

Active Community Environments: An Introduction

2004-2005



The objective of Washington State Department of Health's (DOH) five year *Active Community Environments* project is to improve the health and quality of life for Washington's citizens by improving and increasing opportunities to be physically active. This project seeks to incorporate transportation policy and infrastructure changes that improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities and safety, and use urban planning approaches related to zoning and land use that promote physical activity.

Active Living Task Forces

Through this project, Washington State DOH is committed to working with the state Department of Community Trade and Economic Development (CTED), Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) to develop *Active Living Task Forces* in communities around the state. DOH has selected nine counties within seven RTPOs for this project based on a series of health indicators (e.g., obesity rates, percent of older residents) and other criteria. The *Active Living Task Forces*, once formed, will assist RTPOs in the review and consideration of policy changes and modifications to planning and implementation practices and procedures by integrating health based performance measurement. This advise and assistance to RTPOs could involve such areas of activity as major project planning and development, urban planning, project selection processes for sidewalks, trails, bike lanes, and other non-motorized facilities.

The Important Role of RTPOs:

Regional Transportation Planning Organizations play an important role in this project...

Coordination

- RTPOs are made up of members from cities, counties, WSDOT, ports, tribal nations, school districts, health organizations and other agencies within their regions' boundaries.
- RTPOs typically have a number of other sub-committees and task forces focusing on related issues.

Policy

- They make transportation policy for their regions.

Funding

- They select and fund transportation projects and programs (including non-motorized projects) within their region.



Who Serves on the Active Living Task Forces?

This will vary depending on the scale of each region, its community's needs and who is available to participate. It is strongly recommended an active community task force include the following:

- Older adult (age 50 and over) representation
- Representatives from health organizations
- People familiar local transportation policies and plans
- People interested in non-motorized transportation
- Representatives from schools, school districts, or parent associations.

A mix of community members, and transportation and health professionals can bring a spectrum of important perspectives and skills to the team.

Resources

Active Living Resource Center, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

<http://www.rwjf.org/programs/physicalactivity.jsp>

National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity

<http://www.ncppa.org>

Washington Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity

<http://www.beactive.org>

International Council on Active Aging

<http://www.icaa.cc>

Washington Safe Routes to Schools

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/bike/PDF/SafeRoutes.pdf>

What will the Task Forces Accomplish?

Department of Health (DOH) has two initial requirements for this project:

- The RTPOs should establish their task forces by identifying members, and encouraging members to attend workshops and training opportunities.
- Task Forces will be asked to complete an inventory and several project tasks designed to help them establish baseline information and identify opportunities for improvement.

Each RTPO has unique challenges and opportunities for creating more active community environments. So, for years two through five of this project, DOH is committed to working with WSDOT, CTED and RTPOs on a variety of solutions.

