The Basics of
Active Transportation Financing

Safe Routes to School National Partnership

After decades of roads and communities designed for cars, our neighborhoods desperately need substantial investments to support walk- and bike-friendly streets. Dedicated long-term funding at the state, regional, or local level can provide sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and safe crossings, as well as programs and community activities that make it safe and easy to travel by foot or bicycle. By ensuring funding goes to communities with the greatest health and safety needs, active transportation financing can contribute to creating safe, healthy, equitable communities.

Active transportation financing is funding that is dedicated to planning, infrastructure, or programs that support safety, comfort, and convenience for people walking, bicycling, using mobility devices, or using other human powered means to get around.

Why Active Transportation Financing Matters

When people live in walking- and biking-friendly communities, they get more physical activity and are healthier than those who live in car-oriented communities.[1]

- Low-income communities have higher rates of transportation injuries and deaths, and fewer sidewalks, street lights, and other features that make for safe walking and biking than upper-income communities.[2,3,4]
- We invest far more in treating bicycling and walking injuries than creating safe active transportation conditions, spending seven times more money on medical costs from walking and biking injuries and deaths than on construction of sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes to keep people safe.[5]
- Active transportation investments more than pay for themselves in health care and fuel savings, generating substantial savings within a 10 year period.[6,7]

Learn more:
For more information about active transportation financing, review our report on Investing in Health: Robust Local Active Transportation Financing for Healthy Communities.

What Makes a Good Policy?

Active transportation funding works best when it includes these elements:

- Funding levels need to be high enough to execute significant projects. Because transportation projects can be expensive, this requires a sizable portion of a larger transportation package or a minimum of several million dollars dedicated to biking and walking projects.
- Long-term funding ensures that the same negotiations are not repeatedly called for, providing a reliable funding source that can be counted on in planning.
- Funding should be available for both infrastructure projects and also education and encouragement programs. Research shows that both play essential and complementary roles in increasing the number of people who benefit from biking and walking.
- Funding needs to be prioritized for projects in underinvested or higher need communities. Policies should not only focus on earmarking infrastructure and program funding for high-need communities, but should also establish engagement and capacity building within communities.
- Funding sources should avoid creation of negative incentives or unintended consequences. Mechanisms such as bicycle registration fees can discourage bicycling; relying on traffic fines can create burdens on low-income families and increase danger to community members of color through additional law enforcement exposure.

References

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