

Transportation

What We Know

Transportation is necessary in order to get to and from work, grocery stores, or anywhere else. Cars, buses, planes, trains, bikes, and the body can all be used as transportation. Each form has its benefits, but they also have their own impacts on health.

Connectivity. Transportation has the ability to connect people with places they cannot get to on foot. Streets, bike paths, and railways all have the capability to make getting from one place to another simple, accessible, and easy. This is only possible, however, with good planning and resources³. Even with the availability of transportation, some people are isolated from others or may not have access to it. People living in low-income households or those with disabilities typically have less access to safe transportation⁴.

Safety. Access to transportation has made life easier for many Americans. It also comes with a number of safety concerns. Motor vehicle crashes is one of the leading causes of death in America⁵. Designing safer streets, such as those with speed bumps or traffic circles reduces the risk for pedestrians. Distracted or aggressive driving also puts others at risk. Many states have worked on lowering the legal blood alcohol limit. Laws on “hands free” driving have also been made, prohibiting the use of cell phones while driving.

Pollution. Motor vehicles are the leading cause of air pollution that affects health². Extended exposure to vehicle emissions can trigger respiratory problems. These include asthma, reduced lung function, and increased susceptibility to pneumonia and bronchitis. Vehicle emissions are typically regulated by state agencies. Despite regulations, many areas located near major interstates and highway, are greatly impacted by the vehicular pollution.

Active Transportation. Transportation plays a role in the development of sedentary lifestyles in the United States. People who drive to work or take the bus in order to get around engage in very little physical activity in order to get from one place to another. Many transportation agencies and workplaces are encouraging more active transportation, such as bike riding or walking¹. Increasing the amount of active transportation is especially important for people who live in low-income communities or new immigrants as they might have less access to transportation⁴.

Local Implications for Harrisonburg/Rockingham

Transportation was identified as the #1 challenge in the H/R area by HCC survey respondents, with congestion and access for senior and disabled travelers noted as specific transport-related problems.⁶ Harrisonburg is proximal to several major highways, including I-81, is in the 39th percentile for housing and transportation affordability, and is in the 24th percentile for road traffic fatalities per 100,000 residents according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.⁷ Bus routes generally fail to connect neighborhoods to essential things like shops, the hospital, and banking in a timely manner, particularly for rural residents living in Rockingham County. However, transit trips per capita is high (89th percentile)⁸ and commute time is low.

Locally, James Madison University has been working with the City of Harrisonburg to create a more environmentally friendly bicycle/pedestrian master plan. Residents can check out www.jmu.edu/transportation for information on transportation in Harrisonburg transportation, for example bus schedules, ride sharing, and public safety information. The Northend Greenway Project, which joins the efforts of local citizens with the Virginia Department of Transportation and the City of Harrisonburg, will link neighborhoods and businesses through a publically accessible trail. It is designed to increase physical activity in Harrisonburg, which currently stands at 24.8% less than the U.S. national average.⁹

Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition is organized to facilitate family biking, bicycle commuting, and as well as advocate for safer bicycle riding in the Shenandoah Valley. One current project is Connect Our Schools, which is coalition of people working towards safer bike commuting of children to school. This is also being done in coordination with the Safe Routes to School Coordinator from Sentara RMH Community Health Programs. Vine and Fig, a New Community Project initiative, works toward local environmental transformation including transportation within the built environment.

References

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