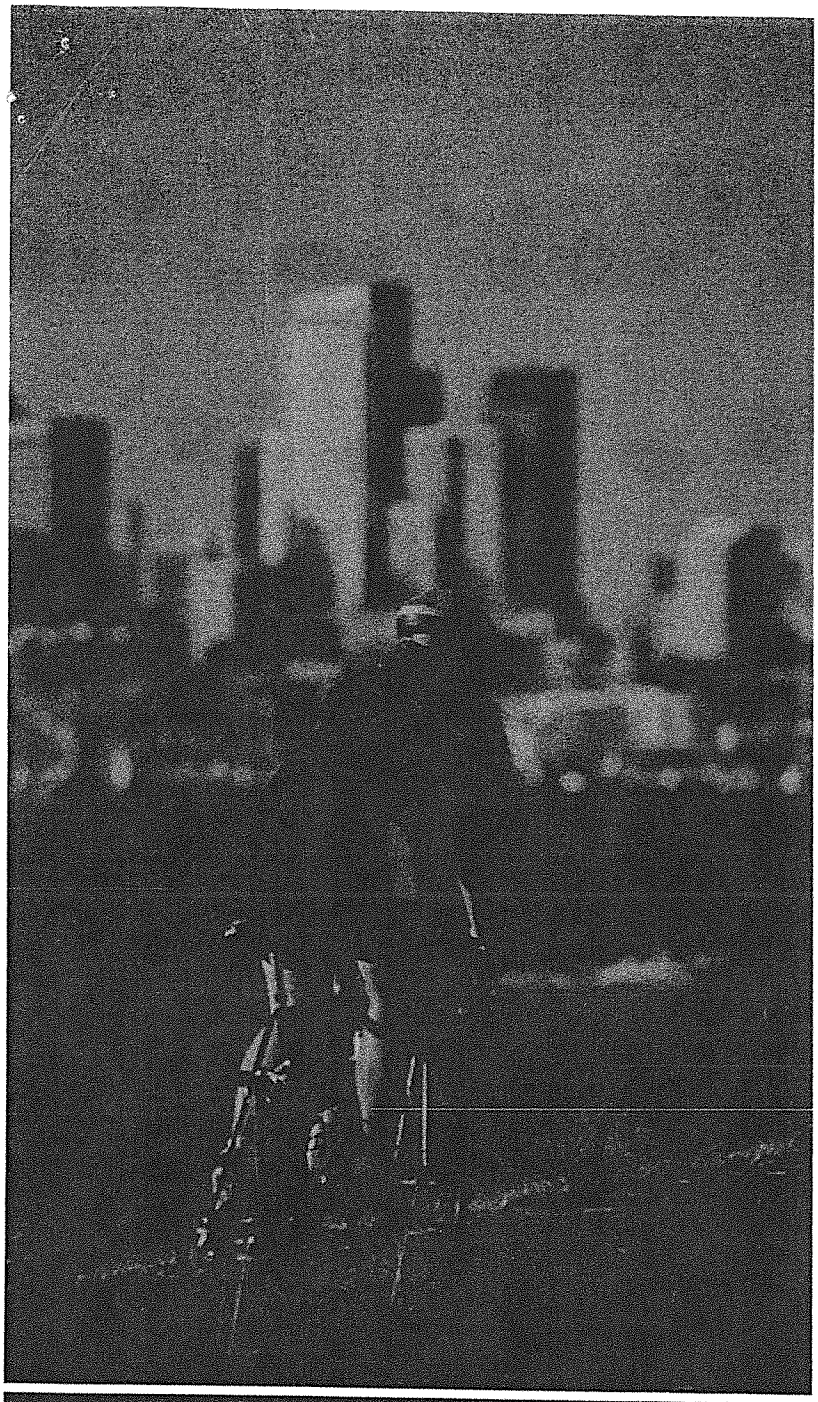

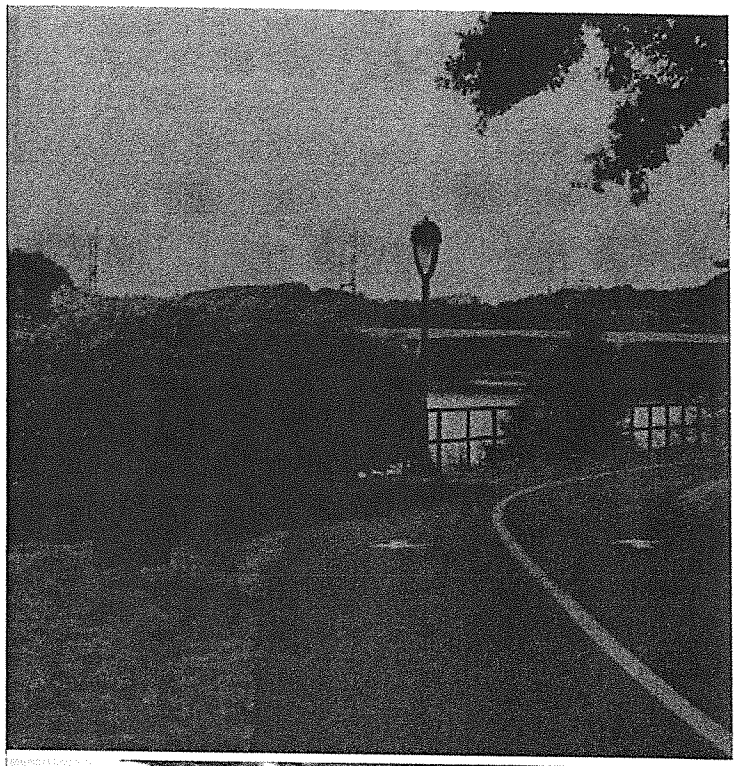

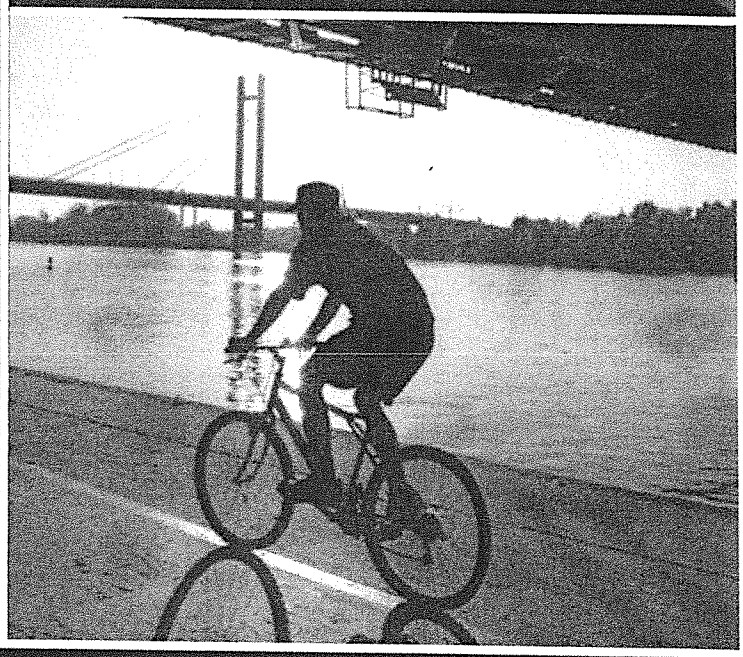

Active Transportation and Parks and Recreation

National Recreation and Park Association

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our society continues to experience economic hardship, increasing chronic disease rates, climate change and social inequity. More than ever before, active transportation is proving to be a valuable tool as communities across the United States tackle these challenges. Active transportation has been conclusively shown to impact our communities in at least four ways: boosting our local economies, improving our physical health, achieving a cleaner environment and providing affordable transportation access for everyone. Although communities can certainly exist without active transportation networks, citizens who live in communities with robust active transportation networks enjoy many desirable benefits. After decades of designing and building automobile-centered communities, we have created places where it is difficult and dangerous to walk or bike safely. Creating a more balanced transportation system through cost-effective investments offers the promise of improving the quality of life of our people and the places in which they live.

Parks and recreation agencies have historically been closely aligned with the goals of active transportation principles, as well as playing an important role in the development and management of active transportation infrastructure. The relationship between parks and recreation and active transportation interests is critical – and is sometimes overlooked by both the public and policymakers. It is difficult to imagine a truly comprehensive active transportation network that is not touched by a park and recreation agency, and in many cases parks and recreation agencies are the primary providers of active transportation-related services. Through active transportation, parks and recreation agencies provide valuable benefits to communities by providing an engine for economic development, increasing health and wellbeing, supporting conservation and providing benefits to all citizens regardless of socioeconomic status.

INTRODUCTION

The United States is faced with economic, health, environmental and social challenges that can be effectively addressed by active transportation. High rates of chronic disease, a struggling economy, climate change and social inequity all decrease the quality of life for people across the country. Research illustrates that active transportation offers several benefits to mitigate each of these challenges.

What is active transportation?

Active transportation is defined as human-powered modes of transportation. The most popular modes of active transportation are walking and bicycling, however, skate boarding, canoeing, roller-skating, etc. can all be considered forms of active transportation.[1]

For purposes of this paper, the benefits of active transportation are categorized into economic, health, conservation and social equity categories.

Transportation policies centered on automobiles provide limited transportation options leading to severe congestion, considerable gas expenses and a transportation system that lacks efficiency.[2] Although tremendous investment in motorized transportation infrastructure over the years has made access to work, shopping and other destinations convenient, it has amplified our dependence on automobiles while dismissing alternative modes of transportation. Moreover, the development of suburban communities has further contributed to the reliance on automobiles due to longer distances from city centers and public transportation systems.[3]

- Active transportation stimulates local economies through job creation, commercial business development and real estate values.
- Active transportation infrastructure builds healthy communities by encouraging physical activity as part of daily life.
- Active transportation promotes conservation and environmental sustainability by reducing air and water pollution and minimizing congestion.
- Active transport ation provides transportation access to all citizens regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status or disability.

In 2012, the passage of the two-year transportation bill known as MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century) made transportation policies even more highway-centric.[4] This bill was signed into law July 6, 2012, and many view this legislation as a setback for active transportation. Under this law, the federal funding for road projects increased from 80 percent to 95 percent while funding levels for alternative transportation was reduced by 30 percent.[4] Prior to MAP-21, there were three transportation programs dedicated to trails and active transportation: TE (Transportation Enhancements), SRTS (Safe Routes to School) and RTP (Recreational Trails Program). MAP-21 has merged these programs into one program known as Transportation Alternatives. Several activities that were approved under the guidelines of TE are no longer eligible for funding under Transportation Alternatives. Some of these ineligible programs include pedestrian and bicycle safety, educational programs, tourist and welcome centers and beautification projects.[4] While limited funding for active transportation is concerning, an even more problematic outcome of this law is that is enables states to opt-out of active transportation programs thus allowing these funds to be transferred to other projects.[4] The need for alternative modes of transportation is even greater today, however, transportation polices for such projects continue to remain under attack.

Interestingly, approximately 50 percent of trips taken in the United States can be accomplished by riding a bicycle for 20 minutes and 25 percent of short trips can be completed by walking 20 minutes or less.[2] However, the National Household Travel Survey indicates that less than 1 percent of daily trips are made by bicycling and less than 11 percent by walking[5] — meaning that people are getting in their cars to make these very short journeys. In American cities, 28 percent of trips are less than 1 mile, yet 60 percent of these trips are made using cars.[6] Although vehicle miles travelled by Americans between 2011 and 2012 dropped by 0.4% percent (partly due to more walkable communities[7]), lack of funding for active transportation infrastructure continues to limit the ability to use non-motorized transportation. Along with lack of access to active transportation options, lack of maintenance of existing sidewalks and trails also decreases the likelihood an individual will choose to walk or bike rather than drive. Research has shown that lack of sidewalks and safe places to bike are primary reasons people give when asked why they do not walk or bicycle more.[6]

While automobiles and motorized transportation infrastructure have afforded Americans with convenience and comfort, it has compromised four important facets of our lives: health, economy, environment and transportation accessibility. Over the years, federal transportation policy and funding authorizations have often failed to incorporate the goals of broader national policy agendas such as health, economic, environmental and social equity policies.[8] In light of this, park and recreation advocates and those who realize the incredible benefits of active transportation continue to push for increased active transportation funding as it provides communities across the nation with the hope of improved overall quality of life.

In most communities, existing and future active transportation options heavily depend on the local parks and recreation agency. These agencies continue to serve as critical components of any active transportation strategy through infrastructure development, maintenance and encouraging its use as a form of recreation. Many park and recreation agencies consistently promote active transportation via marketing, programs, partnerships and investments in active transportation infrastructure. They play a critical role in influencing the cultural shift toward active transportation via their ability to foster landscape architecture, park planning, recreational programming, etc. Furthermore, recreation areas, bicycle racks, helmet loan programs and pedestrian lighting are also established through efforts of local park and recreation agencies.

Park and recreation agencies play an integral role in active transportation, and are a critical part of strategies targeted at increasing active transportation modes. Active transportation and parks and recreation work together to improve our health, economy, environment and transportation accessibility for the benefit of all.

PART I
STIMULATING ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Several principles that underlie the mission of public parks, recreation and active transportation overlap, thus positioning public parks as important players in advocating for active transportation. Through their role in providing places for relaxation and recreation for the public, park and recreation agencies are key stakeholders in the planning, construction and maintenance of active transit projects.

Job Outcomes from Active Transportation Investments in New Jersey

Findings from a 2012 study to estimate the economic impacts of active transportation in New Jersey reveal that investments in active transportation contribute significantly to job creation.[10] In 2011, governmental agencies in New Jersey invested $63.17 million on active transportation infrastructure, which represents less than 1 percent of all transportation spending in the state during that same year. This investment translated into 648 jobs, approximately $44.57 million in wages and salaries, $15.68 million in tax revenue and $75.62 million contribution to the GDP.[10]

Investments in transportation infrastructure positively impact our economy

Although future federal funding toward active transportation infrastructure remains uncertain, trails, pedestrian pathways and bicycle paths have repeatedly been proven to contribute to local economies across the United States through job creation, tourism, commercial businesses and increases in real estate value.

Vehicle for Job Creation

Active transportation projects generate direct, indirect and induced jobs. Direct jobs are created from the engineering and construction process itself. Indirect jobs are those initiated through product and service industries required in the construction phase such as cement manufacturing, trucking, etc. Induced jobs are produced due to demand from local residents such as retail positions and food services specialists.[9] Investments in active transportation can partly mitigate high unemployment rates through the potential to create jobs.[9]

Active Transportation Infrastructure Creates More Jobs than Road Infrastructure

A recent study conducted by the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts to investigate the employment impacts of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in 11 cities in the U.S. reveals that Bicycle Infrastructure Only, Pedestrian Infrastructure Only and Off-Street Multiuse Trails create the most jobs (i.e. direct, indirect and enhanced jobs) while Road Infrastructure Only creates the least number of jobs.[9]

Bicycle Infrastructure Only projects generate
11.41 jobs per $1 million

Pedestrian Infrastructure Only projects generate
9.91 jobs per $1 million

Off-Streat Multiuse Trail projects generate
9.57 jobs per $1 million

Road Infrastructure Only projects generate
7.75 jobs per $1 million

Catalyst for Economic Development

Active transportation can facilitate business development and tourism in affluent communities as well as those that are experiencing economic hardship. Numerous studies on active transportation infrastructure illustrate a substantial return on investment. Active transportation allows funds to circulate within the local economy when people spend at local businesses while walking or bicycling.[1] Near many walking or biking trails, businesses cater to walkers and bikers, driving local economies through spending on food, beverage and equipment.

Complete Streets Influences Economic Revitalization in West Palm Beach, Florida

More than 10 years ago, streets in downtown West Palm Beach were designed to allow automobiles to pass through as quickly as possible without stopping.[11] This led to undesirable economic consequences—eighty percent of the properties were vacant in the downtown area, street crime was increasing and the city was $10 million in debt. In an effort to revitalize this area, the mayor focused on improving non-motorized transportation modes in the area by developing pedestrian crossings, traffic calming strategies and streetscaping. After completion of the projects, West Palm Beach's economy began to thrive, the crime rate declined, property values increased and the commercial occupancy rate jumped to 80 percent.[11]

High Trestle Trail: Business Boom for Iowa's Local Communities (Rails to Trails Initiative)

The High Trestle Trail is a 25-mile trail that was officially opened in April 2011. Historically, the trail was a railroad that was formerly the property of Union Pacific Railroad.[13, 14] The trail runs through the towns of Ankeny, Sheldahl, Slater, Madrid and Woodward and counties of Polk, Story, Boone and Dallas and is visited by more than 91,000 people annually. Consequently, local businesses around the trail reported an increase in sales of 30 percent in May 2011 and expected a 75-100 percent increase in sales in June 2011.[13, 15]

Economic Viability Linked to Active Transportation in Washington D.C.'s Barracks Row

Washington D.C.'s Barracks Row experienced a slump in commercial activity as a result of unsafe sidewalks, lack of lighting and automobile traffic. After design improvements were implemented (new sidewalks, street lighting and traffic signals), Barracks Row tripled its economic activity by attracting 44 new businesses and creating 200 jobs.[11]

North Carolina Northern Outer Banks: Remarkable Return on Investment

Bicycle facilities in the Northern Outer Banks of North Carolina play a critical role in facilitating tourism. Research conducted by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Department of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation highlights that 680,000 tourists travel to this area, with many visiting to cycle.[9,12] It has been reported that during the past decade, approximately $6.7 million in public funding has been invested for constructing bicycle paths/facilities in this particular area. As a result of this investment, bicycling activity continues to produce $60 million annually in economic benefits translating to approximately nine times more than the one-time expenditure of public funds to establish these facilities.[12]

Boost for Real Estate Values

Trails serve as an amenity to nearby homes. Trails in neighborhoods increase real estate values for adjacent properties. On average, homes that are located near trails are more likely to sell in a shorter period of time than homes not in close proximity to a trail.[16] Just one example of this is found in Texas, where the Katy Trail is located in the most urbanized location in Dallas and serves 15,000 people each week.[17] More recently, many people are opting to move near the trail for easy access. Homes along the trail are in high demand and are compared to "oceanfront properties for Dallas."[17] Research findings illustrate that between 2001 and 2011, $750 million in development was completed within 0.4 miles of the trail and home values in the area rose by 20 percent.[17]

PART II
BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Park and recreation agencies often incorporate active transit plans into their overall recreation strategy. In many cases, park and recreation agencies are responsible for maintenance and management of active transportation amenities, and are often responsible for making sure the public knows that these resources are available. Goals of recreational programming and active transportation overlap to a great degree – namely, they focus on providing opportunities for citizens of a community to live healthier, more active lifestyles. To that end, agencies continue to work in partnership with public health and public transportation officials to design active transportation plans that will help reduce the prevalence of chronic diseases.

Current State of Health and Physical Activity

Obesity continues to plague the United States. More than one third (33.8 percent) of the population in the United States is obese and the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion estimates one in six children are obese.[18] Between 2009 and 2012, the number of states that had an obesity prevalence exceeding 30 percent rose from 9 to 13.[19] Almost a decade ago, no state had an obesity prevalence of more than 30 percent. These statistics demonstrate that obesity is indeed growing at a startling rate.

Between 2009 and 2012, the number of states that had an obesity prevalence exceeding 30 percent rose from 9 to 13.

Almost a decade ago, no state had an obesity prevalence of more than 30 percent.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) physical activity guidelines recommend that children and adults should engage in moderate intensity physical activity for 60 minutes per day and 150 minutes per week, respectively.[20] The CDC's criteria for moderate-intensity physical activity simply mean walking briskly (minimum 3 miles per hour) or bicycling at a slow pace (less than 10 miles per hour).[21] However, almost 40 percent of adults do not meet these standards and about 33 percent report no physical activity at all.[22]

Health Care Costs of Obesity

Obesity places an enormous burden on the health care system, with health costs related to obesity escalating steadily since 1998.[23] Current estimates suggest that the annual medical cost of adult obesity today is between $147 billion and $210 billion. By 2030, an extra $48 billion to $66 billion per year may be spent treating preventable diseases associated with obesity.[24] Furthermore, in 2006, the prevalence of obesity was responsible for $7 billion in Medicare prescription drug costs.[25]

Active transportation provides communities with the opportunity to reduce some of the excessive medical costs related to obesity. Active transportation, whether going to a nearby store or commuting to work, provides participants with physical activity that is an important component of the fight against obesity. A comparative National Park Service study between people who exercise on a regular basis versus those that are sedentary indicated that the people who walked or hiked a few times per week filed 14 percent fewer healthcare claims to their insurance provider, spent approximately 30 percent fewer days at a hospital facility and had 40 percent fewer claims over the amount of $5,000.[25] Reducing the use of automobiles by just 1 percent and replacing these shorter trips with walking could lower obesity prevalence by 0.4 percent, which translates to tens of millions of dollars saved on medical expenditures.[26]

Safer Active Transportation Infrastructure Reduces Pedestrian and Bicycle Accidents in Chicago, Illinois

Between 2006 and 2011, downtown Chicago's Dearborn Avenue witnessed 1,140 crashes with pedestrians and bicyclists. In 2012, a two-way bike lane was developed, protected by a parking lane and bollards. After the project was completed, there were no reports of crashes through 2013, illustrating that safer active infrastructure can indeed prevent accidents.[31]

Improving Bicycle Safety in Portland, Oregon

In the early 1990s, the city of Portland, Oregon began expanding its active transportation infrastructure to accommodate bicyclists. Between 1991 and 1996, the number of people that bicycled grew by a magnitude of four, the rate of accidents decreased by 69 percent and the maximum number of fatalities was five per year.[2]

Active Transportation Infrastructure: Health and Safety Concerns

Heavy motorized vehicles moving at high speeds not only negatively impact our health by decreasing physical activity, they also produce expensive, life-threatening crashes. In 2008, the cost of motor vehicle crashes totaled to $180 billion, including healthcare costs, lost wages, property damage, legal/administrative costs, pain and suffering and lost quality of life.[3] In 2012, 4,743 pedestrians and 726 bicyclists were killed in crashes with motor vehicles, along with 21,667 motor vehicle drivers and passengers.[27] All told, motor vehicle accidents claimed more than 33,000 lives in 2012.

A 2012 national survey on bicyclists and pedestrian behavior revealed that 24 percent of injuries to pedestrians occurred as a result of uneven/cracked sidewalks and 29 percent of injuries to bicyclists occurred because of being hit by a car. These findings indicate that poor-quality infrastructure is a leading cause of pedestrian and bicycle injury.[28] Similarly, while 12 percent of trips are pedestrian and bicycle related and 14 percent of all traffic fatalities happen to pedestrians and bicyclists, only 1.5 percent of the federal safety funds are allocated to active transportation projects underscoring the need for increased investment to ensure the safety of those choosing a healthier way to move about their community.[29,30] The study above highlights that infrastructure specifically dedicated for active transit has proven to increase the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.

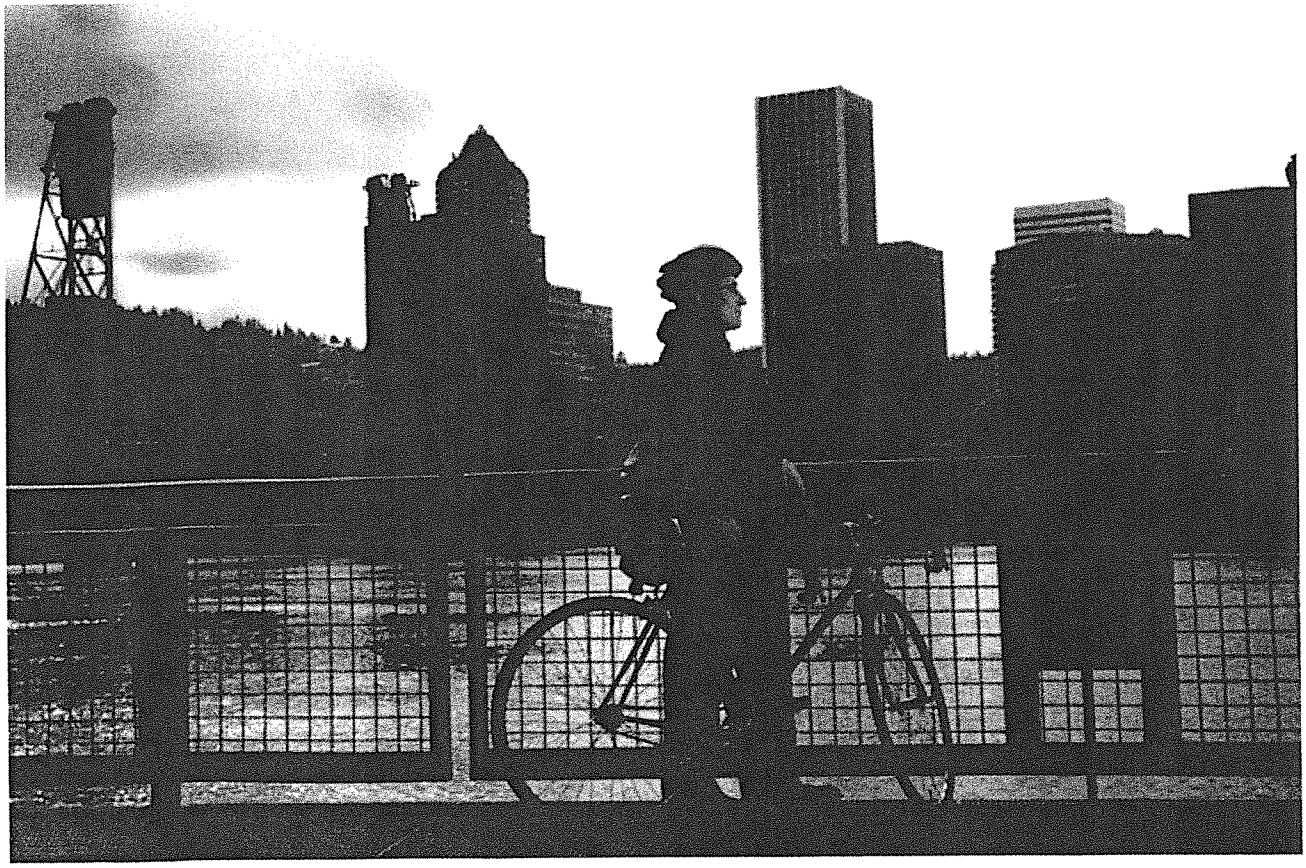
Active transportation is one of the easiest and most cost effective ways for many people to meet the recommended levels of physical activity per day.

The Priceless Prescription: Active Transit

Even the smallest increase in physical activity is proven to be more beneficial than inactivity, so much so that it enhances longevity across both genders and different age groups.[25, 32] Trails, pedestrian pathways and bike paths grant opportunities for people to walk, bike, jog and skate in safe places. Many trails located close to residential areas provide residents with free access to participate in physical activity. Since a significant number of daily trips tend to be relatively short, active transportation becomes an excellent option to complete these trips while simultaneously integrating physical activity into peoples' daily lives.[33]

One of the most frequent ways that people, particularly those who live in cities, get exercise and engage in active transportation is during their daily commute. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene found that New Yorkers get a significant amount of the recommended daily physical activity from participating in active transportation. On average, New Yorkers that walk or bike to work are getting more than 40 minutes worth of physical activity per day versus those who use a car or cab to commute to work.[34]

Active transportation provides the option for children and adolescents to safely walk or cycle to school or to their peers' homes. Studies demonstrate that walking or cycling to school is also associated with increased levels of physical activity.[35] Research conducted in California illustrates that improvements made to active transportation infrastructure connecting neighborhoods to schools through The Safe Routes to School initiative triggered an increase in walking and biking to school by as much as 20 percent to 200 percent.[36] Moreover, children and adolescents that walk one mile each way to and from school accomplish roughly 40 out of the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day.[37,38]



Active Transportation's Impact on Health Outcomes

Numerous studies provide evidence to show that participating in active transportation leads to improved health outcomes.

Active Transportation Leads to Improved Health

Healthy Transportation Systems Lead to Healthy Weight Loss

A study conducted in 2012 examined the behavior of residents in car-centric areas and those in urban mixed-use communities. Those living in urban livable communities (livable communities possess the factors that increase a community's quality of life including the built and natural environments) were 160 percent more physically active than those in communities that rely on automobiles.[17] Furthermore, the study found that males of average height weighed 10lbs less in walkable communities while females in similar communities weighed 6lbs less than their counterparts in car-centric communities.[17]

"Active Cities" Associated with Lower Obesity Rates

A recent study found that residents living in cities and states with more active transportation infrastructure have lower obesity rates than those living in areas with no active transit.[39] The findings highlight that older cities with well-developed public transportation systems such as Boston, New York, Washington D.C., Seattle and San Francisco have lower obesity and diabetes rates. In these cities, 10 percent of work trips involved biking or walking.[41] On the other hand, cities with the lowest level of pedestrian and bike commuting were newer cities characterized by urban sprawl. These cities included Dallas, Fort Worth, Nashville, Arlington, Jacksonville, Indianapolis, Oklahoma City and Charlotte where only 1 percent to 2 percent of work trips involved active transit.[41]

Smart Growth Strategies in Southern California Improve Respiratory Health

Research by the American Lung Association quantified the clean air and health benefits that Southern Californians will enjoy as a result of smart growth strategies that will encourage walking and biking.[40] Some of these strategies included more compact, transit-oriented development; increased frequency and availability of transit; increased bicycle and pedestrian facilities; and complete streets. The annual benefits will include reductions of: 60-140 premature deaths, 110-260 heart attacks, 1,025-2,370 asthma attacks, 95-125 chronic and acute bronchitis cases, 45-105 respiratory related emergency room visits and 7,145-16,550 lost work days.[42]

PART III
PROMOTING CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

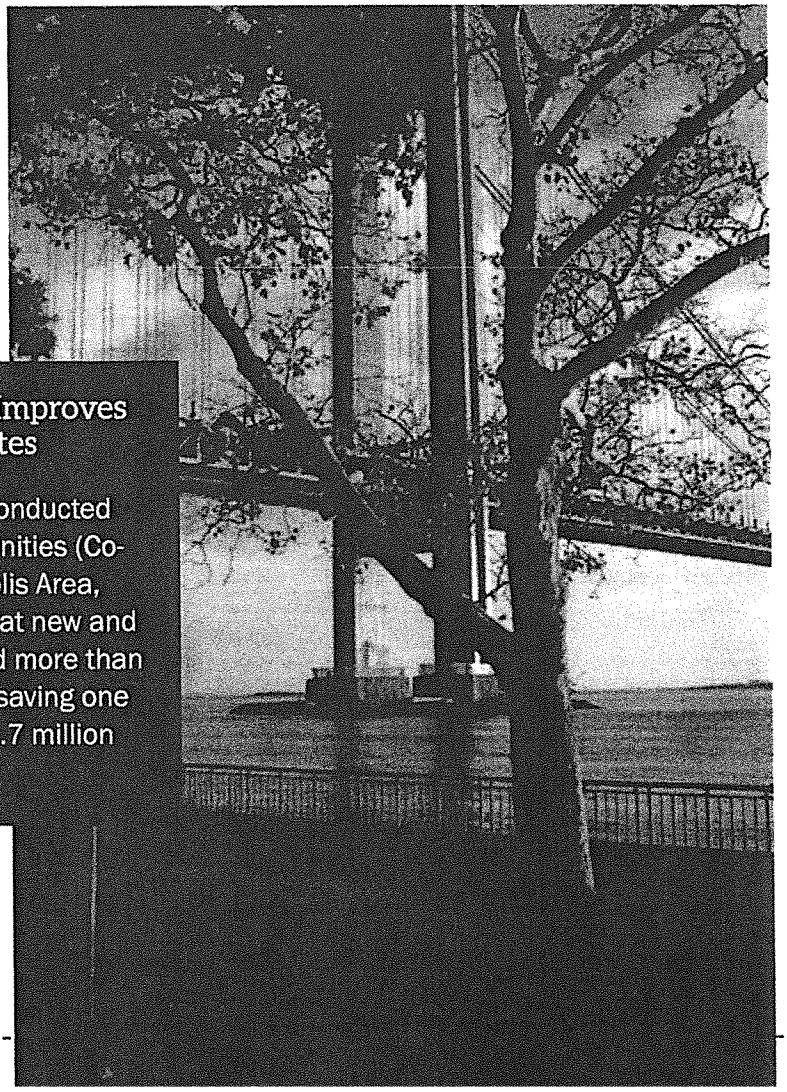
Conservation has long been one of the central missions of the parks and recreation industry. Active transportation features such as open space, parks, trails and greenways are key components of urban conservation efforts and environmental stewardship. Active transportation plays an essential role in protecting natural landscapes, promoting environmental sustainability and in placing individuals in touch with nature — all of which further the cause of conservation.

Transportation decisions that we make alter essential features of our environment through direct impact on air and water quality. Active transportation infrastructure conserves our natural resources by removing vehicles from crowded commuter routes and diminishing the need for highway expansion.

Air Quality: Combating Vehicle Gas Emissions

Excessive levels of toxic gases have detrimental effects on our environment. These emissions are causing temperatures to rise and changes to our climate. Consequently, the effects of climate change are posing serious threats to our ecosystems.

The largest contributor of carbon dioxide emissions (31 percent) in the United States is the transportation sector.[41] Future projections have revealed that even with the introduction of "clean" fuels and "green" vehicles, the level of carbon dioxide will escalate 41 percent higher than the current rate by 2030. This projection is estimated using the projected 59 percent increase in driving by the year 2030.[43] Approximately 60 percent of pollution generated by automobiles occurs within the first few minutes of operation — before automobile pollution-control devices begin to work effectively. Consequently, shorter car trips are more polluting on a per-mile basis than longer trips.[42] Active transportation is the easiest way to complete short trips, so much so that a modest 5 percent increase in neighborhood walkability reduces vehicle nitrogen emissions by 5.6 percent and volatile organic compounds by 5.5 percent.[43]



New Active Transportation Infrastructure Improves Environmental Measures in Four States

A 2012 non-motorized transportation pilot program conducted by the Federal Highway Administration in four communities (Columbia, Montana; Marin County, California; Minneapolis Area, Minnesota; Sheboygan County, Wisconsin) showed that new and improved active transportation infrastructure reduced more than 7,700 tons of carbon dioxide.[46] This is equivalent to saving one gallon of gas per person in the four communities or 1.7 million gallons of gas overall.[44]

Water Quality: Battling Water Pollution

Motor vehicles, roadways and parking lots are major sources of water pollution. Pollutants that present a risk to water quality include crankcase oil drips, road salt, roadside herbicides to clear vegetation and leaking underground fuel storage tanks.[45] Traditional roads and parking surfaces also present challenges associated with water drainage and stormwater runoff. Rapid drainage of stormwater has negative environmental effects since this water is often combined with polluted runoff. Integrating trails and greenways into developed areas can improve water quality through retaining and treating the sources of water pollution.[46] Many envrionmental studies have shown that greenways and natural areas which contain trail systems offer valuable water quality benefits as well as recreational opportunities. For example, South Carolina's Conagree Bottomland Swamp has wetland that creates a natural water filtration system that would otherwise cost a minimum $5 million if an alternative manmade water filtration system were to be installed.[47] Similarly, a study conducted in Louisiana found that wetlands surrounding 15 seafood processing plants provided treatment to the waste water saving the processing plants $6,000-$10,000 per acre of wetland.[48]

Congestion

Road congestion is a significant problem in many parts of the United States. Congestion occurs when the number of miles driven surpasses the infrastructure capacity; therefore, less driving will reduce congestion especially during "rush" hours. This congestion leads to increased air pollution as cars idle in place for extended periods of time, and stop and start as traffic dictates. An effort to reduce the number of miles driven is much less costly than developing additional road infrastructure. Riding a bicycle or walking for short trips can avoid 23 billion miles driven every year[2] – and has the additional benefit of reducing congestion and even further decreasing congestion-related pollution.

PART IV
SOCIAL EQUITY: TRANSPORTATION ACCESS FOR ALL

Although car ownership is common in the United States, there are many people who do not own a vehicle or are unable to drive. Eighty million Americans – approximately 1/4 of the population – are disabled, too young, too old or too poor to drive.[49] Families with an annual income of less than $25,000 are nine times more likely not to own a car than families with an income of more than $25,000.[50] If automobiles are the only feasible mode of transportation, these groups are placed at a great economic and social disadvantage because of the reduced accessibility to services and social networks. Active transportation allows easy access to parks, bike lanes, libraries, schools, clinics/hospitals, full service grocery markets, and one's home and place of employment. Poorly maintained or developed active transportation infrastructure can force people to walk and bike unsafely, or simply not make their trip at all.[52]

Since the current transportation law, MAP-21, expired September 30, 2014, a new proposal known as the GROW AMERICA Act (Generating Renewal, Opportunity, and Work with Accelerated Mobility, Efficiency, and Rebuilding of Infrastructure and Communities throughout America Act) includes policy recommendations from the U.S. Department of Transportation for reauthorization of the federal surface transportation program.[51] This act is a four-year, $302 billion transportation reauthorization proposal for transportation investments in the United States.[53] This legislation highlights the importance of transportation equity through its focus on transportation projects that are more affordable, reliable and that connect communities to places of employment, education and critical services. Currently, 45 percent of Americans do not have access to public transportation, therefore limiting their employment and education options. The proposal includes funding for the Rapid Growth Area Transit Program, which will be used to build new bus rapid transit and other multimodal transit for growing communites.[53] Since low-income workers are dependent on active transit, the proposal requires states with the highest pedestrian and bicycle fatalities to spend their safety funds on addressing these issues and also consider the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists when planning highways.[52]

Active transportation facilities provide people with the option to choose how they prefer to travel. Safe and convenient sidewalks, trails and bike paths remove the socially unjust barriers to mobility by providing citizens with access to viable modes of transportation.

School Serving a Low-Income Community in Detroit, Michigan Successfully Implements Safe Routes to School Program

Maybury Elementary School is a public school serving a low-income, largely Latino community in Southwest Detroit. Most students at this school participate in a free or reduced lunch program. Childhood obesity and diabetes are also major concerns at the school.[53] Prior to 2008, students were not able to walk to school due to unsafe sidewalks, a high crime rate, and poor lighting in a nearby park. In 2005, the school was awarded $300,000 by the Safe Routes to School Program, most of which was designated for infrastructure improvements.[55] In 2008, Detroit's Department of Public Works completed all infrastructure improvements. The school has since created a "walking school bus" whereby parents volunteer to be walking school bus "leaders" resulting in more students walking to school. This demonstrates that active transportation can indeed provide low-income parents with the option of safely walking their children to school.

CONCLUSION

For more than 30 years, park and recreation agencies have played an instrumental role in facilitating active transportation projects. Since active transportation and parks and recreation continue to share four overarching goals — stimulating economic activity, building healthy communities, promoting conservation and achieving transportation access for all citizens — parks and recreation agencies should be viewed as essential and critical components of any strategy to support active transportation. Any plan with the goal of providing or expanding active transportation features for a community should have consistent participation from the community park and recreation agency from inception. Communities across the country should be expanding efforts to support active transportation as part of their planning process, and bring opportunities for citizens to safely walk, run and bike near their homes. Expansion of active transportation offers the ability to advance the interests of community health, conservation and social equity in a cost-effective manner while driving local economic activity. Parks and active transportation amenities such as trail networks act as natural benefit multipliers and are essential partners that work together to create a network of places to get outdoors, exercise, or get to work in an enjoyable way that make cities better places to live.

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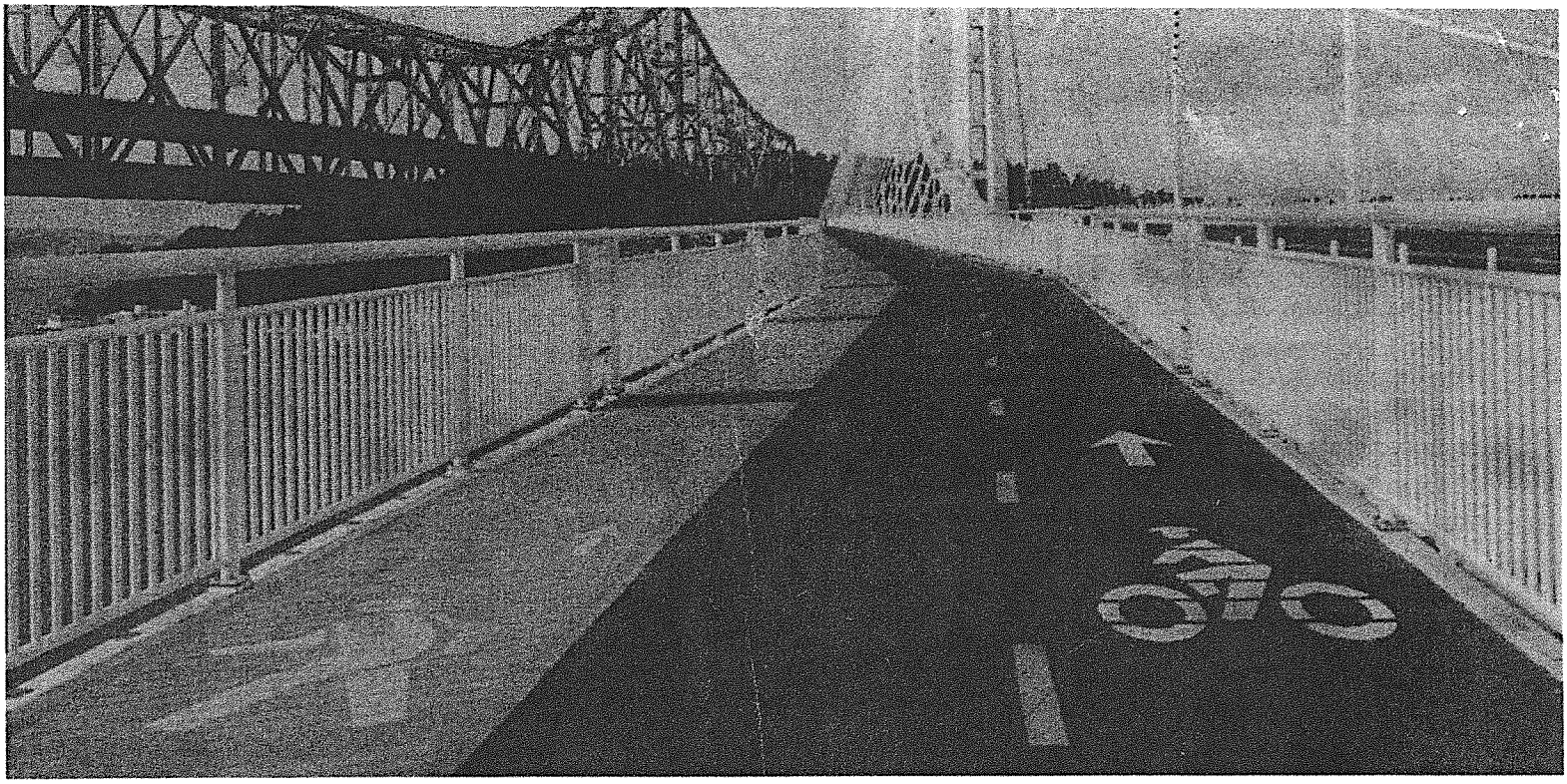

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