

VI. LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Foster livable communities by integrating transportation policies, plans, and investments with coordinated housing and economic development policies to increase transportation choices and access to transportation services for all.

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

President Obama has made place-based policy a key component of his domestic agenda and has challenged all Federal agencies to coordinate and innovate around this idea in an unprecedented way. Fostering and maintaining livable communities, or places where transportation, housing and commercial development investments are coordinated so that people have access to adequate, affordable, and environmentally sustainable travel options, represents a transformational policy shift for DOT. The quality of life benefits that we will work to achieve under our livable communities goal include improvements in the public transit user experience, provision of additional pedestrian and bicycle networks, and improved access to transportation for people with disabilities, older adults, and lower income populations. With these improvements, we expect to maintain or lower household expenditures for transportation and offer more affordable connections to jobs and other necessities.

U.S. transportation investments over the last 50 years have often been poorly coordinated with other investments such as housing and commercial development. This has contributed to a prevalence of low-density, scattered, auto-dependent and inaccessible communities, and disinvestment in many of our core urban centers and first suburbs. These development patterns have been amplified by single-use zoning that separated housing from shopping, work, and schools. Such zoning emphasizes wide streets, ample off-street parking, and large front and side yard setbacks. Federal programs for roadway construction promoted wide, high-speed roadways ill-suited to pedestrian and bicycle use even in quiet residential communities.

The United States' heavy reliance on car-dependent, dispersed development is not without costs.⁶⁷ For example, the average American adult between the ages of 25 and 54 drives over 12,700 miles per year, spending the equivalent of approximately one month each year in the car,⁶⁸ and the average American household has to spend \$7,658 annually to buy, maintain, and operate personal automobiles.⁶⁹

Alternatives to auto travel are lacking in many communities. Fewer than one in 20 households are located within a half-mile of rail transit and only 53 percent of Americans have access to any form of public transportation service.^{70 71} Health experts believe that auto-dependent development patterns contribute to a host of health problems by making walking and biking dangerous in some residential neighborhoods.^{72 73 74} Nearly one-third of Americans live in neighborhoods without sidewalks.⁷⁵ An increase in the number of communities built without sidewalks has been correlated with a decline in the percentage of American children who walk or bike to school. In 1969, 42 percent of children five to 18 years of age walked or bicycled to school. In 2001, only 16 percent walked or bicycled to school, which is one of the causes of rising childhood obesity.^{76 77 78 79 80 81}

A study of the health effects of sprawl found that people living in more compact, walkable counties are likely to walk more, weigh less, and are less likely to suffer from hypertension than people living in more sprawling counties.⁸² Another study, which was the first to examine the relationship between sprawl and a wider spectrum of chronic illnesses, suggests that the physical attributes of where a person lives can encourage or discourage active living and, therefore, have an impact on health.⁸³ Roughly 40 percent of all trips in metropolitan areas are two miles or less in length. These are trips that could be taken on foot or bicycle, but are still taken primarily by car due at least in part to disjointed land use patterns, poor infrastructure design, and limited connectivity.

Creating livable communities is just as important to the quality of life of residents of rural areas as it is for residents of urban and suburban areas. Rural town centers have experienced disinvestment in much the same way as urban core areas. Indeed, many rural areas are fighting to attract local commercial development through the revitalization of their town centers. Rural residents generally must travel greater distances to jobs and services than their urban counterparts and can suffer from greater isolation, especially if they cannot drive.

LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Building livable communities involves a whole government approach and DOT is collaborating across lines of authority to leverage related Federal investments. With the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), we formed the *Partnership for Sustainable Communities* to promote sustainable development and more livable communities. The Partnership is working to address barriers to coordinating transportation, housing, and environmental programs and investments. For instance, integrating transportation planning with housing and community development planning not only improves connectivity and influences how people choose to travel, but also enables communities to consider transportation and land use planning simultaneously and, ultimately, make the best use of limited funds. If these barriers are based on Federal administrative rules or regulation, we are proposing modifications to lift them. Where they are statutory, we are working with Congress to address them. Through the Partnership, we coordinate related federal programs and technical assistance opportunities among all three agencies. For example, DOT and HUD provide staff and resources to support the EPA Smart Growth Technical Assistance Program. DOT collaborates with EPA in the administration of the HUD affordable housing and planning programs. In addition, HUD and EPA are providing technical assistance in the evaluation of DOT TIGER Discretionary Grant applications, for which livability and sustainability are two key criteria.⁸⁴ To achieve our Livable Communities agenda, we will:

- Provide best practices in financing and implementing livable communities strategies;
- Encourage coordination of land use planning with the current MPO transportation planning process, including preparation of plans and programs that support local economic development, multi-modal networks, and land use plans;

- Develop, pilot, and link tools that can help communities evaluate the trade-offs among various street space allocations and scenarios;
- Develop national and local performance measures that can be used to track livability across the Nation; and
- Advocate for more robust State and local planning efforts, create incentives for investments that demonstrate the greatest enhancement of community livability based on performance measures, and focus transportation spending to support complementary infrastructure investments, both public and private.

Our strategic objectives for the Livable Communities goal are presented below.

FY 2014-2018 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Expand convenient, safe, and affordable transportation choices for all users by directing federal investments in infrastructure towards projects that more efficiently meet transportation, land use, and economic development goals developed through integrated planning approaches (LC1).
- ❖ Ensure federal transportation investments benefit all users by emphasizing greater public engagement, fairness, equity, and accessibility in transportation investment plans, policy guidance, and programs (LC2).

Our strategies for addressing each objective are discussed in the following paragraphs.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE ACCESS TO CONVENIENT AND AFFORDABLE TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

We will enhance the quality of life for all Americans by creating and maintaining a safe, reliable, integrated and accessible transportation network that enhances choices for transportation users, provides easy access to employment opportunities and other destinations, and promotes positive effects on the surrounding community. We will build on innovative ways of doing business that promote mobility and enhance the unique characteristics of our neighborhoods, communities and regions. To increase access to transportation choices, we will:

- Continue to encourage States and MPOs to consider the impact of transportation investments on local land use, affordable housing, and additional infrastructure needs;
- Continue to invest in high-speed and intercity passenger rail to complement highway, transit, and aviation networks and encourage projects that improve transit connectivity to intercity and high-speed rail, airports, roadways, and walkways;
- Increase the capacity and reach of public transportation, improve the quality of service, and improve travel time reliability through deployment of advanced

- technologies and significant gains in the state of good repair of transit infrastructure;
- Advocate for transportation investments that strategically improve community design and function by providing an array of safe transportation options such as vanpools, smart paratransit, car sharing, bike sharing, and pricing strategies that, in conjunction with transit services, reduce single-occupancy driving;
 - Encourage rural areas to plan for opportunities to walk and ride bicycles as well as provide reliable means of high-quality, accessible public transportation services to connect them to vital destinations now accessible only by automobile;
 - Support Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Assessments, which analyze current engineering practices, enforcement strategies, and education programs. The assessments can be used to assist with long-range planning and resource allocation, generate support for program improvement, and serve as a benchmarks against which to measure future improvements;
 - Promote the use of bicycling and walking for daily activities through investment in on- and off-street bike and pedestrian infrastructure and safety enhancements;
 - Develop planning data and analytic techniques to support planning for non-motorized travel, including Geographic Information System-based methods to estimate non-motorized travel, standardized methods for non-motorized travel data collection, data collection and analysis of trends in non-motorized travel, data analysis of related travel trends such as VMT per capita and travel time reliability, and analytic tools to study the relationship between non-motorized travel and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;
 - Encourage Federal Land Management Agencies, States and Tribal governments to inventory their walking and bicycling facilities; and
 - Maintain a web-based clearinghouse on walking and bicycling to provide best practices on walking and bicycling planning, design, construction, maintenance, safety, ways to encourage using these modes for trips and continue to develop methods to evaluate the walkability and bikeability of a community.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVED COORDINATION OF HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION

The Transportation Secretary leads the Federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) in support of the United We Ride (UWR) initiative. UWR is a Federal inter-agency initiative to coordinate over 60 federally-assisted transportation programs aimed at improving the availability, quality, and efficient delivery of transportation services for older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes. UWR works through FTA staff, other Federal agencies, State and local organizations, and non-profits to provide assistance in obtaining Federal grants in support of the transportation-disadvantaged. To increase access to transportation for these persons, we will continue to support the CCAM mandates and also:

- Support locally-coordinated human service transportation planning processes and advocate for a single point of access that links human services with transportation providers to address mobility needs of persons with disabilities, older adults, low-income persons and others without cars or who are unable to access the fixed route system and trains;
- Conduct research to develop transportation management center capabilities for automated scheduling, mapping, routing, and dispatching to link human services transportation providers for easier access, and more efficient and cost-beneficial services; and
- Enhance technical assistance and training activities to improve the operations of local public and non-profit community transportation providers.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE ACCESS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* (ADA) prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in all aspects of life, and applies to all entities, i.e., public or private regardless of funding source. Title II of the ADA applies to all programs, services and activities provided or made available by public entities including State and local governments or any of their instrumentalities or agencies. The scope of Title II coverage extends to the entire operations of a public entity, and includes all stations in transit systems, airports facilities, intercity rail transportation system, and roadway facilities including sidewalks or pedestrian crosswalks. We can provide guidance, assistance, and funding in a limited number of cases, to encourage ADA compliance in existing facilities. While many entities have developed ADA transition plans, implementation has been slowed by competing priorities for limited funds.

We consider how environmental justice principles will be integrated into all DOT planning and programming, rulemaking, and policy formulation.⁸⁵ We seek to prevent disproportionately high and adverse effects onto minority or low-income populations through Title VI analyses and environmental justice analyses conducted as part of federal transportation planning and environmental permitting provisions.

To increase access for persons with disabilities, we will:

- Identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects of transportation policies and programs on minority populations and low-income populations;
- Increase access to transportation for Special Needs Populations and Individuals with Disabilities;
- Ensure full compliance and accountability for ADA requirements including the prompt resolution of claims;
- Increase the number of State and local government ADA transition plans that provide schedules for including curb ramps or other sloped areas at pedestrian crosswalks, identify physical obstacles that limit accessibility, describe the methods that will be used to make facilities accessible, and specify a schedule for achieving compliance for pedestrian accessibility in public rights-of-way; and

- Reduce language barriers when providing services and benefits to persons with limited English proficiency.⁸⁶

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, PERFORMANCE GOALS, AND INDICATORS

We will monitor our progress in achieving the Strategic Objectives for the Livable Communities goal using the Performance Goals and Indicators in Table G.

Table G. Performance Goals, Indicators, and Lead by Livable Communities Strategic Objective.

Performance Goal	Performance Indicator(s)	Lead Office
Strategic Objective: Expand convenient, safe, and affordable transportation choices for all users by directing federal investments in infrastructure towards projects that more efficiently meet transportation, land use, and economic development goals developed through integrated planning approaches (LC1).		
Improved networks that accommodate pedestrians and bicycles by increasing to 65 the number of States, MPOs, and local governments with polices and/or plans that improve transportation choices for walking and bicycling by FY 2018.	Number of States, MPOs, and local governments with polices and/or plans that improve transportation choices for walking and bicycling.	FHWA
Increase intercity passenger rail ridership to at least XX billion miles traveled by 2018.	Total number of intercity rail passenger-miles traveled.	FRA
Strategic Objective: Ensure federal transportation investments benefit all users by emphasizing greater public engagement, fairness, equity, and accessibility in transportation investment plans, policy guidance, and programs (LC2).		
Improve accessibility on Public Rights of Way by increasing the number of State DOTs and sub-recipients with adequate transition plans that include the Public Rights of Way.	Number of State DOTs and sub-recipients with adequate transition plans that include the Public Rights of Way.	FHWA
Increase the percentage of the Veterans Transportation Community Living Initiative (VTCLI) partner community sites using social media strategies to at least 25 percent, or 22 out of 86, by 2018.	Number of VTCLI partner communities	FTA
Improve access to transportation for people with disabilities and older adults by ensuring that at least XX percent of	Cumulative percentage of intercity passenger rail stations that comply with the	FRA

intercity passenger rail stations comply with the requirements of ADA by the end of 2018.	requirements of ADA, where AMTRAK is responsible.	
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EXTERNAL RISK FACTORS

Current laws and associated DOT guidance provide States and MPOs with great flexibility; they neither give priority to nor require the expenditure of funds by grant recipients on projects that are explicitly intended to improve livability.

Transportation infrastructure and housing have long useable lives, which can provide or limit options for generations. For example, if a bridge is built without accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians or without the structure to support passenger or freight rail, then these modes are not likely to receive consideration until that bridge is replaced. Further, the design and location of neighborhoods can be even more lasting. As a consequence, changes to the organization and density of the national housing stock and the transportation that supports the stock will take decades to unfold, and will largely be constrained by the extent of new community or infill growth. Retrofits of existing communities therefore require strong direction and leadership as well as the involvement of all stakeholders throughout the planning process.

Federal-aid roadway design standards do not apply to local streets. DOT can give guidance and publish best practices, but cannot require that transportation infrastructure include walking and bicycling facilities. Typically, sidewalks and bike paths are optional in road construction. Where sidewalks do exist, they are often not well-connected, accessible, or safely designed. Other barriers to livable communities include the lack of crosswalks, traffic signals with insufficient time for crossing, wide roads without medians, fast-moving traffic, long blocks, lack of gridded streets, sidewalk obstructions, and narrow sidewalks.

Community and institutional resistance to changes in business practices, planning procedures, and transportation norms that will be needed to build livable communities can be strong and pervasive. Obstacles to change include lack of information about the benefits of change, lack of knowledge about how the change would affect individuals or the community, lack of community pressure to change, and lack of sustained leadership in the direction of change. The costs of change are often immediate, while the benefits are long-range. This cost-benefit disparity reduces the political appeal of change.

Important demographic trends could have a profound effect on the demand for transit and walking and alter current resistance to change. The demographic groups that are growing most quickly in the U.S. are older, non-traditional families, and non-white households. Historically, these groups have used alternatives to personal vehicles such as transit in higher numbers.⁸⁷ Nationwide, the use of private vehicles for commuting to work is just below 88 percent. But, usage is closer to 80 percent in the largest metropolitan areas with the difference being made up mostly by increases in transit and walking.⁸⁸

Preferences and attitudes among younger Americans could also be a driving force for change. In one survey, half of the population age 18 to 34, often referred to as Millennials, agreed that an easy walk to stores was an extremely important determinant in their choice of housing and neighborhood. In the same survey, over two-thirds felt that living in a walkable community was important.⁸⁹ Among this same group, a more recent survey revealed that the loss of a personal vehicle is of less consequence than the loss of their mobile devices. The survey results suggest that the availability of car sharing and ride sharing services make it easier for Millennials to live without owning a car.⁹⁰

Among older Americans, preferences could be changing too. Another survey of older households reported that 71 percent of respondents want to live within walking distance of transit.⁹¹ In more walkable communities, older Americans will have more opportunity to age in place if transportation is available to them. Even if they have to curtail their driving, they will still have access to medical services, shopping, family, friends and social amenities.