

Fighting For Equitable

Walking, bicycling, and public transit need to be safe and convenient for everyone. But currently, these activities are more dangerous and less available in low-income communities and communities of color than others.

Walking and bicycling are prevalent among low-income people and people of color – but street conditions are even more dangerous than the walking and bicycling conditions experienced by white, middle-class Americans. In addition, the health, access, and community benefits provided by active transportation are crucial for low-income Americans and Americans of color, who have higher rates of obesity and physical inactivity. Many low-income Americans suffer from the lack of safe and convenient access to work, school, healthy food, health care, and other important destinations – addressing inequities in walking, bicycling, and public transit access can help overcome these challenges, while providing healthy physical activity.

Why does safe and convenient walking and bicycling matter for low-income communities and communities of color?

- Low-income people have the highest rates of walking and bicycling to work – the very highest rates of walking and bicycling to work are among those who make under \$10,000 per year, with high rates also seen for those making under \$25,000 per year.¹
- By race, people of mixed race and Asian Americans have the highest rates of walking to work, Latinos show moderately high rates, and whites and African Americans show the lowest rates.²
- Children of color, particularly Latinos and African Americans, are more likely to bike or walk to school than white students.³ Low-income children are twice as likely to walk to school as children from higher-income families.⁴
- More than 60 percent of transit riders walk to get to and from their transit stops.⁵ African Americans make up 33 percent of public transit riders, riding at a rate that is two and a half times more than their share of the population.⁶ A high percentage of public transportation users are low- to moderate-income, with two-thirds of riders having household incomes of less than \$50,000 per year, and 20 percent of riders having a household income of less than \$15,000 per year.^{7,8}
- Latinos and Native Americans have a slightly higher rate of bicycling than whites.⁹ Growth in bicycle ridership is occurring most rapidly among African Americans and Asian Americans, with Latinos and whites following.¹⁰ Between 2001 and 2009, bicycle trips by Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans grew from 16 to 23 percent of all bike trips in the United States.¹¹



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benefits for low-income communities and communities of color:

- Obesity levels are threatening the health and well-being of Americans, with low-income people and Latinos and African Americans suffering the highest rates.²² More than 38 percent of Latino youth and almost 36 percent of African-American youth are obese or overweight.²³ Obesity is linked to some of the leading causes of preventable death, including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer.²⁴
- Physical inactivity is one of the primary contributors to obesity.²⁵ Residents of low-income communities and communities of color have significantly less access to recreational facilities than those in higher-income or predominantly white communities.²⁶ People in low-income communities have lower activity levels and higher body mass indexes.²⁷
- Regular physical activity for children and youth improves strength and endurance, helps control weight, reduces anxiety and stress, and increases self-esteem.²⁸
- Active transportation is a proven way to get healthy levels of physical activity. Almost one-third of transit users get their entire recommended amount of physical activity just by walking to and from transit stops.²⁹ People who live in more multimodal communities exercise more and are less likely to be overweight than those who live in automobile-oriented communities.³⁰ Adults who get around by

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Groups that focus on walking, bicycling, and Safe Routes to School need to make equitable active transportation a key objective, while engaging with low-income communities and communities of color. At the same time, groups that focus on social justice and equity need to include active transportation among their demands. By partnering, these movements can be more successful in achieving goals such as:

- Prioritizing transportation funding and investments for low-income communities with dangerous street conditions.
- Fighting against racial profiling by police of children, youth, and adults of color who are walking and bicycling.
- Keeping housing stable and affordable for low-income households, while ensuring that communities get the safe walking, bicycling, and street infrastructure they need to overcome the dangers caused by decades of underinvestment.
- Using Safe Routes to School programs to keep children in high crime neighborhoods safe from crime and violence, while overcoming the hurdles of chronic absenteeism.
- Supporting quality public transportation and ensuring safe walking and bicycling access to transit stops.

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership has developed a report that explores some of the challenges and opportunities for understanding [At the Intersection of Active Transportation and Equity: Joining Forces to Make Communities Healthier and Fairer](#), delves into the statistics and realities regarding transportation inequities, summarizes how the active transportation movement is working to increase its understanding of equity, and assesses a wide range of issues and initiatives where equity and active transportation intersect.

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