

# Social Equity Benefits of Walking

*"...If you believe that society should strive to promote equality and happiness, you push to make your roads integrated and humane, from space for walking to space for cars and transit. And in my mind, the most advanced cities are the ones with the best-quality sidewalks."<sup>1</sup>*

— Enrique Peñalosa,

former mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, and president of the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy

## Problem Overview

- Over the past 50 years development trends have created low-density suburbs and exurbs that require people to go further distances to satisfy basic needs and often make travel by foot impossible:
  - » Suburban subdivisions often lack sidewalks and feature multilane highways that cannot be safely crossed by foot.<sup>3</sup>
  - » Schools are often placed on the fringe of communities along wide, busy thoroughfares that prevent children from biking or walking to school.<sup>4</sup>
  - » There are few transportation options for nearly two-thirds of residents living in unincorporated areas, small towns, and rural communities: 41% have no access to transit; and another 25% live in areas with below-average transit services.<sup>5</sup>
- These development patterns disproportionately affect those with low incomes and communities of color:
  - » Low-income households are more reliant on walking, cycling, and transit infrastructure for personal mobility. A Brookings Institution report reveals that 7.5 million American households, or 10% of households, do not have access to a private vehicle. Nearly 60% of those households have incomes below 80% of their regional median income. Families without a vehicle, however, often live in places that lack active transport investments.<sup>6</sup>
  - » In 2006, 45% of jobs in the largest of the country's metro areas were farther than 10 miles from the urban core, where the disproportionate numbers of low-income and minority populations live.<sup>7</sup> These suburban jobs are often reachable only by private car, which further isolates low-income and minority populations from economic opportunities.
- African-Americans make up 12% of the U.S. population, yet they account for 20% of pedestrian fatalities.<sup>8</sup>
- Hispanics suffer a pedestrian death rate that is 62% higher than non-Hispanic whites, and African-Americans suffer a pedestrian death rate that is almost 70% higher than non-Hispanic whites.<sup>9</sup>
- Americans in the lowest 20% of the income bracket spend 42% of their total annual income on transportation, while middle-income households spend 22% of their annual income on transportation.<sup>10</sup> High transportation costs make low-income families limit their spending on other basic needs, such as health-care expenses, food, and clothing.<sup>11</sup>
- Walking is critical for accessibility:
  - » One-third of all Americans are not able to drive, either because they are too old, too young, too poor, or have some form of disability.<sup>12</sup>
  - » 1 in 5 Americans faces a physical limitation that affects his ability to travel for his daily needs.<sup>13</sup>
  - » More than 50% of Americans 65 and older who do not drive stay home on a given day because they lack transportation options.<sup>14</sup>
- Federal transportation funding compounds these inequities:
  - » Not a single dollar of the U.S. transportation budget is dedicated solely to walking.
  - » Less than 2% of federal transportation funds are spent on pedestrian facilities.<sup>15</sup>

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## Walking as a Solution

- Walking improves mobility, consumer cost savings, fitness and health, and social interaction.<sup>16</sup>
- Increasing community walkability improves home values, residents' health, and localized air quality.<sup>17</sup>
- More compact urban form designed around transit stations can reduce travel costs, wages, and housing costs, which can lead to substantial net benefits for lower-income households.<sup>18</sup>
- Improved walkability allows residents to save on transportation costs:<sup>19</sup> The typical annual transportation cost for households in neighborhoods with bus and rail transit was \$3,000 lower than the cost in communities with no access to transit.<sup>20</sup>
- According to one CDC-funded study, trails can be beneficial in promoting physical activity among those groups traditionally at highest risk for inactivity, especially women and individuals in lower socioeconomic groups.<sup>21</sup>

## Additional Resources

- PolicyLink: [www.policylink.org](http://www.policylink.org)

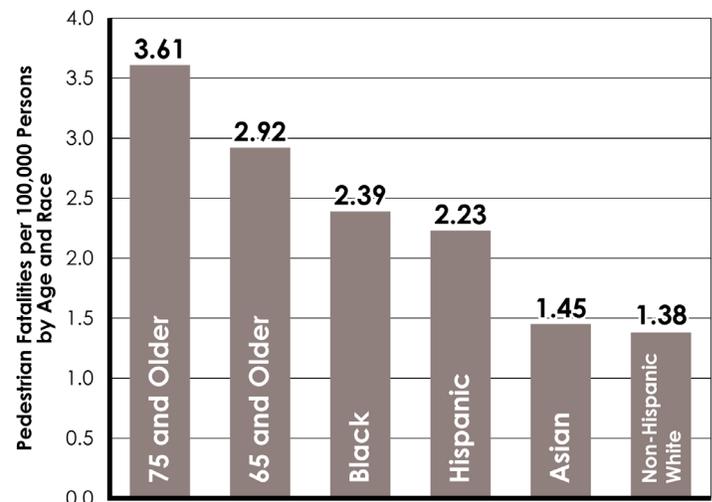


Figure 1: Pedestrian Fatality Rate Per 100,000 Persons by Age and Race. Source: *Dangerous by Design, Transportation for America, 2011*

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