

# Making the Case for Active Transportation

## - Bulletin # 7: Increasing Social Capital -



**Social capital**<sup>1</sup> can be defined as the:

- ✦ Degree of citizen involvement in a community,
- ✦ Degree to which people know and trust their neighbours, and
- ✦ Numerous social interactions and transactions that people have as we go about our daily business.

Municipalities that provide walking and cycling opportunities can enhance social capital by providing greater opportunities for neighbours to interact. Conversely, social capital can be undermined if there are more single-occupant vehicles on the road and fewer pedestrians, cyclists, public transit users and carpoolers.<sup>2</sup>

Providing active transportation infrastructure such as sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails, and promoting design features such as porches in front of houses, may facilitate getting people out of their cars and onto the streets and will increase their opportunity to socialize.

Communities that are designed to be walkable, and include zoning for mixed land-use (e.g., residential, commercial, employment and services) will have residents who are more likely to know their neighbours, to participate politically, to trust others and be involved socially, which can lead to better physical and mental health.<sup>3</sup>

**Active transportation** refers to any form of human-powered transportation. Examples include:

- Walking,
- Cycling,
- Using a wheelchair,
- Pushing a stroller,
- Running, and
- In-line skating or skateboarding.



Photo credit: Go for Green

*Walking School Bus* is a proven tool that increases walking in municipalities. Not only does it support greater physical activity for children but also promotes social interaction among children and their parents and caregivers.<sup>2</sup>

**Increase social capital through active transportation by:**

- ✦ Designing communities for people rather than cars;
- ✦ Locating public facilities such as parks, libraries, and recreation centres, so that people can access them using active transportation;
- ✦ Creating attractive and secure street environments.<sup>4</sup>

“Practices that decrease time spent driving and increase pedestrian activity, social interactions and commercial activity in a neighbourhood can probably also increase social capital.”<sup>1</sup>

“The benefits of improved accessibility, transportation system diversity, and community cohesion are particularly important for people who are physically, economically or socially disadvantaged and so rely on non-automobile transportation.”<sup>4</sup>

## Take Action!

Approach your municipality to discuss how their current street design contributes to social capital. Share the information in this bulletin to increase their awareness that streets designed around the needs of people and active transportation increase social capital, while streets designed to move cars faster (e.g., wider roads that increase the distance that people must walk or cycle across intersections) hinder the development of social capital.

Communicate to municipal decision makers the importance of their role to promote and support active transportation opportunities in the community. Start by sharing the *Making a Case for Active Transportation: Bulletin #8 - A Role of Municipal Decision Makers*.

Host educational and networking opportunities with community stakeholders such as municipal decision makers (municipal council members and staff in land-use planning, parks and recreation, traffic management, transit, and engineering), non-government organizations (Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Diabetes Association) and other interested groups (e.g., cycling and walking clubs, educational professionals, daycare providers and seniors groups) to provide them with an opportunity to share their successes and challenges of increasing social capital through promoting active transportation opportunities.



Photo Credit: Go for Green

## References:

1. Frank, L., Kavage, S. & Litman, T. (2006). Promoting public health through smart growth: Building healthier communities through transportation and land use policies and practices. *Smart Growth BC*. 1-43.
2. Transport Canada. (2006). The social implications of sustainable and active transportation. Urban Transportation Showcase Program, Issues Paper 45. Retrieved from [www.tc.gc.ca/utsp](http://www.tc.gc.ca/utsp)
3. Leyden, K. (2003). Social capital and the built environment: The importance of walkable neighborhoods. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 93 (9), 1546-1551.
4. Litman, T. (2006). Cities connect: How urbanity helps achieve social inclusion objectives. Victoria Transport Policy Institute. Retrieved from [www.vtpi.org](http://www.vtpi.org)

**How to use this bulletin:** This bulletin is for professionals and community members who want to build a case for active transportation in their community. Share the information in this bulletin with community decision makers such as municipal council members and municipal staff responsible for land-use planning, transportation, public utilities, social services, parks, recreation and building codes to increase knowledge on how to increase social capital through active transportation.

## Other *Making the Case for Active Transportation* Bulletins ([www.cfri.ca](http://www.cfri.ca)):

- Health Benefits
- Environmental Benefits
- Built Infrastructure
- Role for Municipal Decision Makers
- Economic Benefits
- Barriers
- Safety

