

# Making the Case for Active Transportation

## - Bulletin # 1: Health Benefits -



Most people engage in active transportation in some form throughout their lives. What many may not know are the health benefits associated with engaging in active transportation *more often* in their daily lives.

### Using active transportation to move from place to place may increase your overall physical activity.

- ✦ Physical activity is associated with positive health outcomes, improved fitness and improved physical, mental and social health.
- ✦ People are more active when they can easily access key destinations such as parks, shops, services and workplaces.<sup>1</sup>
- ✦ Studies have shown that experiencing the health benefits of engaging in active transportation may provide motivation to people to be more active in other ways.<sup>2</sup>

Well-connected walking and cycling networks are crucial to encourage active transportation for all citizens, but may be particularly needed in lower-income neighbourhoods. “Money spent on pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is particularly important in supporting the mobility and participation of lower-income individuals in work and community life (p.263).”<sup>2</sup>

**Active transportation** refers to any form of human-powered transportation. Examples include:

- Walking,
- Cycling,
- Using a wheelchair,
- Pushing a stroller,
- Running, and
- In-line skating or skateboarding.



Photo credit: Go for Green

### Using active transportation in combination with motorized transportation may increase your overall physical and social health.

How we travel to and from work not only affects our health and the environment but can also impact a variety of community and social issues. Residents who have long commutes to work spend less time with family and less time being active in the community.<sup>1</sup>

A study conducted by Statistics Canada<sup>3</sup> found that 19% of cyclists felt that their commutes are the most pleasant activity of the day, whereas only 2% of drivers felt the same way.

If Canadians reduce their reliance on cars and increase walking and cycling they can:

- ✦ Increase their physical activity levels,
- ✦ Lower their risk of obesity,
- ✦ Lower the risk of hospitalizations from asthma, and
- ✦ Reduce the risks of other health conditions such as heart disease, some cancers and type 2 diabetes.<sup>1</sup>

“Policies that can shift travel from private vehicles to non-motorized transportation and transit would provide multiple benefits in the form of increased physical activity, less sedentary time in cars, less air pollution and reduced accident risk (p.6).”<sup>1</sup>

### CFLRI Quick Facts:

The CFLRI's 2007 Physical Activity Monitor<sup>8</sup> examined personal beliefs regarding the potential beneficial aspects of physical activity. The majority of Canadians strongly agree that physical activity:

- ✘ helps to prevent heart disease (76%)
- ✘ reduces stress (69%), and
- ✘ helps with tasks in older age (66%).

Canadian women are more likely than men and active Canadians are more likely than inactive Canadians to strongly agree that physical activity provides these benefits.

### Take Action!

Request that your municipality ensures land-use planning and development policies which include mixed land uses (i.e., zoning for residential, commercial, employment and retail in the same neighbourhood), well-connected streets and sidewalk networks that promote a supportive active transportation environment.

- ✘ Land-use planning policies relating to the form and design of communities and their infrastructure (including built and natural settings) can provide opportunities for people to be active and help them to maintain healthy weights.<sup>4</sup>
- ✘ There is evidence to suggest that persons living in environments that are safe, aesthetically pleasing, and of high connectivity are more likely to be active.<sup>5</sup>
- ✘ The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada<sup>6</sup> states the opportunity to walk or cycle safely in neighbourhoods is integral to being physically active and increasing social interaction.

### Consider incorporating other modes of transportation in your daily routine.

- ✘ Learn more about how your community is designed. Outline a route that incorporates active modes of travel and/or public transit. Even though public transit involves motorized travel, you will engage in physical activity to get to your final destination. Consider incorporating these new methods of travel into your daily life.
- ✘ Consider parking further away and walking a little extra distance to reach your destination.
- ✘ Park your car once when shopping at "super centres" and walk to the different stores instead of driving from store to store.

**Communities need to be built so residents have the OPPORTUNITY to engage in active transportation!**

### Engaging in physical activity through active transportation can lead to:

- Better health,
- Improved fitness,
- Better posture and balance,
- Better self-esteem,
- Stronger muscles and bones,
- Relaxation and reduced stress,
- Continued independent living in later life, and
- Increased connection to your community!<sup>7</sup>

### References:

1. Frank, L., Kavage, S. & Litman, T. (2006). Promoting public health through smart growth: Building healthier communities through transportation and land use policies and practices. *Smart Growth BC*. 1-43.
2. Butler, G. P., Orpana, H.M. & Wiens, A.J. (2007). By your own two feet: Factors associated with active transportation in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 98 (4), 259-264.
3. Turcotte, M. (Nov. 2006) Like commuting? How workers perceive their daily commute to work. *Canadian Social Trends*. Statistics Canada: Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2006004/pdf/9516-eng.pdf>
4. Sallis, J. F. & Glanz, K. (2006). The role of built environments in physical activity, eating, and obesity in childhood. *The Future of Children / Center for the Future of Children, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation*, 16(1), 89-108.
5. Day, K., Boarnet, M. G., Alfonzo, M., & Forsyth, A. (2006). The Irvine-Minnesota Inventory to measure built environments. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 30,144 –52.
6. Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (2006) Tipping the scales of progress. *Heart Disease and Stroke in Canada 2006*. Retrieved from [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)
7. Public Health Agency of Canada (2003) *Canada's physical activity guide to healthy active living*, Ottawa, Ontario.
8. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (2008) Results of the Physical Activity Monitor 2007. Bulletin number 3: Beliefs associated with the benefits of physical activity. Available at: <http://www.cflri.ca/eng/statistics/surveys/pam2007.php>

**How to use this bulletin:** This fact sheet is for the general population and community members. It is for those who would like to increase their knowledge on the health benefits of engaging in active transportation. Consider using this bulletin as a hand-out at public presentations, community events or health fairs.

### Other Making the Case for Active Transportation Bulletins ([www.cflri.ca](http://www.cflri.ca)):

- Barriers
- Environmental Benefits
- Safety
- Role for Municipal Decision Makers
- Economic Benefits
- Built Infrastructure
- Increasing Social Capital

