

FHWA's Fostering Livable Communities Newsletter

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Introduction

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Fostering Livable Communities Newsletter is intended to provide transportation professionals with real-world examples of ways that transportation investments promote livability, such as providing access to good jobs, affordable housing, quality schools, and safer roads. The FHWA Livable Communities Newsletter also includes topics related to Safe Routes to School, Context Sensitive Solutions, and Environmental Justice. To access additional tools and resources, or to learn more about FHWA's Livability Initiative, please visit FHWA's Livability website or the interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) website. The PSC is a partnership of three Federal agencies: the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). To read past issues of the newsletter, visit www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/newsletter/. To subscribe to the newsletter, visit [GovDelivery](#).

Want to continue the discussion? Have a question about one of the topics you read here? Visit the [FHWA Livable Communities Discussion Board](#) to join the conversation.

Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



DOT Pilot Addresses Transportation Connectivity Needs in West Baltimore

Leslie Stahl, Community Planner, Volpe, The National Transportation Systems Center

In the early 1970s, African American communities in West Baltimore were divided by US 40 (formerly I-70), a highway that was never completely constructed. The project was intended to connect Baltimore to the Maryland portion of I-70 to the West, but public opposition eventually ended its construction, resulting in an unfinished highway project referred to by locals as the "highway to nowhere." Despite ultimately stopping the project, the neighborhood was already significantly altered during the initial construction. Twenty blocks were leveled, including 971 homes, 62 businesses, and one school. More than 1,500 families were displaced in the process.

For several decades the neighborhood struggled to recover from the impacts of the incomplete highway project. Though the area was considered economically disadvantaged before the project began, the neighborhood never rebounded after the project was stopped. Some of the highway has been removed, but several miles of the road, which was depressed by 30 feet during construction, remains in the neighborhood.

The Fulton Avenue Bridge project, also called the Reconnecting West Baltimore project, will reconfigure lanes on the bridge that spans US 40 between the two sides of the divided community. The traffic lanes will be reconfigured to include an extra-wide shoulder and a combination of bicycle and pedestrian access across the bridge. Traffic calming, safety, and stormwater management elements will also be incorporated into the reconfiguration. The project is being funded through a Transportation Community and System Preservation grant for \$1,669,632, which was awarded in 2011.



Figure 2: Fulton Avenue Bridge will undergo renovations that will reduce travel lanes to make room for pedestrian and bicycle facilities (Image courtesy of FHWA).



Figure 1: Fulton Avenue Bridge spans the "highway to nowhere" and connects bisected West Baltimore neighborhood (Image courtesy of FHWA).

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced that the community would receive long-needed assistance and attention through the new [Transportation Empowerment Pilot \(LadderSTEP\) program](#). LadderS^{TEP} will provide technical assistance to the community aimed at creating more economic development around transportation projects.

Fulton Avenue Bridge, now being advanced under the LadderS^{TEP} initiative, will also incorporate the Local Hiring Preference Pilot opportunity announced by DOT in the *Federal Register* in March 2015. The city, State, and FHWA collaborated to develop a work plan for the project, and the city's local hiring law will require that at least 51 percent of project hires be Baltimore residents.



Civil unrest in Baltimore in 2015 amplified Federal policy initiatives throughout the city. DOT is now part of a Federal taskforce that has increased investments in support of Baltimore City’s top priorities including public safety, education, health, and job creation. Last summer, DOT partnered with the Department of Labor to support the Mayor’s goal for providing internships for all 8,000 applicants. DOT successfully encouraged support from local stakeholders and hosted interns in the FHWA Baltimore office.

FHWA Develops Tool to Help Transportation Practitioners Integrate Health Into Corridor Planning

Victoria Martinez, Air Quality Specialist, Federal Highway Administration, Office of Natural Environment

Corridor planning is an integral component of transportation decisionmaking that provides opportunities to enhance positive health outcomes and support livable communities. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has developed a [Framework for Better Integrating Health into Transportation Corridor Planning](#) (“Framework”) to help transportation

practitioners integrate health into their existing corridor planning processes. The Framework is adaptable to various contexts at both the regional and project level, and it is scalable to any type of transportation corridor. It can also be applied at any point in the corridor planning process or to inform every step of the process to support broad health goals.

The Framework identifies four priority areas where health and transportation are closely related, including active transportation, air quality, safety, and equity. While health and transportation may be related in other ways, these four areas represent the strongest connection identified in the literature. These priority areas inform the types of data, level of detail, and topic areas covered in the Framework and help to guide the user’s understanding of the relationship between health and transportation.

Priority Area	Health Issue
Active transportation	Obesity, body mass index, chronic disease
Air quality	Respiratory/pulmonary disease, asthma
Safety	Injury prevention, aging
Equity	All health issues

The [Framework](#), which is hosted on FHWA’s [Health in Transportation web page](#), has six steps. These steps are explained in the following table.

STEP 1: Define Transportation Problems and Public Health Issues	Framework users should determine the scope of the problems and needs to be addressed and consider whether or not the transportation agencies and other partners in the jurisdiction are supportive of integrating health into the process. Practitioners should identify agencies, groups, and individuals that might have information to share about health issues and needs, as well as any stakeholders to contact. Stakeholders can be other transportation agencies, health groups, or community members.
STEP 2: Identify Transportation and Health Needs, Resources, and Priorities	Framework users should collect data and information about the needs, available resources, and priorities related to transportation and health, and identify gaps in information. Health partners will help in this step by collecting and assessing the availability and breadth of health data and information. This establishes the baseline conditions for the corridor.
STEP 3: Develop Goals and Objectives that Promote Health in the Community	Framework users should create goals and objectives for addressing health in the corridor. Framework users should think about the health impacts of potential transportation strategies when developing the goals and objectives. Health partners can help in this step by providing technical assistance related to health impacts and creating



	measurable objectives.
STEP 4: Establish Evaluation Criteria that Include Public Health	Based on the goals and objectives, Framework users should develop evaluation criteria and identify potential transportation strategies. In developing evaluation criteria, Framework users should consider the data, tools, and information needed to measure the health impacts.
STEP 5: Develop and Evaluate Alternatives and Their Health Impacts	Framework users should iteratively vet and refine potential solutions using identified strategies and evaluation criteria. This process results in a set of alternatives that reflects the health implications of transportation decisionmaking in the corridor. Part of what will make this step successful is consideration of the expertise of health partners necessary to evaluate the alternatives as well as implement them.
STEP 6: Identify Alternatives that Support Health in the Community	Framework users should use the results of Step 5 to analyze the alternatives to select a preferred alternative. Even if funding is not available to implement the preferred alternative, this step can serve as a useful illustration of the potential impact of transportation decisions and the importance of seeking out and maintaining relationships with health partners.

To evaluate the usefulness of the tool, FHWA solicited applications from transportation agencies to participate in a beta test of the Framework. FHWA selected five agencies (see the callout box below) to participate, and gave them technical assistance to advance their projects using the Framework. The results of the beta test are also featured in a series of [case studies](#).

The beta test case studies highlight the benefits that agencies experienced while using the Framework. Using the Framework helped the agencies:

- Improve the corridor planning process by focusing each step of the process on particular objectives.
- Identify additional partners to engage with at every step for improved knowledge of the corridor’s specific needs.
- Enhance their awareness of new data resources for a more robust evaluation of alternatives.
- Quickly move forward in the process of considering health outcomes in the corridor.
- Incorporate health into corridor planning and develop more comprehensive goals for satisfying the corridor’s needs.

The Framework helped the beta test agencies incorporate health into their existing corridor planning processes by providing them with steps that were easy to integrate into their existing processes and helping them establish useful relationships with health partners. The Framework then enabled the agencies to cultivate champions and partnerships and to develop a meaningful process for evaluating the potential health impacts of various corridor planning strategies and provided them with a tool they can use and refine for years to come.



[Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission](#) tested the first four steps of the Framework on multimodal Haddon Avenue in the city of Camden, New Jersey, which serves two large hospitals as well as several residential and commercial clusters.

[Akron Metro Regional Transit Authority](#) completed the first five steps of the Framework to produce a plan for bus stop consolidation on the South Arlington corridor in Akron, Ohio. Residents along this corridor include concentrations of higher-than-average minority, low-income, and elderly populations.

[Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority](#) used the first four steps of the Framework to complete a feasibility plan for the Northwest Multimodal Corridor in Oklahoma City. The corridor is envisioned to include bus rapid transit service to connect Oklahoma City's northwest suburbs to downtown.

[East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission](#) used the first three steps of the Framework to help create a multimodal vision for the College Avenue corridor in Appleton, Wisconsin, which connects Appleton International Airport to downtown. Regional partners have been discussing turning it into a gateway corridor with increased development and improved multimodal features.

[Tennessee Department of Transportation](#) used the first three steps of the Framework to improve safety and mobility along State Route 109 in the metropolitan area of Nashville, Tennessee. Regional partners are considering adding multimodal accommodations to the corridor.

The [Framework](#) is available for anyone to use. The study team is also working to incorporate the Framework into the [PlanWorks](#) online decisionmaking tool.

CSS Training Webinars Provide Insights Into How to Best Use Performance-Based Practical Design Strategies

David Leyzerosky, Project Associate, Project for Public Spaces

Performance-Based Practical Design (PBPD) is a decisionmaking design strategy used by State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) to upgrade aging transportation infrastructure using limited resources. The premise of PBPD is to engineer solutions based on specific project needs rather than relying on a set of uniform design specifications.

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) initiative recently highlighted PBPD, its application, and its importance in the ever-changing transportation engineering landscape in two webinars: [Using Performance-Based Practical Design to Improve Safety](#) and [Performance-Based Practical Design: Integration into Transportation Projects and Agency Practice](#). The first webinar provided information on what PBPD is and the resources FHWA has developed to promote its use. The second webinar discussed ways that State DOTs are using PBPD to improve project delivery times and outcomes.

PBPD has become more popular as the design process has evolved from applying traditional design standards, for instance from the Association of State Highway and Transportation Official's (AASHTO) "Green Book," to considering new tools and better data collection. Such tools and data collection practices allow State DOTs to make informed decisions without having to exclusively rely on traditional standards. This evolution in design practice corresponds with the rising cost of transportation projects, and the increasing challenges States face when seeking funding for new and existing projects.

[Using Performance-Based Practical Design to Improve Safety](#) Webinar Provides Background Information on PBPD



Missouri DOT (MoDOT) was one of the first agencies to adopt PBPD, or Practical Design, as it was referred to at the time. Practical design critically reviewed projects to establish a reduced-cost scope and geometrics that stressed the State's needs rather than adhering to strict design standards. MoDOT's practical design approach to project management was synthesized in the *National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Report 443*, along with similar practices from seven other States. The report found that practical design maximized return on investment without compromising safety. The report also concluded that the practical design approach encouraged additional analysis to verify decisionmaking, allowed for greater flexibility in highway design, and limited impacts on the environment.

While practical design proved effective, there were concerns that the practice could lead to an overemphasis on short-term needs without an understanding of how such decisions could impact other long-term objectives such as safety, context, long-range corridor goals, and livability. To address these concerns, FHWA developed the PBPD approach in the context of the performance management framework. PBPD modifies the traditional design approach in an effort to meet project and system objectives. Since its adoption, PBPD has become another important CSS tool that can adapt projects to contextual design, reduce costs, and maintain long-term vision for a community without compromising safety standards.

Oregon DOT Best Practices Showcased in [Performance-Based Practical Design: Integration into Transportation Projects and Agency Practice Webinar](#)

Oregon DOT uses the PBPD process to provide its planners with an effective strategy to fully define the problem and establish the needs, constraints, and goals for a corridor so that they can build the consensus needed to make changes. Oregon DOT uses PBPD to essentially build the "right project, at the right time for the right cost, in the right way." Project needs are clearly defined and agreed upon with the public.

Oregon DOT project teams continually validate their projects by asking questions such as:

- "Do we understand the problem?"
- "Has our understanding of the problem changed?"
- "Does the proposed project address the purpose and need?"
- "Is the project consistent with stakeholder expectations?"

These questions ensure that a particular project meets the outcomes it was intended to achieve, that spending is on track, and that consensus is maintained. Oregon DOT's process emphasizes critical thinking, project evaluation, and validation in order to deliver timely results.

With increasing demands and decreasing revenues in transportation it is imperative to use critical thinking to generate solutions that work for people. Performance-Based Practical Design is a methodology that helps State DOTs find those same solutions for their communities without sacrificing safety, context, and livability.

Ohio Department of Transportation Bridge Replacement Projects Improve Social, Economic, and Environmental Opportunities in Cleveland

Jocelyn Clemmings, Public Information Officer, Ohio Department of Transportation

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is replacing the deteriorating I-90 Innerbelt Bridge in Cleveland, Ohio with [a pair of new structures named in honor of Ohio statesman George V. Voinovich](#). Spanning the Cuyahoga River and serving



nearly 140,000 motorists each day, these bridges are a vital link and gateway to the heart of downtown Cleveland's sports and entertainment district. The bridges also serve a critical commercial function, carrying I-90 (the longest east-west interstate) and providing the terminus of Interstates 71 and 77.

The design of the new bridges mimics the curves of other bridges in the Cuyahoga River Valley, but it includes modern features such as color-changing LED lighting systems. Areas around the bridge are being enhanced with public overlooks, community gardens, improved biking and walking facilities, public art, and additional parking.



Figure 3: The steel skeleton of the old Innerbelt Bridge was demolished using explosives in July 2014. In total, 19,775 tons of steel and steel rebar were recycled from the old bridge. (Image courtesy of Marianne Mangan)

ODOT undertook an extensive public involvement process with the goal of capturing the unique characteristics of the communities that the new bridge touches. ODOT was especially mindful about including community stakeholders in decisionmaking because of the perception that the interstate divided neighborhoods during its construction in the 1950s.

As part of the proposal phase, ODOT shared renderings of the bridges with the public for feedback so that it could be incorporated into the preferred design once selected. The publicly chosen design was awarded additional points (for aesthetics) during the selection process and those points were added to the total score for each rendering. The winning design was ultimately the one preferred by the public.

Both bridge [projects used the Federal Highway Administration's \(FHWA\) Infrastructure Voluntary](#)

[Evaluation Sustainability Tool \(INVEST\)](#), a criteria-based tool designed to assess and enhance the sustainability of transportation projects and programs. The tool helped planners and stakeholders quantify and communicate project objectives that were important for improving the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the bridges and surrounding area. Example criteria for the bridges included better bicycle and pedestrian access and historic preservation. The westbound bridge project achieved gold-level status, and the eastbound bridge achieved platinum-level status—the highest level attainable.

ODOT and its partners completed a variety of actions to achieve gold- and platinum-level status for the bridge projects. Examples include:

- Committing to recycling nearly all construction materials including steel, concrete, and asphalt.
- Managing stormwater with a robust treatment system.
- Reducing energy use and emissions.
- Balancing earthwork.
- Utilizing LED technology for both aesthetic lighting and highway/city street-level lighting.
- Restoring and creating wildlife habitats.



This project is also responsible for continuing work to improve the health and well-being of ecosystems in the Cuyahoga River. Work has begun to protect fish larvae within the navigable waters of the river. The project team installed fish pocket habitats behind new steel bulkhead walls. These habitats will be used as a rest area for larval fish. The bridge will also aerate water that drains into the Cuyahoga River, which will also improve conditions for wildlife.

At a total cost of over half a billion dollars, the bridges are the largest bridge replacement projects in Ohio's history. Funding for the bridges is being provided by numerous sources, including Federal and State funds. To attain additional Federal funds, ODOT categorized the westbound bridge project as the last American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) project to be completed in the State, which will ensure that any remaining ARRA funding in Ohio be allocated to the bridges.



Figure 4: The new George V. Voinovich Bridge includes a system of eco-friendly color-changing LED lights. Public input was used to select the final lighting scheme. (Image courtesy of ODOT)

The first of the two bridges, which will eventually carry only westbound traffic, opened in November 2013 and is temporarily carrying traffic in both directions until completion of the second bridge. The second bridge is scheduled to open to traffic in the fall of 2016 and should be completed in the summer of 2017.

Baton Rouge Peer Exchange Broadens Participants' Complete Streets Knowledge, Especially for Locals

Leslie Stahl, Community Planner, Volpe, The National Transportation Systems Center

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Louisiana Division, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Region 6 Office, and the Louisiana Local Transportation Assistance Program (LTAP) Center held a [Complete Streets Peer Exchange](#) on January 19-20, 2016, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The event was part of the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Ladder^{STEP} program, which provides technical assistance to help several communities nationwide to create more economic development around transportation projects.

The purpose of the peer exchange was to bring individuals from places where Complete Streets initiatives have been successfully implemented to share their experiences with transportation practitioners in Louisiana.

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LaDOTD) adopted a statewide [Complete Streets Policy in 2010](#), and has since been working on [implementation across the State](#). The city of Baton Rouge has a Complete Streets policy in place and is in the process of implementing several Complete Streets projects. More than 90 people from various agencies and organizations across Louisiana attended the event, including staff from the LaDOTD, local agencies, and consulting firms.

"Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work."

--Smart Growth America

Speakers from around the country and the State attended, including individuals from Charlotte, NC; Austin, TX; Virginia DOT; and Louisiana. They presented on the following topics:



- Implementation
 - How to retrofit Complete Streets designs into existing roadways
 - How to construct new Complete Streets projects
- Design standards
 - Including those that needed to be updated or changed
- Issues
 - Including strengths and weaknesses of implementing Complete Streets during design, construction, and implementation phases
- Public outreach
 - Efforts that were or were not effective
 - Public reception/acceptance of changes
- Top lessons learned
 - Suggestions for future projects based on past issues and mistakes

During registration for the event, attendees were asked to submit a question they had about Complete Streets. These questions were summarized and sent to the speakers before the event so that they could determine the knowledge and interests of participants while planning their presentations. The speakers' presentations can be found at the following link: <http://www.ltrc.lsu.edu/ltap/resources.html>.

To increase engagement during the event, organizers polled the audience using interactive software. Participants used remotes to individually answer questions posed during the presentations. A sample of questions and the most common response(s) for each is as follows.

- Q: What is the greatest pedestrian design challenge?
- A: Lack of right of way or large intersections.

- Q: What is the greatest bicyclist design challenge?
- A: Lack of right of way or vehicle and pedestrian conflict points with a bicyclist.

- Q: What is the greatest transit stop design challenge?
- A: Lack of right of way or a lack of pedestrian access/ADA.

- Q: What design element contributes most to a better Complete Streets solution?
- A: Lane reductions or access management.

- Q: What is the best performance measure for a Complete Streets policy?
- A: The number of people walking/biking or the number of bridged gaps in multimodal connectivity.

Following the peer exchange, speakers from Virginia DOT and the city of Austin held a session with representatives from the city of Baton Rouge. Baton Rouge representatives asked questions about Complete Streets related to parking, transit, implementation, safety, planning, public perception, and education, and they are eager to put what they learned into practice.



Report Reveals Unmet Bicycling Needs of African American and Asian Residents in St. Paul, Minnesota

Leslie Stahl, Community Planner, Volpe, The National Transportation Systems Center

While an array of community members use bicycles, the stories and experiences of communities of color are consistently left out of mainstream bicycle education, outreach, and city planning. Considering its role as a local community bicycling and advocacy organization, Cycles for Change (C4C) set out to provide community members from the racially diverse neighborhoods surrounding C4C's St. Paul shop with an opportunity to share their experiences regarding why they do or do not participate in the growing community of bicycle riders.

Using both targeted in-person community meetings and a brief survey, C4C gathered feedback from 100 residents—including African Americans, Latinos, and Hmong immigrants and refugees—and published [Diverse Bicyclists, Diverse Needs: Cycles for Change Community Conversations](#), a report on the findings in October 2015.

C4C hosted six community conversations where they spoke with more than 50 community members about their cycling experiences and needs in St. Paul. The goal of the project was to speak with communities underrepresented in bicycle advocacy to learn about their perceptions of bicycling. To do this, the project team leaders worked with existing bicycle and educational organizations in the St. Paul region to solicit participation from people representing a variety of ages, genders, ethnic groups, and neighborhoods.

Conversations were held at convenient neighborhood locations such as libraries or the C4C bicycle shop, with members from organizations including Nice Ride Neighborhood, Cycles for Change, St. Paul Smart Trips Frogtown Crew, and the Hmong American Partnership in attendance.

The conversations focused on what motivates participants to ride a bicycle, what prevents them from riding, what bicycling looks like in their community, and what bicycle services they want to see in their neighborhood.

There were variations in the topics discussed and the needs identified among the six groups, but several consistent themes emerged:

- High costs are associated with owning and maintaining a bicycle. This includes the perceived need to own bicycling-specific apparel and the upfront cost of buying a bicycle.
- Education is needed to help people understand where and how to safely ride, how to care for bicycles, and how to integrate bicycling with using other modes such as taking public transportation with a bicycle.
- African Americans and other minorities feel that bicycle advocacy tends to benefit white residents and is exclusionary of other races and ethnicities. Some participants mentioned police profiling of African Americans riding bicycles is also a part of the problem.

Participating Community Organizations

[Nice Ride Neighborhood](#) is a nonprofit organization that provides public bike sharing and other bike programs to Minneapolis-St. Paul and greater Minnesota.

[Cycles for Change](#) is a nonprofit community organization that provides resources, support, and advocacy for empowering and improving the diversity of cycling in St. Paul, Minnesota.

[St. Paul Smart Trips Frogtown Crew](#) is a partnership between St. Paul Smart Trips and the Kitty Andersen Youth Science Center, which works to develop youth leaders in the Frogtown Neighborhood to help increase walking and biking trips.

[Hmong American Partnership](#) is a nonprofit organization serving the Hmong and greater immigrant and refugee community in the Twin Cities region.



- A lack of safe bicycling facilities makes riding difficult or prevents participants from bicycling, especially in winter and in areas where there are steep hills and busy thoroughfares.

In addition to the in-person discussions, Aurora St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation, a community organization in St. Paul, surveyed 50 residents about bicycling in the area. The results showed that purchasing a bike and safely riding it are the main reasons most respondents did not ride a bike. Respondents indicated that they would ride more if they could afford a bicycle, if there was a bicycling community they felt comfortable riding with, and if there were more bicycle-friendly streets.

As a result of this report, C4C has begun to identify ways the organization can improve bicycling for residents who feel underrepresented or inaccessible to bicycling in their communities. For example, C4C will promote its Earn-a-Bike program more broadly and begin offering a layaway program to encourage people to purchase bicycles. C4C also plans to work within its own community and with other organizations to help educate current and potential cyclists about how to safely ride and care for their bicycles. Lastly, C4C plans to work with other organizations such as the St. Paul Smart Trips Frogtown Crew to improve advocacy efforts on behalf of African American and Asian residents and their unique needs.

Parks: An Opportunity to Leverage Environmental Health

Dee Merriam, FASLA, MLA, MCRP

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Parks and recreation departments align with environmental public health on many cross-cutting activities such as swimming pool inspections, mosquito control, rabies management, and food permits. Parks also provide children access to safe and healthy places to play. Furthermore, they can mitigate safety hazards by protecting land such as flood plains and unstable slopes from inappropriate development. Public health and parks and recreation departments have many synergistic goals that could be leveraged to make both more effective.

In communities across the country, parks and recreation departments implement environmentally responsible land management practices and can be an important partner for environmental health programs. Parks often protect environmentally sensitive areas. For example, flood plains that are protected from inappropriate development in parks can store storm water, reducing downstream flooding. Protection of groundwater recharge areas allows storm water to seep into the ground, filtering non-point source pollutants and preventing them from entering streams. Tree canopies in parks can mitigate urban heat islands by providing shade and absorbing carbon dioxide and pollutants.

In addition, parks provide opportunities for public health promotion including physical exercise, stress relief, and education programs. Studies have shown that access to green space can reduce the effects of poverty on health. A study of social interactions among residents of a public housing project in Chicago found that access to green space reduced aggression and improved social interactions. Other studies have found that children who walk or bike to parks visit them more frequently and are more active. Because many environmental public health benefits are associated with parks, a strong partnership with your local parks and recreation department could be a great advantage to your department.



Below are some questions you can use to start a dialogue with the communities your department serves.

- *Does your community have a master plan that includes an inventory of environmentally sensitive sites and ecosystems that need protection?*

If not, encourage the creation of a map of flood plains, steep slopes, and other areas that should be protected as the foundation for a green space system. Work with parks or planning staff to establish a vision plan that makes environmental health concerns a priority. This could include establishing buffers around key resources such as flood plains and groundwater recharge areas. Setbacks or buffers help protect resources and create locations for facilities such as trails, playgrounds, and picnic areas that leverage community investments.

- *Do at-risk children in your community have a park that they can walk to?*

Sometimes a park is intended to serve a neighborhood, but its entrance has an inconvenient location (e.g., on a busy street that requires a long, roundabout walk). Adding a new entrance that is easy and safe to reach can increase community access. A park access analysis comparing the number of people who live within a half mile of a park to the number of people who have less than a half-mile walk route to a park entrance can identify opportunities to increase park access.

- *Do safe walking and biking routes exist that join parks to nearby schools?*

An analysis of children who walk or bike to after school activities can be used to develop supportive infrastructure or create programs to bridge this gap. This may be particularly important for children whose parents are not able to provide after-school transportation.

- *Are new development plans reviewed for opportunities to create pedestrian-friendly streets leading to or adjoining nearby parks?*

Pedestrian-friendly streets can make parks more visible and safer. Early reviews of rezoning and subdivision plans by either public health or parks and recreation officials provide opportunities to encourage desirable street patterns.

- *Is there an appropriate adult presence in parks during after school hours?*

This presence could range from activity leaders to adults in a community garden or public health outreach initiatives. Knowing park sites that would benefit from adult presence helps target opportunities. A park might be an ideal location for programs like health fairs and fresh food markets.

- *Does the parks and recreation department have healthy vending policies?*

Work with the department to promote healthy food choices such as drinking water and fresh fruit.

- *Are parks visible?*

Provide signs, Web sites, and maps to make parks more visible. Community health depends on teamwork and communication among all stakeholders.

Call your local parks and recreation director today and start the conversation.



Breaking Down Barriers—Parks and Recreation Connecting with Public Health

Richard J. Dolesh, Vice President of Conservation and Parks, National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and Zarnaaz Bashir, MPH, Director of Strategic Health Initiatives, NRPA

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There are approximately 2,800 local health departments across the country, according to the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). These departments are generally responsible for assessing community health issues and barriers to healthy activities in the population it serves; investigating health problems and threats; (3) Preventing, reducing and containing adverse health effects; conducting emergency preparedness activities; and implementing health promotion programs.

Comparing the categories of responsibility that park and recreation agencies have in their communities, such as providing parks and public open spaces for residents; protecting air and water quality through protected lands; providing comprehensive recreation services; and serving the needs for recreation, physical activity and conservation for persons of all abilities and all ages, to public health responsibilities illustrates that there is alignment between them. Despite these similarities, working together for community health remains challenging.

Growing Awareness of Essential Role in Health and Wellness

Many public health agencies do not see the health benefits parks and recreation places can provide a community. Part of the reason for this is that the awareness of the importance of health to the mission of parks and recreation has been slow to develop. In the past decade there has been a groundswell of awareness within the field of parks and recreation that health and wellness should be important, mission-critical priorities, and that the public very much wants these outcomes.

Mutual Goals Promote Greater Cooperation

Alex Stone, a planner for the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program of the National Park Service, which provides technical assistance to state and local governments, says there have not been good ways for parks and recreation to validate improvements in community health. One way to integrate health into the outdoor recreation planning process is to establish a health advisory committee, as has been done in Washington State, to bring together state and local representatives to help communities expand access to opportunities for improving their health.

Health departments are now thinking about how they can be instrumental in seeking grants, for example, for projects such as the design and construction of a local trail system. RTCA worked with the Centers for Disease Control to produce a workbook targeted at both park and recreation professionals, as well as health practitioners. The Parks, Trails and Health Workbook—A Tool for Planners, Parks and Recreation Professionals, and Health Practitioners provides information on how to develop proven methods of practice to enable cooperation between health and parks agencies.

Health in All Policies Takes Shape

Public health agencies and other health providers have begun to promote the notion of “Health in All Policies (HiAP),” a strategy to address the underlying conditions that influence health. The HiAP strategy also addresses issues of health and social equity. The belief is that to improve the health of communities, health must be incorporated into all aspects of decisionmaking across all sectors.



HiAP points to nontraditional health partners such as parks, planning, housing and transportation, as being vital partners in the effort to change policies and environments that promote health. The challenge is that all sectors must work together to improve underlying conditions that affect health and reduce disparities that now exist.

Examples of Collaboration Show Enormous Potential

One successful collaboration between a health agency and a park and recreation department is in Helena, Montana, where their mutual cooperation has been enabled by the heads of both agencies working together through the city/county administrative structure.

The health department became the park departments' partner when they started a tobacco-free parks policy. Volunteers picked up all the cigarette butts they could find in the park, which led to powerful photos that became background material for the recommendation to the city commission to implement a tobacco-free parks policy.

The partnership has helped the health department receive funding to develop an active living wayfinding system and communities plan to increase health equity by guiding residents to opportunities for physical activity and nutritious food using the trail system. Other examples included development of community gardens, permaculture sites and an edible forest park in cooperation with the health department.

In Liberty, Missouri the health department and parks and recreation department established a community health coalition. The health department will provide data to the parks department to model healthy behaviors to implement in communities through a strategic health planning network.

Inviting the public health department to collaborate on park and recreation master plans was an example of implementing a HiAP strategy. Their community health coalition was the catalyst for getting a grant to look at how developments were planned and whether sidewalks on one side of the street only or cul-de-sacs led to less walking and biking and thus less access to parks. They are working at a higher level of performance, and outcomes are a part of the process to achieve the larger goal of improving the health of the community.

From the point of view of the park and recreation professional, finding opportunities to work with public health agencies may be challenging, but the results are well worth the effort.

Join Communities Nationwide for Bike to School Day on May 4, 2016

Colleen Oliver, Communications Manager, Safe Routes to School Programs, University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center

Join tens of thousands of children, parents, school officials, and community members across the country for the fifth annual National Bike to School Day on May 4, 2016. Last year, organizers registered more than 2,600 individual events nationwide on <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org>. Every year Bike to School Day registration sets new records and 2016 is expected to be the biggest celebration yet.

Bike to School Day is a national event that gives communities across the country the opportunity to bicycle to school together on the same day. The event is part of the movement for year-round safe routes to school and encourages bicycling to school as a healthy way for kids and families to make their school commute. They also bring attention to safety needs, promote physical activity, help build a sense of neighborhood, and inspire school spirit. National Bike to School Day joins



National Bike Month, led by the League of American Bicyclists each May, and builds off the 19 years of success of International Walk to School Day.

Bike to School Day registration is free and open to all individuals and/or organizations planning a 2016 Bike to School Day event in the United States. Registering a Bike to School Day event provides organizers access to a variety of downloadable materials including stickers, certificates, badges, and activities. Visit <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org> for more information

Announcements/New Resources

- The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) published “[Incorporating On-Road Bicycle Networks into Resurfacing Projects](#),” a workbook that provides recommendations for how roadway agencies can integrate bicycle facilities into their resurfacing programs. The workbook also provides methods for fitting bicycle facilities onto existing roadways, cost considerations, and case studies.
- FHWA published “[Transportation Alternatives Program \(TAP\) Performance Management Guidebook](#),” which provides sample performance objectives and measures that States, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and project sponsors may consider as they administer, implement, and evaluate TAP and program outcomes.
- The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has provided [updates](#) on Secretary Foxx’s Transportation Empowerment Pilot Program, Ladder^{STEP}, in Fast Lane, the official DOT blog. The Ladder^{STEP} program has assisted projects in [Baton Rouge, LA](#), [West Baltimore, MD](#), and [South Phoenix, AZ](#).

