



Safe Routes
to School
National
Partnership

Fighting For Equitable Transportation: Why It Matters



Walking, bicycling, and public transit need to be safe and convenient for everyone. But currently, these activities are more dangerous and less available in low-income communities and communities of color than others.

Walking and bicycling are prevalent among low-income people and people of color – but street conditions are even more dangerous than the walking and bicycling conditions experienced by white, middle-class Americans. In addition, the health, access, and community benefits provided by active transportation are crucial for low-income Americans and Americans of color, who have higher rates of obesity and physical inactivity. Many low-income Americans suffer from the lack of safe and convenient access to work, school, healthy food, health care, and other important destinations – addressing inequities in walking, bicycling, and public transit access can help overcome these challenges, while providing healthy physical activity.

Why does safe and convenient walking and bicycling matter for low-income communities and communities of color?

1. Low-income people and people of color are using active transportation now:

- Low-income people have the highest rates of walking and bicycling to work – the very highest rates of walking and bicycling to work are among those who make under \$10,000 per year, with high rates also seen for those making under \$25,000 per year.¹
- By race, people of mixed race and Asian Americans have the highest rates of walking to work, Latinos show moderately high rates, and whites and African Americans show the lowest rates.²
- Children of color, particularly Latinos and African Americans, are more likely to bike or walk to school than white students.³ Low-income children are twice as likely to walk to school as children from higher-income families.⁴
- More than 60 percent of transit riders walk to get to and from their transit stops.⁵ African Americans make up 33 percent of public transit riders, riding at a rate that is two and a half times more than their share of the population.⁶ A high percentage of public transportation users are low- to moderate-income, with two-thirds of riders having household incomes of less than \$50,000 per year, and 20 percent of riders having a household income of less than \$15,000 per year.^{7,8}
- Latinos and Native Americans have a slightly higher rate of bicycling than whites.⁹ Growth in bicycle ridership is occurring most rapidly among African Americans and Asian Americans, with Latinos and whites following.¹⁰ Between 2001 and 2009, bicycle trips by Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans grew from 16 to 23 percent of all bike trips in the United States.¹¹



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2. Low-income people and people of color are walking and bicycling in dangerous conditions:

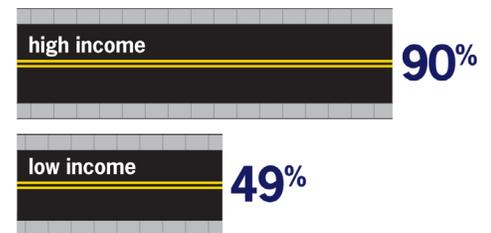
- Children and adults from low-income households have a higher risk of being injured or killed while walking than residents of upper-income areas.¹² Nationally, pedestrian fatality rates in low-income metro areas are approximately twice that of more affluent neighborhoods.¹³ A study in one metropolitan region showed that the number of people on foot injured in the poorest census tracts was 6.3 times higher than in the richest census tracts; for people on bicycles, the number of injuries was 3.9 times higher in poor areas; and for vehicle occupants, 4.3 times greater in poor areas than in rich ones.¹⁴
- For walking, Latino and African American fatality rates are about twice that of whites.¹⁵ Fatality rates for people bicycling are 23 percent higher for Latinos than whites, and 30 percent higher for African Americans than whites.¹⁶
- Low-income communities have poorer pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and more high-speed, high-traffic roads.¹⁷ While almost 90 percent of high-income areas have sidewalks on one or both sides of the street, in low-income communities that percentage drops to 49 percent.¹⁸ Streets with street lighting are also significantly more common in high-income areas (75%) than in low-income communities (51%).¹⁹ Streets with marked crosswalks are significantly more common in high-income areas (13%) than in low-income communities (7%).²⁰ Traffic calming features, such as traffic islands, curb bulb outs that shorten crossing distances, and traffic circles, are found almost three times as often in high-income areas compared with low-income communities.²¹

People Killed While Walking by Income



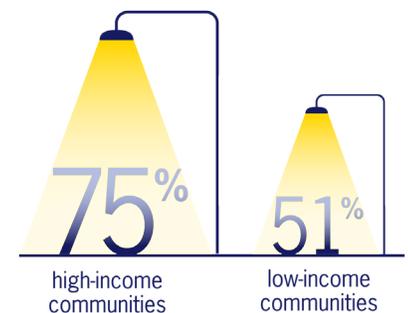
Governing, August 2014

Communities with Sidewalks



Bridging the Gap, Income Disparities in Street Features that Encourage Walking, 2012

Who Has Streets with Lighting?



Bridging the Gap, Income Disparities in Street Features that Encourage Walking, 2012





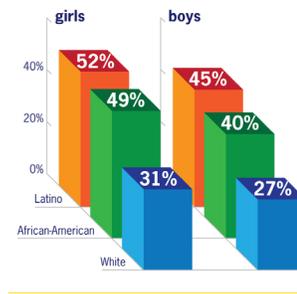
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3. Active transportation can provide huge health and community benefits for low-income communities and communities of color:

- Obesity levels are threatening the health and well-being of Americans, with low-income people and Latinos and African Americans suffering the highest rates.²² More than 38 percent of Latino youth and almost 36 percent of African-American youth are obese or overweight.²³ Obesity is linked to some of the leading causes of preventable death, including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer.²⁴

Lifetime Risk of Diabetes



More than half of Latina girls are expected to get diabetes over the course of their lifetime, and the numbers are almost as high for African American girls.

Leadership for Healthy Communities

- Physical inactivity is one of the primary contributors to obesity.²⁵ Residents of low-income communities and communities of color have significantly less access to recreational facilities than those in higher-income or predominantly white communities.²⁶ People in low-income communities have lower activity levels and higher body mass indexes.²⁷
- Regular physical activity for children and youth improves strength and endurance, helps control weight, reduces anxiety and stress, and increases self-esteem.²⁸
- Active transportation is a proven way to get healthy levels of physical activity. Almost one-third of transit users get their entire recommended amount of physical activity just by walking to and from transit stops.²⁹ People who live in more multimodal communities exercise more and are less likely to be overweight than those who live in automobile-oriented communities.³⁰ Adults who get around by walking or bicycling have lower weight and blood pressure, and are less likely to become diabetic.³¹
- Switching from car trips to walking and bicycling trips reduces air pollution. Latino communities have the highest air pollution exposure levels,³² and overall, air pollution is more likely to be found at dangerous levels in communities with more Latino, Asian American, African American, and low income residents.³³ Exposure to unhealthy air is linked to asthma, bronchitis, and cancer, and worsens existing lung and heart disease, all of which disproportionately affects low-income people and people of color.³⁴ African Americans are three times more likely to die from asthma than whites.³⁵
- Walking and bicycling can help people get to know their neighbors, improve community, and reduce social isolation and mental health problems.³⁶





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What can be done?

Groups that focus on walking, bicycling, and Safe Routes to School need to make equitable active transportation a key objective, while engaging with low-income communities and communities of color. At the same time, groups that focus on social justice and equity need to include active transportation among their demands. By partnering, these movements can be more successful in achieving goals such as:

- Prioritizing transportation funding and investments for low-income communities with dangerous street conditions.
- Fighting against racial profiling by police of children, youth, and adults of color who are walking and bicycling.
- Keeping housing stable and affordable for low-income households, while ensuring that communities get the safe walking, bicycling, and street infrastructure they need to overcome the dangers caused by decades of underinvestment.
- Using Safe Routes to School programs to keep children in high crime neighborhoods safe from crime and violence, while overcoming the hurdles of chronic absenteeism.
- Supporting quality public transportation and ensuring safe walking and bicycling access to transit stops.

At the Intersection of Active Transportation and Equity

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership has developed a report that explores some of the challenges and opportunities for understanding and increasing equity in the field of active transportation. The report, [At the Intersection of Active Transportation and Equity: Joining Forces to Make Communities Healthier and Fairer](#), delves into the statistics and realities regarding transportation inequities, summarizes how the active transportation movement is working to increase its understanding of equity, and assesses a wide range of issues and initiatives where equity and active transportation intersect.

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