



## Benefits of Transit

### What is Transit?

Often referred to as public transportation or mass transit, transit is any form of transportation that runs fixed routes and is available to the public. The most common forms of transit are buses, subways, ferries, and trains.

### Health Benefits

- The average American driver may spend over 450 hours each year—equal to nearly 11 workweeks—behind the wheel.<sup>1</sup> The stress of driving in congested conditions is linked directly to a long list of health problems, including cardiovascular disease, suppressed immune system functioning and strokes as well as more headaches, colds and flu. Studies indicate that less travel time, more predictability, enhanced control and less effort required to make a trip reduces the stress levels and negative health effects associated with driving. Transit provides obvious advantages in all of these dimensions, as well as opportunities to read and relax that are not available to drivers stranded in traffic. Expanding and enhancing transit provides an opportunity to decrease stress and its negative impacts on our health.<sup>2</sup>
- Train commuters walk an average of 30% more steps per day, and report having walked for a period of 10 minutes or more while traveling significantly more often, and were 4 times more likely to walk 10,000 steps per day than car commuters. The way a person commutes can significantly affect the amount of physical activity commuters accumulate during the course of a typical work day without a planned exercise program thus reducing the likelihood of becoming obese.<sup>5</sup>
- Obesity and declining physical fitness can be associated with inactive, sedentary, auto-dependent lifestyles.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 65 percent of U.S. adults are overweight; 30 percent are obese. Obesity makes people susceptible to illnesses and chronic health conditions, leading to less productive and less enjoyable lifestyles and increased healthcare costs.<sup>2</sup>
- Transportation planning decisions, including decisions on transit, impact public health in three main ways: through traffic crashes, vehicle pollution, and physical activity. Of the 10 most common causes of death in the United States, seven are affected by transportation in these three ways.<sup>3</sup>

## **Economic Benefits**

- Transit fuels local development and in turn has a positive impact on local property values. Studies have shown greater increases in the value of properties located near transit systems than in similar properties not located near transit.<sup>2</sup>
- A person who commutes 30 miles each way daily could save an estimated 390 gallons of gasoline every year by switching from using a car to using transit. At \$3.25/gallon that would yield a total savings of \$1,267 annually on gasoline alone.
- A transit coalition report, "*Dollars & Sense: The Economic Case for Public Transportation in America*," found that every dollar taxpayers invest in transit generates \$6 or more in economic returns.<sup>2</sup>

## **Safety Benefits**

- Total per capita traffic fatality rates (including automobile, transit and pedestrian deaths) tend to decline as transit ridership increases in a community.<sup>4</sup>
- Transit trips result in 190,000 fewer deaths, injuries and accidents annually than trips by car, providing \$2 billion to \$5 billion in safety benefits, based on 1994 data.<sup>1</sup>

## **Other Benefits**

- Transit-friendly, walkable communities reduce reliance on motor vehicles and promote higher levels of physical activity. These more traditional urban settings may generate half the automobile trips of similarly sized modern-day suburbs. Studies show that a single mile of transit travel can substitute for five to seven miles of auto travel in such settings.<sup>2</sup>
- Transit fosters more livable communities by creating corridors that become natural focal points for economic and social activities. These activities help create strong neighborhood centers that are more economically stable, safe and productive.<sup>2</sup>
- From 1980 through 1995, the asthma rate among children doubled from 2.3 million to 5.5 million, reaching epidemic proportions in the U.S. Air pollution is a primary cause. Over 140 million Americans, 25 percent of whom are children, live, work and play in areas where air quality does not meet national standards. Increased availability and use of transit dramatically reduces motor vehicle emissions and improves air quality.<sup>2</sup>
- Transit enhances equity in American society by creating jobs, getting people to work and providing quality transportation access for low-income individuals and minority communities.<sup>2</sup>

## Sources

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4. Litman, T. (2005). Terrorism, Transit, and Public Health: Evaluating the Risk. *Journal of Public Transit*, 33-46.
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