



December 1, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama  
c/o Mortimer Downey, Transportation Advisor

**Re: Health Performance Outcomes and the Next Transportation Bill**

Dear President-Elect Obama:

Enclosed please find a letter signed by more than 40 national organizations and 130 state and local organizations urging Congress to include health performance outcomes in the next transportation bill.

Currently, the U.S. federal government spends approximately \$60 billion/year on transportation infrastructure. This outlay is dwarfed by the costs to our country resulting from the negative health impacts of transportation. Americans spend:

- \$76 billion a year on health care costs related to physical inactivity, because many individuals cannot safely walk, bicycle, or access public transit;
- \$164 billion a year on health care costs associated with traffic injuries and deaths; and
- Between \$40 and \$64 billion a year on health care costs associated with asthma and other health conditions related to high rates of air pollution.

We are grateful that you have expressed support for transportation options--such as public transit, bicycling, and walking--to be affordable and accessible to all Americans. These same modes of travel can also contribute to reducing the high health care costs that our current auto-focused transportation system generates.

As President, we hope you will direct leadership toward ensuring that the next transportation bill recognizes and addresses the links between transportation and public health. By reversing the negative and costly health impacts of our current transportation system, you will provide a strong foundation for supportive policies and programs for transportation choices that are safe, healthy, and less polluting.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that our 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation system is one that is safe and healthy for communities all throughout the United States. For more information on any of the points identified in the letter, please contact me

Sincerely,

Deb Hubsmith, Director  
Safe Routes to School National Partnership



America Bikes America Walks American Academy of Pediatrics  
 American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network  
 American Diabetes Association American Institute of Architects American Public Health Association  
 American School Health Association American Society of Landscape Architects  
 Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals Bikes Belong Coalition Campaign to End Obesity  
 Congress for the New Urbanism EcoMom Alliance Friends of the Earth  
 International Mountain Bicycling Coalition League of American Bicyclists Local Government Commission  
 National Association for Health & Fitness National Association of Chronic Disease Directors  
 National Association of Regional Councils National Center for Bicycling & Walking  
 National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity National Complete Streets Coalition  
 National Institutes of Health Bicycle Commuter Club National Recreation and Park Association  
 Natural Resources Defense Council National Wildlife Federation PolicyLink Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc.  
 Prevention Institute Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Safe Routes to School National Partnership  
 Smart Growth America Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association  
 State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association Thunderhead Alliance for Biking and Walking  
 Transportation for America Trust for America's Health United States Public Interest Research Group  
 YMCA of the USA...plus 130 state and local organizations

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November 7, 2008

The Honorable Chairman James L. Oberstar  
 House Committee on Transportation &  
 Infrastructure  
 2165 Rayburn Building  
 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ranking Member John L. Mica  
 House Committee on Transportation &  
 Infrastructure  
 2163 Rayburn Building  
 Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Request for the next transportation bill to include performance-based outcomes on public health**

Dear Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Member Mica:

As you are drafting the legislation for the successor to SAFETEA-LU, we, the 171 undersigned national, state and local organizations, urge you to recognize the key role the federal government holds with respect to how surface transportation affects public health—in particular, outcomes on air quality, physical activity, and safety. We urge Congress to develop performance-based outcomes related to public health for the next transportation bill.

We understand that there are many important and fundamental considerations for the next transportation bill, such as financing the bill and managing the nation's aging infrastructure system. At the same time, we believe that this next transportation bill provides Congress with an important choice and responsibility at a critical time. As leaders who will design the future of our transportation system, you have a choice to make between creating additional costs or producing positive benefits for the health and safety of Americans and the quality of our air. These issues are inextricably linked to transportation and land use.

Congress should ensure that transportation projects improve opportunities for public health, and do not create additional public health hazards.

Physical Activity

Transportation policies are contributing to the obesity epidemic. Today in America, 67 percent of adults are overweight or obese and nearly one-third of all children are overweight or obese. In addition, childhood obesity has increased nearly five-fold for children aged 6-11 over the past forty years, and doctors state that the current generation might be the first in more than two hundred years to have shorter life spans than their parents.



Numerous studies have confirmed the relationship between the built environment and physical activity. Studies have consistently found that people living in auto-oriented communities drive more, walk less, and are more obese than people living in walkable communities. For each hour of driving per day, obesity increases 6 percent. In contrast, studies show that individuals who walk, bicycle, or access public transit reduce the risk of obesity and gain public health benefits. This demonstrates how transportation shapes land-use, and how those factors are linked to obesity. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Community Guide to Preventative Services* indicates that building facilities for physical activity, such as sidewalks and trails, is an effective means of increasing physical activity.

Regarding costs, CDC estimated that obesity cost America \$117 billion in the year 2000, and another study showed that physical inactivity results in \$76 billion in direct medical costs annually in the United States. The Surgeon General recommends thirty minutes of physical activity each day for adults and sixty minutes of physical activity most days for children. New data based on objective monitoring of physical activity shows that less than 20 percent of adolescents and less than 5 percent of adults are meeting these guidelines.

Physical inactivity is a crisis in America. This crisis is directly related to the fact that our surface transportation system has largely ignored the needs of cyclists and pedestrians, and does not have a comprehensive, connected, and convenient public transit system. In many cases, Americans can not even safely cross the street or walk or bicycle a short distance to access public transit, stores, or schools because of hazardous conditions.

#### Safety and Injuries

Over the past two decades, traffic fatalities on United States roadways have averaged about 43,000 per year, and approximately 2.5 million people are injured on roadways each year. In addition to the loss of human life and health, traffic crashes cost Americans an estimated \$164 billion each year.

Further, 13 percent of traffic fatalities in the United States occur among pedestrians and bicyclists, a number that is grossly disproportionate to the approximately 1 percent of funding that supported these modes in SAFETEA-LU, and the approximately 9.5 percent of trips in the United States that are made by walking and bicycling.

#### Air Quality

Nearly half of Americans live in areas with unhealthy air quality. Air pollutants from cars, buses and trucks can worsen respiratory diseases, trigger asthma attacks, and are tied to heart disease and cancer. Asthma is on the rise in the United States, with one in ten children now suffering from this disease. Researchers have found that one in three schools are located in air pollution danger zones. The public health costs of pollution from cars and trucks have been estimated at between \$40 billion and \$64 billion per year.

In addition to creating air pollutants that contribute to poor air quality, transportation is responsible for one-third of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions, and approximately half of carbon monoxide emissions. Curbing increasing trends in the amount that Americans drive and the aggregate amount of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the United States is imperative. Otherwise, these trends will soon undercut the progress achieved in reducing pollution through increased vehicle fuel efficiency standards and reduced carbon content of transportation fuels as provided for in the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007.

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In conclusion, we urge Congress to recognize that there is an important federal role in the next transportation bill to improve public health and ensure that transportation projects do not continue to have



harmful effects on public health. We ask that you consider these themes as overarching performance outcomes in structuring the programs and priorities in next transportation bill. As demonstrated through the statistics presented above, American families and government agencies are spending more money each year on health care costs due to the negative impacts of transportation on public health than the federal government is spending annually to improve transportation.

To further highlight these critical issues, we urge the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to hold a hearing (or other suitable format as determined by Congress) on transportation policies' implications for public health. We also encourage you to hold a joint hearing with the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee with public health professionals, researchers, and advocates who can further explain the federal role in the relationships between transportation policies, land use, public health, air quality, and harmful automobile emissions. This hearing should also examine the need for improved surveillance, evaluation and research associated with measuring the costs and benefits of all transportation modes and public health outcomes.

Should you have any questions about the statistics or issues contained within in this letter, please contact Deb Hubsmith, Director of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership

We, the undersigned, thank you for your leadership on transportation policies. We hope to have the opportunity to work with you on a transportation bill that will address the nation's infrastructure, safety and mobility needs, while also recognizing performance outcomes related to public health, including physical activity, safety and air quality.

Sincerely,

**National Organizations:**

America Bikes	National Association of Regional Councils
America Walks	National Center for Bicycling & Walking
American Academy of Pediatrics	National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity
American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation	National Complete Streets Coalition
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network	National Institutes of Health Bicycle Commuter Club
American Diabetes Association	National Recreation and Park Association
American Institute of Architects	Natural Resources Defense Council
American Public Health Association	National Wildlife Federation
American School Health Association	PolicyLink
American Society of Landscape Architects	Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc.
Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals	Prevention Institute
Bikes Belong Coalition	Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
Campaign to End Obesity	Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Congress for the New Urbanism	Smart Growth America
EcoMom Alliance	Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association
Friends of the Earth	State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association
International Mountain Bicycling Coalition	Thunderhead Alliance for Biking and Walking
League of American Bicyclists	Transportation for America
Local Government Commission	Trust for America's Health
National Association for Health & Fitness	United States Public Interest Research Group
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors	YMCA of the USA

**State and Local Organizations**

Be Active New York State  
Better World Club  
4J School District, Safe Routes to School Program  
Activate Martinsville & Henry County  
Activate Omaha  
ACTIVE Louisville  
Active Williamsburg Alliance  
Affinity Health System  
Affinity Health System  
Ashland Cycling Enthusiasts  
Bay Area Bicycle Coalition  
Bicycle Alliance of Washington  
Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia  
Bicycle Coalition of the Ozarks  
Bicycle Commuters of Anchorage  
Bicycle Federation of WI  
Bicycle Sport Shop  
Bicycling Club of Milledgeville  
Bicycling for Louisville  
Bike Chattanooga  
Bike Pittsburgh  
BikeAlameda  
BikeLane Coalition  
BikeNet  
Bloomington Transportation Options for People  
Bowling Green Safe Routes to School Committee  
Bridging the Gap  
Buffalo County Nutrition Coalition  
California Bicycle Coalition  
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network  
California Park & Recreation Society  
California Public Health Association-North  
Cascade Bicycle Club  
Centre Region Bicycle Coalition  
Chain Reaction Cycling Club  
Chicagoland Bicycle Federation  
City of Aspen Environmental Health Department  
City of Fayetteville  
City of Moscow  
ClevelandBikes  
Coalition for Sustainable Transportation (COAST)  
Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children  
East Coast Greenway Alliance  
Franklin County Health Department  
Friends of Madison County Parks and Trails  
Friends of Pathways  
Go Bike

Health by Design  
Healthy Lifestyle La Plata Coalition  
Highland Elementary School Health and Safety  
Highland Elementary School PTA  
Indiana Bicycle Coalition  
Indiana Public Health Association  
IU/Wishard Level I Trauma Center, Wishard Health Services  
Kansas City River Trails, Inc.  
Knox County Health Department  
Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition  
Lane Coalition for Healthy Active Youth  
Latino Health Access  
Lebanon Valley Bicycle Club  
Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government  
LiveWell Commerce City  
Lockheed Martin Recreation Association Bicycle Club  
Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition  
Louisiana Public Health Institute  
Manitowoc County Kids Coalition for Activity and Nutrition  
Marin County Bicycle Coalition  
Mark J. Reynolds Memorial Bike Fund, Inc  
Miami-Dade Park and Recreation Department  
Michigan Fitness Foundation  
Mid-America Regional Council  
Missouri Bicycle Federation, Inc.  
North Carolina Active Transportation Alliance  
North County Cycle Club  
Oklahoma Bicycling Coalition  
Ozark Greenways, Inc.  
Parks & Trails New York  
Partnerships for Healthy Communities  
Pepin County Nutrition Coalition  
Polk County Health Department  
Positive Spin  
PPH Partners  
Preserve Our Climate  
Red Dirt Pedalers, Stillwater's bicycle club  
Regent Neighborhood Association, Transportation and Traffic Committee  
Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates (SABA)  
Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District  
Safe Kids Sonoma County  
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition  
San Francisco Department of Public Health  
San Luis Obispo County Bicycle Coalition  
San Mateo County Health Department  
Sharebike  
Shifting Gears Bicycles



Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition  
Slavic Village Development  
Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition  
Southern California Public Health Association  
St. Croix Regional Medical Center  
St. Louis Regional Bicycle Federation  
St. Paul Smart Trips  
State Trails Advisory Committee for Montana  
Sumter County Active Lifestyles  
The Atlanta Bicycle Campaign  
The PedNet Coalition  
The Queen's Medical Center  
The Strategic Alliance  
Trailnet  
Train with Rainey  
Transportation Alternatives for Marin  
Tri-County Health Department  
UC Berkeley Traffic Safety Center

Upper Valley Trails Alliance  
Virginia Association for Health, Physical  
Education, Recreation & Dance (VAIIPERD)  
Walk/Bike Nashville  
Walk+Roll Cleveland  
WalkBikeBerks  
WalkBoston  
WALKSacramento  
WalkSanDiego  
Washington Area Bicycle Association  
Washington Bike Law  
Washington County Health Department  
Washtenaw Bicycling and Walking Coalition  
Washtenaw County Public Health Department  
Wisconsin Walks  
[www.bikecommuter.com](http://www.bikecommuter.com)  
Xccent, Inc  
Yellowstone Valley PTA Council