

# Planning For Better Health

## Solutions for active and safe living

**Greetings!** As a community leader, you want what's best for your city or town. Traffic congestion and the cost of commuting may drive your concerns but there's an even more compelling reason to plan city growth carefully: our health.

For decades, we designed roads and homes for cars rather than people, and people have suffered. We breathe dirtier air, are more overweight, and are less likely to walk or even eat fresh local food. In neighborhoods where poor planning is evident, these issues are felt even more acutely.

Better-designed cities give people more options for how they move around—options such as walking to the grocery store or cycling to work. Many of the trips we make are less than three miles, the equivalent of a 15-minute bike ride. By retooling our existing infrastructure, we better serve our residents, decrease pollution, and get closer to reaching our greenhouse gas reduction goals under the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB32).

Fortunately, there is growing recognition that the way we design our communities affects our health. Some cities are putting roads on "diets"—reducing auto lanes to make room for bike lanes and wider sidewalks. Others are writing General Plan language that prioritizes creating tight-knit neighborhoods with homes people can afford and space for new parks and community gardens. City-centered growth also protects the farms on the urban fringe that provide healthy, fresh local food.

You can help. This guide, *Planning for Better Health*, outlines facts and solutions. It offers messages you can use to persuade your city leaders to plan land use that improves our health.

Together we can make our region a better, healthier place to live.

Ken Yeager  
*President, Board of Supervisors, Santa Clara County*  
*Metropolitan Transportation Commissioner*  
*Member, California Air Resources Board*





## **The Health Issue: Poor Diet and Fitness**

### **Solution: Nearby Parks and Safe Sidewalks**

#### **Quick Facts**

**Fact:** The lack of parks, play spaces or safe sidewalks leads to less physical activity for children, putting them at risk of obesity.

A 2010 study by UCSF and Kaiser Permanente colleagues found the neighborhood environment affected the exercise and eating habits of young girls.

**Fact:** The availability of food and retail stores affected how much girls ate.

**Fact:** Walkable neighborhoods with places to play or exercise had a beneficial impact on Hispanic/Latina girls.

**Fact:** Neighborhoods without places to play or exercise had the most negative influence on African-American girls.

#### **Key messages you can use ~**

*“For children, it’s vital to have walkable neighborhoods and nearby parks. Without these amenities, children are at risk of eating more and exercising less.”*

*“When girls have access to parks and safe sidewalks, they are much more likely to stay fit. Planning for parks in urban areas should be a priority to fight childhood obesity.”*

#### **Policy Suggestions**

- Make an inventory of the number of parks in your city. Make sure future growth plans include green places for children to play within a quarter mile of all residents.
- Identify underused land that could become parks, and direct resources to create safe, green places.
- Assess existing sidewalks and make sure parks can be reached safely on foot or by bicycle.

#### **Study Background**

Researchers recorded the diet and exercise habits of more than 200 girls from San Francisco, Marin County and the East Bay. They also visited each girl’s neighborhood and noted whether or not the streets were clean and walkable within a quarter-mile radius. They counted how many parks and retail and food stores were nearby, too.

#### **Resources & References**

For more information, see “Measuring the Neighborhood Environment,” 2010 [www.ijbnpa.org/content/7/1/52](http://www.ijbnpa.org/content/7/1/52).

# The Health Issue: Obesity and Asthma

**Solution:** Complete Streets and Walkable Neighborhoods

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## Quick Facts

**Fact:** Obesity rates in the United States have increased dramatically in the last thirty years. Approximately two-thirds of U.S. adults and one-fifth of children are either obese or overweight. Overweight people are at risk of many chronic diseases including heart disease and diabetes. (Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

**Fact:** More than half of Americans would like to walk more and drive less. Poor community design and lack of pedestrian facilities are the primary reasons people cite for not walking more. An overwhelming percentage support policies intended to make their communities more livable by reducing traffic speed and creating a safer pedestrian environment. (Source: Surface Transportation Policy Partnership)

## Key messages you can use ~

*"Communities must be designed around people and not cars. Walkable neighborhoods that have a mix of homes, shops and jobs give people a choice to leave their cars parked and walk or bike instead. This is good for our health and good for the planet."*

*"Nearly half of the Bay Area's greenhouse gas pollution comes from driving. At the same time, many of the trips we make are less than three miles — the equivalent of a 15-minute bike ride. If we make our streets safer for cyclists and pedestrians, we can improve air quality, reduce carbon emissions and engage in a more active lifestyle."*

## Policy Suggestions

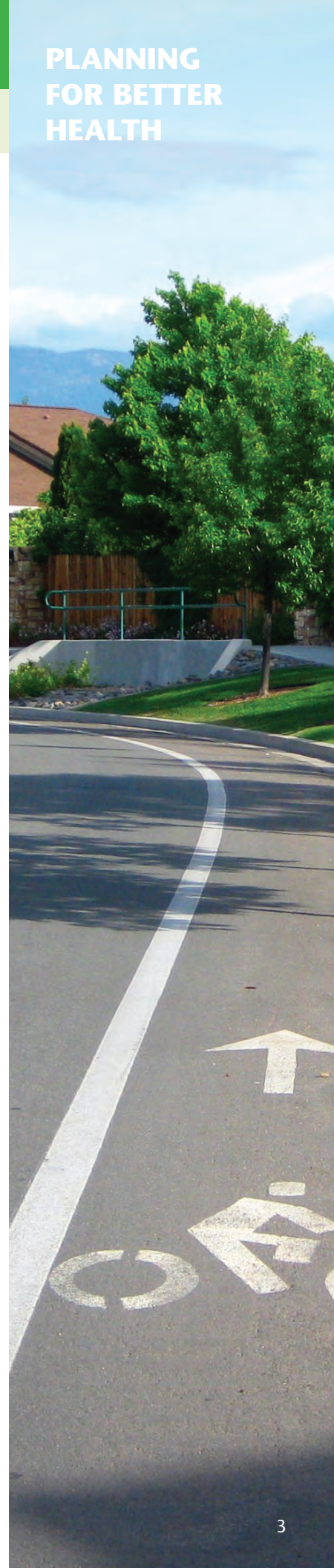
- Ensure that pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities can safely share the street network.
- Identify barriers to pedestrian and bicycle access, especially at transit stations, and prioritize completion of these gaps.
- Plan and implement a continuous network of walkways and bikeways and ensure they connect people with primary destinations (transit stations, job centers, shops, offices, libraries, parks).

## Performance Standards and Measurable Outcomes

Communities with complete streets policies can measure success through a number of ways: the miles of on-street bicycle routes created; new linear feet of pedestrian accommodation; changes in the number of people using public transportation, bicycling, or walking (mode shift); and number of new street trees.

## Resources & References

How walkable is your neighborhood? Check out [www.walkscore.com](http://www.walkscore.com).





## The Health Issue: Poor Diet

### Solution: Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture

#### Quick Facts

**Fact:** In San Jose, fast food and convenience stores outnumber grocery stores and fresh produce markets by a ratio of 4.6 to 1. That's more than the 4.3 to 1 ratio for Santa Clara County, and the 4.2 to 1 ratio for the state as a whole.

**Fact:** Overall, in Santa Clara County, 26% of all middle and high school students are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

**Fact:** Between 1984 and 2004, Santa Clara County lost 33,288 acres of agricultural land to development, or 1,664 acres per year.

#### Key messages you can use ~

*"Integrating community gardens into urban spaces reconnects people with their food. What better place than in the Valley of Heart's Delight to ensure school children understand where their food comes from and to start developing healthy eating habits early on."*

*"Everyone deserves accessible, healthy, and affordable food."*

#### Policy Suggestions

- Partner with the County and nonprofit organizations to promote community gardens in low-income and high density areas as an opportunity to grow affordable and healthy food.
- Develop partnerships with nonprofits and the school districts to connect school children with community gardens, providing children with educational opportunities and access to healthy foods.
- Identify nutrition-deficient neighborhoods and encourage the location of full service grocery stores and farmers markets in these areas.
- Expand the production and consumption of locally grown fresh produce, including the provision of more community garden sites.
- Ensure that remaining agricultural lands inside the urban limit line are preserved and used for growing food. Connect these spaces with educational institutions.

#### Local Examples

The San Jose Community Garden Program was established in 1977 and has accumulated 19 community gardens on approximately 35 acres of land. The majority of the gardens are older than 15 years. The newest garden, Guadalupe, was opened in November 2008. More than half of San Jose gardeners are immigrants. Middle Eastern, Portuguese, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Romanian, Latino, Bosnian, Italian, and Vietnamese people mix and mingle while growing a variety of fresh produce that reflects their diverse backgrounds. This also helps reduce the seclusion that many immigrant families experience when they arrive in Santa Clara County with its auto-dependent sprawling neighborhoods.

# The Health Issue: An Aging Population

## Solution: Senior-Friendly Communities

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### Quick Facts

**Fact:** Over the next twenty years, our population will age dramatically as the Baby Boomers reach their senior years. It is estimated that by 2030, one out of every five residents in Santa Clara County will be over age 65.

**Fact:** In Europe where cities are denser and the pedestrian infrastructure is better, 50% of seniors walk or bike compared to 8% of American seniors.

**Fact:** Compared with older drivers, older non-drivers in the United States make 15% fewer trips to the doctor; 59% fewer shopping trips and visits to restaurants; 65% fewer trips for social, family, and religious activities.

**Fact:** In a recent AARP poll 40% of adults 50 years and older say they do not have adequate sidewalks in their neighborhoods. 47% say they cannot cross their main roads safely.

### Key messages you can use ~

*"We must plan and design our communities today to meet the needs of an aging population. Seniors thrive in neighborhoods that are walkable and inclusive, where everything they need is within a reasonable distance."*

*"To ensure that seniors are able to enjoy their neighborhood and engage with their community, we must design safe streets with sidewalks and easy connections to shops, transit, and community centers."*

### Policy Suggestions

- Inventory and assess existing senior services and create a plan for addressing the gaps in services. By determining where services and senior enclaves are, a community can plan ahead by redirecting transit routes to better serve area where there are senior hot spots.
- Include senior housing in complete neighborhoods served by transit. Seniors thrive when they can reach essential services without a car.
- Ensure that the streets and sidewalks in these neighborhoods are of the highest quality so as to amplify seniors' independence. Many of the policies related to complete streets lead to more senior-friendly neighborhoods.

### Health Statistics for Seniors and Active Living

- Walking reduces costs to society. The CDC estimates that if 10 percent of adults began a regular walking program, \$56 billion in heart disease costs could be saved. (Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003)
- Vehicle accidents with senior pedestrians are more likely to result in death. In 2007, older Americans made up 19% of all pedestrian fatalities although they only make up 13% of the total U.S. resident population.
- The Surgeon General recommends 30 minutes of moderate activity a day. For seniors, a one-mile trip is a 30-minute walk if seniors go 2.8 ft/s.





## **The Health Issue: Childhood Obesity**

### **Solution: Safe Routes to School**

#### **Quick Facts**

**Fact:** One generation ago, most children walked to school. Today, only one in ten children walks to school regularly. Since the mid 1960s rates of childhood obesity have increased exponentially from 4% to 16%, while the number of walking and bicycling trips made by children has fallen by 65%. (Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

**Fact:** Travel to school accounts for 25% of all morning traffic. (Source: TransForm)

**Fact:** Studies from the American Heart Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that walking to school is associated with higher overall physical activity throughout the day. There are many potential benefits of physical activity for youth including weight and blood pressure control, bone, muscle, and joint health and maintenance.

#### **Key messages you can use ~**

*"When children walk and cycle to school, they build lifelong healthy habits while also helping to reduce traffic congestion near schools."*

*"Streets should be designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities. A sign of a quality city is one where children have safe access to sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes."*

#### **Policy Suggestions**

- Partner with school districts to encourage safe routes to schools.
- Identify the physical barriers that prevent children from safely getting to and from school and prioritize these streets for safety upgrades.

#### **Benefits of Safe Routes to Schools**

- Increases the amount of time devoted to physical activity, which helps reduce a child's risk of obesity.
- Improves concentration and increases alertness.
- Enhances safety in the area around the school by reducing traffic.
- Makes children more self-sufficient, an important part of developing social skills.
- Empowers children to contribute positively to the environment, by traveling pollution-free.
- Provides a great opportunity to develop healthy, lifelong habits of enjoying physical activity.
- Is the perfect opportunity for family quality time.

#### **Resources & References**

To learn more, visit [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org).

# The Health Issue: Health Disparities

## Solution: Equal Access to Produce and Parks

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### Quick Facts

**Fact:** There are 51 residential areas in the City of San Jose that do not have access to a park, school, or open space within 1/3 mile.

**Fact:** In one Los Angeles neighborhood, about 20 fast-food restaurants are packed into a quarter-mile stretch of road. Grocery store chains have historically been less likely to locate in lower-income communities and communities of color. East Palo Alto, a community of 30,000 and predominantly Hispanic and African American, approved its first full service grocery store in October 2009.

**Fact:** In Los Angeles, white neighborhoods (where whites make up 75% or more of the residents) boast 31.8 acres of park space for every 1,000 people, compared with 1.7 acres in African-American neighborhoods and 0.6 acres in Latino neighborhoods.

**Fact:** A Health Report from the City of Berkeley points to evidence that some California communities display a life expectancy that is 20 years greater in the wealthiest census tracts than in the most impoverished.

### Key messages you can use ~

*"It is vital that all residents of a community enjoy equal access to nature, and urban parks provide that visual and mental respite from the busyness of city life."*

*"Lower-income neighborhoods that are shown to have little to no access to parks must be prioritized to receive these first as the city expands parkland. Having a green place to play, walk, and relax benefits people of all ages."*

### Policy Suggestions

- Apply resources to meet parks, recreation, and open space needs in underserved areas of the city, prioritizing lower income and higher density areas, which may have a greater need for these amenities.
- Provide access to an existing or future park, open space lands, and/or a major city trail within a 1/3-mile radius walking distance of all residents by either acquiring lands within 1/3 mile or providing safe connections to existing recreation facilities outside of the 1/3-mile radius walking distance.
- Implement zoning designed to limit fast-food restaurants in overburdened communities.
- Identify sites for community gardens and promote the expansion of farmers' markets and urban agriculture.
- Measure the accessibility of healthy foods by neighborhood to identify nutrition-deficient neighborhoods in a city.

### Resources & References

Looking for an interactive map to identify park-deficient neighborhoods? Check out [www.parkscore.org](http://www.parkscore.org).





# The Health Issue: Pedestrian and Cyclist Fatalities

## Solution: Complete Streets and Road Diets

### Quick Facts

**Fact:** In the Bay Area, pedestrians and cyclists represent 28% of all fatal motor vehicle collisions. Older Americans made up 20% of all pedestrian fatalities.

(Source: Metropolitan Transportation Commission, 2005 data)

**Fact:** Below 20 mph, only 20% of collisions cause a serious or fatal injury to a pedestrian. Above 35 mph, most vehicle collisions are fatal or incapacitating.

### Key messages you can use ~

*"I would ride my bike to work if there was a dedicated bike path, but right now the streets do not feel safe."*

*"A good city is one where a child can go anywhere on a bike safely."*

*"We must design our cities and streets for people, not cars. Streets are public spaces after all, so we should encourage people to get outside and meet on park benches, chat on sidewalks, walk in the sun, and be with their neighbors."*

### Policy Suggestions

- Identify roads that could benefit from a "diet"; in other words, right-sizing large streets. An example might be to take a four-lane road and turn it into two travel lanes and one turn lane, and using the leftover street space to add or widen sidewalks, add bike lanes, and create a landscaped median.
- Design streets so sidewalks are more clearly defined instead of driveways. Different paving materials and raised medians and intersections slow down auto traffic and provide a safer pedestrian environment.
- Around transit stations, ensure a continuous network of sidewalks, walkways, and bikeways.

### Local Example

Bicycle traffic on Valencia Street in San Francisco increased by 140% (from 88 bikes/ hour to 215 bikes/ hour) after bicycle lanes were added and the number of traffic lanes in each direction reduced from two to one.



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