

Turning Potential into Practice:

Walking and Biking as Mainstream Transportation Choices

Active transportation has the potential to carry a significant part of the transportation load.

Communities that invest in walking and biking have seen tremendous growth in the share of walking and biking trips. Minneapolis, for example, has nearly a 30 percent share of non-motorized trips (Table 1).

With nearly half of all trips under three miles (FHWA 2006), **expanding safe, active transportation choices**—which are perfect for short trips—can make a significant contribution to the overall transportation load. Current transportation statistics undercount walking and biking trips by focusing almost exclusively on work trips which account for only 15 percent of all trips (Bureau of Transportation Statistics 2002).

Expanding active transportation choices needs to be at the heart of the nation's long-term transportation strategy. The status quo practice of expanding roadway capacity is a recipe for gridlock. Communities with good walking and biking conditions can expect a five to 15 percent reduction in overall vehicle miles traveled (Litman 2007).

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Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
National Headquarters
2121 Ward Court, NW, 5th Floor
Washington, DC 20037
tel 202.331.9696
fax 202.223.9257

www.railstotrails.org



Commuting in Washington, D.C. © JESSICA LEAS / RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY

Active transportation has the potential to carry a significant part of the transportation load. With short trips under three miles representing nearly half of all trips (FHWA 2006), walking and biking are poised to bring healthy, clean transportation to communities around the country. While this potential remains untapped in many areas of the country, a growing number of communities are realizing significant increases in walking and biking thanks to targeted investments in active transportation promotion and infrastructure.

At the forefront of this national movement are the four Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Project communities, each receiving approximately \$20 to 25 million to improve their walking and biking networks. These communities are distinct from one another in character: the small-town feel of Sheboygan County, Wis.; bustling and urban Minneapolis; the college-town vibe of Columbia, Mo.; and California's innovative and vibrant Marin County. However, even as diverse representations of America's transportation needs, the Pilots are emblematic of a common goal: more walking and biking choices for mainstream transportation.

While this Pilot program is still fairly new (it was initiated in the 2005 reauthorization of the federal transportation legislation), initial research into the prevalence of walking and biking already shows that focused investment in active transportation using pre-existing federal sources makes a difference in how people travel. Most accounts of transportation mode share rely on Census "journey to work" data. While the Census is certainly the most comprehensive data source available for transportation, it focuses only on transportation to and from work. Work trips, however, only account for 15 percent of all trips (Bureau of Transportation Statistics 2002). In addition, the Census only counts the dominant mode for a journey. If, for example, you walked a mile to a bus stop,

then took the bus three miles to work, the Census would ignore the walking portion altogether.

Research into the Nonmotorized Pilots has provided a more comprehensive portrait of how people travel. The new research shows that walking, biking and transit represent a much more significant mode share than traditionally thought. Current rates of walking and biking for Pilot communities range from 7.3 percent in Sheboygan to 19.6 percent in Minneapolis. When transit—which is predominantly accessed by walking and biking—is factored in, the active transportation mode share jumps even higher to a high of 28.1 percent in Minneapolis.

A focused look at Minneapolis shows that walking and biking are mainstream transportation options today. Years of investments in active transportation have resulted in tremendous transportation choice for residents. When presented with a real choice between being stuck in traffic and walking and biking, many people choose the healthy, clean alternative for a large share of their trips. With close to 30 percent of trips by walking, biking and transit, the Minneapolis experience shows that investments in such active transportation options results in increased non-motorized mode share.

While each individual walking and biking trip is usually short, the cumulative impact in terms of avoided driving is considerable. In Minneapolis, the use of non-motorized forms of transportation resulted in 91 million miles of avoided auto use. This represents four percent of all vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in Minneapolis.



Walking and biking to school in Marin County, Calif. © LAURA COHEN / RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY

From the Periphery to the Mainstream: Active Transportation Builds Communities

While a roughly 30 percent mode share for active transportation and 91 million miles of avoided driving shows the potential for walking, biking and transit, active transportation is often perceived as a peripheral player in the transportation debate. Instead of focusing on the large overall percentage of trips taken by walking and biking, skeptics point to the fairly low percentage of overall VMT as a huge limiting factor for active transportation. To meet the transportation needs of America, skeptics argue, we need more roads and more concrete to facilitate the commuting patterns that Americans seem to prefer. While multimodal approaches and climate change are acknowledged, the real answer to pressing congestion problems in many transportation leaders' minds is to substantially increase highway miles, with some calling for a

doubling of highway miles in the next 50 years (AASHTO 2007).

Study after study, however, shows we cannot build our way out of congestion with increased road capacity (STPP 1999). Continuing the status quo approach of building wider and wider roads further and further out into the countryside is recipe for gridlock. By providing active transportation opportunities that link community destinations, people are given meaningful choices about how to move within their communities.

When offered a real choice through the provision of walking and biking infrastructure, people will choose to walk and bike. Portland, Oregon, for example, has built more than 100 miles of trails and bike lanes just since 2001. This and earlier investments in infrastructure and programming have resulted in a quintupling of bike miles traveled over the last 15 years (City of Portland 2005). In general creating bicycle/pedestrian-friendly communities can result in a five to 15 percent reduction in overall VMT in a community (Litman 2007). These figures can be even higher in close proximity to bike/pedestrian facilities with local reductions of 20 to 30 percent (CCAP 2007).

Active transportation choice allows people to meet their neighbors and stroll along neighborhood streets. The short walking and biking trips that become daily routines can replace many of the longer, auto trips that clog neighbor-

Table 1: Nonmotorized Pilot Mode Share

Pilot Community	Walking Share	Biking Share	Walk/Bike to Transit Share	Nonmotorized Mode Share
Minneapolis, MN	17.6%	2.0%	8.5%	28.1%
Marin, CA	11.8%	1.8%	1.4%	15.0%
Columbia, MO	8.6%	1.5%	2.0%	12.1%
Sheboygan, WI	6.6%	0.7%	1.0%	8.3%

hoods around the country. The VMT savings we see today are not the high-water mark of limited potential, but instead highlight the possibilities of active transportation to meet the mobility needs of Americans.

- “According to the 2001 National Household Travel Survey, nearly half of all travel trips taken in the United States are 4.8 km (3 miles) or less in length; 28 percent are less than 1.6 km (one mile). By taking advantage of the opportunity to convert short automobile trips to bicycling and walking, communities can reap significant benefits from healthier air and reduced traffic congestion” (FHWA 2006, p. 4).
- The apprehension of riding in traffic is significant barrier in increasing bicycle usage. A recent study of Portland, Ore. cyclists by Dr. Jennifer Dill found that 56 percent of cyclists said that they would bike more, but did not because of “too much traffic” (Anderson 2007).
- “While more than \$75 billion a year is spent on federally assisted roadway projects, less than \$1 billion a year is spent on pedestrian and bicycling projects. Only 0.7 percent of federal transportation funds are spent on improving the pedestrian environment and making

it safer to walk” (Pucher and Renee 2003, p. 73).

- “Only about 14 percent of children’s trips to school are made on foot, down from 50 percent in 1969. Forty percent of parents asked about the barriers to children walking to school cited traffic as a major concern” (STPP 2004).
- Twenty-one to 27 percent of local traffic results from parents driving children to school (Safe Routes to School 2007).
- Portland has built more than 100 miles of trails and bike lanes just since 2001. This and earlier investments in infrastructure and programming have resulted in a quintupling of bike miles traveled over the last 15 years (City of Portland 2005).
- In 2003, nine percent of households in the United States did not have an automobile (Bureau of Transportation Statistics. 2002).
- “Pedestrian and bicyclist safety in particular have been ignored. While bicyclists and pedestrians represent 14 percent of all traffic fatalities in the United States, they receive less than one percent of all federal road spending” (STPP 2003b).
- Only 17 percent of children walk to school. Fifty-three percent are driven by a parent (STPP. 2003. Americans’ Attitudes Toward Walking and Creating More Walkable Communities).
- Fifty-five percent of Americans would like to walk more during the day for both transportation needs and exercise. Sixty-three percent would like to walk more to do errands (STPP 2003a).

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Bicycle parking at the State Building in Madison, Wis. © BARBARA RICHEY / RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY



National Headquarters
2121 Ward Court, NW, 5th Floor
Washington, DC 20037
tel 202.331.9696
fax 202.223.9257