



# Keeping Kids Moving

## How Equitable Transportation Policy Can Prevent Childhood Obesity

### Transportation Policy and Childhood Obesity: Making the Link

How children get around their own communities has a tremendous impact on their health, and their risk for becoming overweight or obese. Safe, accessible sidewalks and streets, and well-designed parks and bike paths increase the likelihood that children will engage in much-needed physical activity.<sup>1</sup>

Millions of overweight and obese children live and attend schools in communities that are unsafe for walking or bicycling. This is especially true for children in low-income communities and communities of color, where patterns of infrastructure development are inequitable.<sup>2</sup> Reversing this trend and providing children with safe, healthy environments is crucial to reversing the epidemic of childhood obesity.

*New transportation policies can help reduce and prevent childhood obesity by encouraging physical activity in environments where children live, learn, and play.*

**32** The percent of children in the United States aged 10 to 17 who are overweight or obese,<sup>3</sup> and who, as a result, are at risk for serious health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, asthma, coronary heart disease, and stroke.<sup>4</sup>

**38** The percent of Mexican American youth aged 2 to 19 who are overweight or obese, compared with 36 percent of African American youth, and 29 percent of white children.<sup>5</sup>

**40** The percent of American children who do not walk or bike to school because their parents think the traffic is too dangerous.<sup>6</sup>

**316** The number of child pedestrians killed in the United States in 2008.<sup>7</sup>

**80** The percent of federal transportation expenditure that goes toward highways.<sup>8</sup>

**1** The percent of federal transportation funding spent on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, even though these modes account for nearly 10 percent of trips in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

**49** The percent decrease in the collision rate for children walking or biking to school under a Safe Routes to School program.<sup>10</sup>

**200** The percent increase in the number of students walking and bicycling to school under a successful Safe Routes to School program.<sup>11</sup>

**13.7** The number of minutes more of physical activity per day that middle school girls get if they walk or bike to school.<sup>12</sup>

**320** The percent increase in daily bike trips in Portland, Oregon, after the city dramatically increased the number of miles of bike lanes.<sup>13</sup>

**100** The number of communities and states across the country that have adopted "Complete Streets" policies directing transportation planners to consistently consider bicyclists, pedestrians, and public transit riders of all ages and abilities in their designs.<sup>14</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Michelle Ernst and Lilly Shoup, "Dangerous by Design," Transportation for America, Surface Transportation Policy Project (no date), [http://t4america.org/docs/dangerousbydesign/dangerous\\_by\\_design.pdf](http://t4america.org/docs/dangerousbydesign/dangerous_by_design.pdf) (accessed July 9, 2010).
- <sup>2</sup> Victor Rubin, "All Aboard: Making Equity and Inclusion Central to Federal Transportation," PolicyLink, 2009, [http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97C6D565-BB43-406D-A6D5-ECA3BBF35AF0%7D/all\\_aboard.pdf](http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97C6D565-BB43-406D-A6D5-ECA3BBF35AF0%7D/all_aboard.pdf) (accessed July 9, 2010).
- <sup>3</sup> National Survey of Children's Health, 2007, <http://www.nschdata.org/Content/Default.aspx> (accessed July 12, 2010).
- <sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Overweight and Obesity: Health Consequences," 2009, <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/causes/health.html> (accessed April 21, 2010).
- <sup>5</sup> Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, "F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future, 2010 Report," <http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/20100629fasinfatmainreport.pdf> (accessed July 12, 2010).
- <sup>6</sup> Michelle Ernst and Lilly Shoup, "Dangerous by Design," Transportation for America, Surface Transportation Policy Project (no date), [http://t4america.org/docs/dangerousbydesign/dangerous\\_by\\_design.pdf](http://t4america.org/docs/dangerousbydesign/dangerous_by_design.pdf) (accessed July 9, 2010).
- <sup>7</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), "Pedestrians Killed by Age and Location," 2008, <http://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/People/PeoplePedestrians.aspx> (accessed July 12, 2010).
- <sup>8</sup> Victor Rubin, "All Aboard: Making Equity and Inclusion Central to Federal Transportation," PolicyLink, 2009, [http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97C6D565-BB43-406D-A6D5-ECA3BBF35AF0%7D/all\\_aboard.pdf](http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97C6D565-BB43-406D-A6D5-ECA3BBF35AF0%7D/all_aboard.pdf) (accessed July 9, 2010).
- <sup>9</sup> Position Paper on the Intersection of Transportation and Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity Working Group on Transportation, [http://www.reversechildhoodobesity.org/webfm\\_send/64](http://www.reversechildhoodobesity.org/webfm_send/64) (accessed July 9, 2010).
- <sup>10</sup> Marla Orenstein, Nicholas Gutierrez, Thomas M. Rice, Jill F. Cooper, and David R. Ragland, "Safe Routes to School Safety and Mobility Analysis," Report to the California Legislature, Traffic Safety Center, January 2007, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5455454c> (accessed July 12, 2010). The estimated safety benefit of the program ranged from no net change to a 49 percent decrease in the collision rate among children.
- <sup>11</sup> Position Paper on the Intersection of Transportation and Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity Working Group on Transportation, [http://www.reversechildhoodobesity.org/webfm\\_send/64](http://www.reversechildhoodobesity.org/webfm_send/64) (accessed July 9, 2010). The estimated safety benefit of the program ranged from a 20 to 200 percent increase in the number of students walking or bicycling to school.
- <sup>12</sup> This was the finding in a multi state survey of more than 1,500 girls, cited in Michelle Ernst and Lilly Shoup, "Dangerous by Design," Transportation for America, Surface Transportation Policy Project (no date), [http://t4america.org/docs/dangerousbydesign/dangerous\\_by\\_design.pdf](http://t4america.org/docs/dangerousbydesign/dangerous_by_design.pdf) (accessed July 9, 2010).
- <sup>13</sup> Victor Rubin, "All Aboard: Making Equity and Inclusion Central to Federal Transportation," PolicyLink, 2009, [http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97C6D565-BB43-406D-A6D5-ECA3BBF35AF0%7D/all\\_aboard.pdf](http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97C6D565-BB43-406D-A6D5-ECA3BBF35AF0%7D/all_aboard.pdf) (accessed July 9, 2010).
- <sup>14</sup> Michelle Ernst and Lilly Shoup, "Dangerous by Design," Transportation for America, Surface Transportation Policy Project (no date), [http://t4america.org/docs/dangerousbydesign/dangerous\\_by\\_design.pdf](http://t4america.org/docs/dangerousbydesign/dangerous_by_design.pdf) (accessed July 9, 2010).