

ITE Transportation and Health Initiative: Statement of Intent

Transportation plays an important role in people’s health, safety, well-being, and quality of life. ITE members have a direct impact on two of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) top 10 most pressing issues concerning the public’s health: Motor Vehicle Injuries and Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity (www.cdc.gov/psr/index.html). While ITE’s Vision Zero initiative focuses on safety, this initiative focuses on the link between transportation and health. ITE members play a major role in providing active transportation choices and therefore access to healthy food choices.

Data available from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the World Health Organization indicate that more than two-thirds of Americans are overweight and 17 percent of children/adolescents and 36 percent of adults in the United States are obese. Further, more than 40 percent of the world’s population is overweight and more than 10 percent is obese. Worldwide obesity has more than doubled since 1980 and lack of physical activity leads to 3 million deaths per year globally. Obesity has been linked to high blood pressure, type-2 diabetes, heart disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, cancers, and pregnancy complications. The National League of Cities estimates that obesity in the United States results in an increase of \$190 billion/year in medical care spending.

Transportation impacts individual health decisions. As stated by the CDC: “People and families may make decisions based on their environment or community. For example, a person may choose not to walk or bike to the store or to work because of a lack of sidewalks or safe bike trails. Community, home, childcare, school, healthcare, and workplace settings can all influence people’s daily behaviors. Therefore, it is important to create environments in these locations that make it easier to engage in physical activity and eat a healthy diet.”

While healthy choices are ultimately an individual responsibility, ITE members must help create environments that enable healthy decisions. Communities across the nation are setting goals in their transportation plans to become Active Living Communities—places where residents and visitors can readily participate in everyday physical activity, regardless of physical limitations. From a transportation perspective, such activity can be as simple as a short walk from the home or office to the store around the corner or it may mean traveling by bicycle to and from work or school. The ability to be active in a city, neighborhood, or village center is largely determined by transportation facilities and operations, as well as land use patterns. A city where attractive destinations are in proximity to each other and to residential areas makes active travel appealing. When these conditions are combined with a transportation system designed for all users and abilities, walking, biking, and using public transportation become efficient and desirable means of getting around. In turn, active transportation modes have the obvious result of increasing levels of physical activity, while reducing obesity, healthcare costs, air pollution, and noise levels. Tools such as Health Impact Assessments are already being used by ITE members. Our transportation systems should make it easier for people to be healthy by making walking and bicycling truly feasible options; by creating intermodal connections that are well maintained, safe, and secure; and by building the infrastructure and amenities such as bike storage, benches, and placemaking—but also by providing adequate maintenance such as clearing snow from walkways and bike lanes, and providing proper lighting to improve safety.

ITE has identified transportation and health as a key initiative in 2017, with several activities already underway:

- In January, the ITE International Board of Direction created a new Task Force, led by Paula Flores, to investigate the connection between transportation and health and identify additional activities ITE should undertake to address this issue.

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- ITE's Complete Streets and Planning Councils are working on projects aimed at improving active transportation options and opportunities, including the recently completed lecture series on Protected Bikeway Design. Work on a companion informational report has begun.
- ITE will launch the *Bicycling and Walking Benchmarking Report* website in April, created in partnership with the American Public Health Association (APHA)
- ITE is participating in the American Public Health Association's National Public Health Week, April 3–9, 2017.
- ITE's Thought Leaders podcast series recently featured Karyn Warsow from the Transportation Public Health Link. Karyn discussed the connection between transportation and health and how transportation and health professionals can better work together. The April 25 joint podcast with the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT) will also focus on transportation and health.
- ITE is preparing a strong transportation-health program for the Joint ITE/Canadian ITE Annual Meeting in Toronto, Canada.
- A series of Transportation and Health webinars will be delivered, beginning on April 18 with "Connecting Transportation and Health Goals: Diagnosing the Problem." Future webinars will focus on available technical resources and tools.
- ITE supports the U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action to promote Walking and Walkable Communities.
- ITE will co-sponsor and participate in the 2017 National Walking Summit being held in St. Paul, MN, USA, September 13–15 and will seek to co-sponsor and participate in other relevant events.

Future activities will include a strong focus on development/enhancement of tools that will help ITE members take health considerations into account as they participate in and support the transportation decision-making process. The Transportation and Health Task Force will explore ways that ITE can put existing research in this area into practice and incorporate health considerations into ITE references such as the *Traffic Engineering Handbook* and *Transportation Planning Handbook*, and explore developing new reference material.

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