial range could be given. Researchers could get per-pupil cost estimates from different programs, environments, and states to get a sense of the range. Infrastructure needs could be calculated by coming up with an average for Safe Routes to School infrastructure needs, with estimates differentiated based on actual engineering estimates for schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Local and state campaigns would benefit greatly from a Safe Routes to School cost calculator that estimated needs based upon number of students, number of urban, suburban, and rural schools, and cost estimates. Similar calculators could address broader active transportation costs.

Campaign Decision: Standalone Versus Larger Campaign

Active transportation funding campaigns often have an important decision to make: whether to advocate for a standalone push for walking and biking funds, or whether to look to be part of a bigger financing campaign, such as a transportation or recreation bond. There are pros and cons of both approaches.

Standalone Active Transportation Campaigns

Standalone campaigns require a reasonable level of political support for active transportation in the community. A standalone campaign cannot rely on surviving with faint support as part of a package. Instead, it will need a majority of policymakers to come out in open support of active transportation. This is more feasible in some communities than others, and may depend on a variety of factors, such as the strength of support for children's health and safety in the proposal, recent local events, and other matters.

Standalone active transportation funding efforts are often more likely to be successful when they are raising money for a fairly specific need or are targeting a specific mechanism to raise money. For example, as noted above, Seattle has dedicated school zone speeding fines that go to support Safe Routes to School, raising significant funding to support the program each year. Louisiana and some other states have "share the road" license plates available for an extra $25, which goes to support bicycle and pedestrian safety. On the whole, it appears that standalone active transportation campaigns usually generate smaller funding amounts.

Larger Transportation Financing Campaigns

In contrast, many successful active transportation funding campaigns work by getting a percentage or a slice of a larger transportation bond or sales tax effort dedicated to active transportation or related needs. One benefit of these types of efforts is that they mean that active transportation has the potential to access a share of the significant amount of money that gets committed in some of the large long-term transportation bonds and taxes. For example, at the state level, this strategy brought active transportation around $20 million a year for 16 years in Washington State. In addition, this means that active transportation is treated as a key part of the transportation ecosystem—rather than an unimportant alternative that merits little consideration.

At the same time, the reality of these efforts is that active transportation is generally not in the driver's seat. That means that active transportation proponents may find themselves in the position of being asked to support a package that has huge amounts of money dedicated to highway expansions or projects of very questionable value for health and communities—with their only real options being to leverage benefits for active transportation, or to walk away. Another reality of these campaigns is that the deals that go into how the package is proposed often occur years before the measure goes public—so advocates need the insider relationships and political connections to know that the effort is underway, and may experience barriers in creating significant transparency and community accountability during this process.

How Health Partners Can Support Active Transportation Financing Initiatives

Health professionals can add tremendous value to active transportation financing campaigns and subsequent implementation efforts. To figure out how to get involved in supporting such efforts, it can be useful to have a sense of the range of opportunities available. What roles can health professionals play to support active transportation financing efforts?

Health Perspective for Decision Makers

City councils, county boards of supervisors, and other decision making bodies often play a significant role in deciding whether to support funding of active transportation efforts, whether they are voting directly on funds, deciding to put a financing measure on the ballot, or otherwise. The health perspective is one of the most persuasive in moving decision makers, but is more likely to be taken seriously when the information comes from a health or healthcare professional. Health professionals can influence decision makers through public testimony at city council meetings, by meeting in person with decision makers, or by serving on an advisory committee or participating in community engagement activities.

Trusted Messenger for the Public

Whether an issue is directly presented to the public through a ballot measure or not, public support for directing money to active transportation is essential for the short-term and long-term success of active transportation financing measures. Health professionals, including doctors, nurses, and public health professionals, are one of the most trusted groups of messengers on public policy issues such as this. Health professionals can persuade the public of the value of active transportation financing as spokes-people on the issue, through writing op-eds or letters to the editor, or through other outreach opportunities.

Community Engagement

Organizations focused on health can also assist through outreach to community members and meaningful engagement around active transportation financing priorities and concerns. Public health departments and healthcare organizations running programs within communities often have built trust with community members as a result of their ongoing direct interaction with residents. Oftentimes health groups also have more experience with conducting community engagement than a planning or transportation department.

Health Data & Contextualization

Public health departments and healthcare organizations have access to health data and are able to translate this data into transportation needs. This includes data related to physical inactivity, air quality, and chronic disease. By providing this data and translating it into meaningful information, healthcare professionals can explain the real world impact of proposed changes.

Equity at the Forefront

With a firm understanding of the causes and consequences of health disparities, and a professional commitment to advancing health equity, health professionals are well-positioned to advocate for strong equity measures. Health stakeholders can help transportation practitioners understand that health disparities are often correlated with restricted opportunities for safe walking and bicycling. Health stakeholders can use data to advocate convincingly for the need for strong, equity-focused policies.

Anchor, Funding, or Implementation Role

Both during campaigns and during implementation of active transportation financing initiatives, healthcare organizations can serve as anchor institutions for such work, providing backbone or structural support for organizing and outreach efforts. Healthcare organizations can also play a role in funding or implementing aspects of active transportation investments, ensuring that health is considered throughout the process.

Evalution

Strong evaluation is essential to guide implementation, engage in course correction, identify additional policy or funding needs, and achieve the goals initially set out. Health professionals are more likely to be experienced with evaluation and can help city or county staff understand the importance of evaluation, identify appropriate methodologies, and assist with the actual evaluation process.

Conclusion

Active transportation investments have the potential to improve the physical and mental health of Americans, saving lives and improving productivity while supporting strong local economies and creating places where people are happy to live and work. But none of these benefits can occur without sufficient funding on the ground. As this report shows, the healthcare sector and a diverse cohort of additional supportive stakeholders are needed in order to generate success for active transportation financing initiatives. Healthcare professionals are trusted by community members and relied upon for concrete and practical recommendations about how to improve health. That makes them an essential partner in active transportation financing campaigns. In addition, the access to data and ability to assess the pros and cons of health policy proposals are key roles for health professionals. Successful campaigns in local regions provide a vivid illustration of how such coalitions can succeed in a variety of communities. When health and other stakeholders work together, the results are tremendous benefits for active transportation and community health.

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