

The Public Health Benefits of Transit

A quality transit system is an essential element to creating healthier communities. Transit encourages riders to walk as a part of their daily routine, helps reduce crash rates, improves air quality and can reduce isolation.

Encouraging walking

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that adults average at least 22 minutes of daily moderate physical activity, such as walking, to reduce their risk of heart disease, obesity, stroke and diabetes. A quality transit system encourages walking and creates opportunities for riders to exceed the CDC's recommended guidelines by building in extra activity into their daily commute.

In the Portland region, TriMet ridership studies indicate bus riders will walk as much as a quarter mile to their bus stop, while MAX riders will walk up to a half mile to connect to light rail. Additionally, TriMet's system emphasizes cycling to transit by incorporating bike racks on buses and light rail vehicles, bike parking at transit centers, and bike lanes to provide safe connections to transit.

Fewer crashes

Providing safe, convenient and attractive sidewalks, pedestrian crossings and transit stops is imperative to ensuring riders have a positive transit experience. In communities where transit is designed to maximize the pedestrian experience, motorists move at slower traffic speeds, reducing crash rates. Additionally, residents of transit-oriented communities often drive significantly less, and rely more on walking and transit than residents of other neighborhoods.



Public transit encourages riders to walk as part of their daily routine, which health experts say is critical to reducing an individual's risk for heart disease, obesity, stroke and diabetes.

TriMet and its regional partners are working collaboratively as part of the Pedestrian Network Analysis Project to develop an objective, data-driven system for prioritizing places around the region where pedestrian infrastructure investments will provide safer and more comfortable access to transit.

The agency also actively supports transit-oriented development to help create more walkable communities. A 2006 study of the Portland region showed that people living in transit-oriented communities with mixed-use development travel 55 percent less in a private vehicle each day.

Reducing air pollution

Air quality is critical to reducing the incidence of asthma, lung disease, lung cancer and mortality. A quality transit system means fewer cars on the road and lower tailpipe emissions into the air.



See where it takes you.

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Transit positively impacts public health

- **Encourages daily walking:** Increased walking reduces a person's risk for heart disease, obesity, stroke and diabetes.
- **Supports safer streets:** Wide sidewalks, safe pedestrian crossings and bike connections are key elements in reducing crash rates.
- **Facilitates cleaner air:** Reducing auto emissions and improving air quality contribute to lower incidences of asthma, lung disease and lung cancer.
- **Reduces isolation:** Access to grocery stores, medical services, employment and education reduces isolation.

More than four tons of smog-forming pollutants are avoided every day when people choose to ride TriMet instead of drive cars. Electric-powered transit such as MAX Light Rail or Portland Streetcar, along with technological advances that enable diesel buses to run cleaner, make transit a mode more beneficial to public health than commuting alone in a gas-fueled car. Additionally, emissions from TriMet buses have been reduced in the last several years due to new pollution-control equipment and cleaner-burning fuels. With the latest standards and technology, our buses emit 90 percent fewer nitrogen oxides and particulates than they did 10 years ago.

More access, reduced isolation

Transit also is essential to taking people to the places that they need to go and reducing isolation, particularly for seniors and people with disabilities. A quality transit system provides access to grocery stores, medical services, employment and educational institutions.

TriMet's bus, MAX Light Rail and WES Commuter Rail services are completely accessible to seniors and people using mobility devices. TriMet continues to take steps to make the system even more accessible by adding audible stop announcements to new buses, increasing the number of low-floor buses and working with city and county partners to improve pedestrian connections to transit.

Additionally, TriMet provides support to RideWise, a program that teaches older adults and people with disabilities to travel independently and safely on public transportation.

An investment in better health

Communities often consider investing in public transit to provide residents with viable transportation choices and the opportunity to reduce family transportation expenses (estimated savings average more than \$10,300 per year for a transit rider in the Portland region). With the rising costs of health care and worsening obesity rates, public health experts are raising awareness about the effect of the built environment and how we get around on our health.

For more information on public health and transit in the Portland region contact the Upstream Public Health, the Oregon Public Health Institute and the Multnomah County Health Department.

Available in other formats:

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