



Active Community Environments Initiative

What is the program?

The Center for Disease Control's five year partnership project with Washington State Department of Health and Washington State Department of Transportation, called *the Active Community Environments Initiative*, promotes walking, bicycling, and the development of accessible recreation facilities. It was developed in response to data from a variety of disciplines, including public health, urban design, and transportation planning. These data suggest characteristics of our communities such as proximity of facilities, street design, density of housing, and the availability of public transit, pedestrian and bicycle facilities play a significant role in promoting or discouraging physical activity.

This initiative encourages environmental and policy interventions that will affect increased levels of physical activity and improved public health. The goals are to:

- encourage the development of pedestrian and bicycle friendly environments
- promote active forms of transportation like walking and bicycling
- disseminate information and technical resources related to Active Community Environments Initiative

How does the program help reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT)?

In Washington State, over half of all trips are under three miles, yet 80 percent of these trips are made by car.¹ Part of the earliest and most effective areas on which to focus for reducing VMT and related emissions is lowering the number of short vehicle trips – especially focusing on urban and urbanizing areas. Most people drive for short trips because, in many places, the built environment makes walking and biking either uninviting or very difficult.

Biking and walking are increasing in Washington, particularly in urban and urbanizing areas where housing infill is occurring. Bicycle commuting has increased 75 percent in the past ten years.² Biking and walking currently account for about 6 percent of statewide commute trips.³ In the Puget Sound Region, bicycling and walking account for 9 percent of all trips.⁴ In several urban core areas across Washington, bicycling and walking account for 15 percent of all trips.⁵ Bicycle touring has also become increasingly popular and contributes more than \$6 million annually to local economies in the state.⁶

What is happening now (current status/activities)?

Current statewide activities to promote the goals of the Active Community Environments Initiative include:

- develop the Kids Walk-to-School program to promote walking and bicycling to school.
- collaborate with public and private agencies to promote Walk-to-School Day.

¹ National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), www.bts.gov/programs/national_household_travel_survey/.

² US Census, www.census.gov/.

³ NHTS; US Census;

Regional Household Activity Survey Analysis Report, PSRC (2006). www.psrc.org/data/surveys/hhsurvey/index.htm.

⁴ Regional Household Activity Survey Analysis Report, PSRC (2006). www.psrc.org/data/surveys/hhsurvey/index.htm.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bicycle Alliance of Washington, www.bicyclealliance.org/.

- develop the Active Community Environments guidebook for public health practitioners to use to partner with transportation and city planning organizations to promote walking, bicycling, and close to home recreation facilities.
- promote the development and use of close-to-home parks and recreational facilities through a partnership with the National Park Services Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program.
- collaborate on the King County HealthScape study to review the relationships of land use, transportation, air quality, and physical activity.
- collaborate with the Environmental Protection Agency on a national survey to study attitudes of the American public toward the environment, walking, and bicycling.

Additionally, Regional Transportation Planning Organizations across the state have joined the Active Community Environments Initiative and are benchmarking their efforts to connect bicycle and pedestrian facilities and improve safety using a Community Assessment survey developed by the statewide team.

What can we be doing with existing resources to enhance the program's ability to reduce VMT?

Funding to continue the efforts of this program beyond this year is uncertain. However, the Center for Disease Control has named this program one of the top ten initiatives of the year.

What could we (or should we) be doing with additional resources? (i.e. where are the opportunities for growth/enhancement)?

Additional funding would fund Community Assessment surveys at additional locations to be administered by Regional Transportation Planning Organizations and expand WSDOT and DOH technical assistance services.

Program Contact:

Paula Reeves

Highways and Local Programs

Washington State Department of Transportation

360-705-7258

www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/NutritionPA/our_communities/active_community_environments