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**Statement for the Transportation Transition Team**

**December 16, 2013**

The Boston Alliance for Community Health is a partnership among eleven neighborhood coalitions, hospitals, community health centers, community-based organizations and the Boston Public Health Commission. Our mission is to create a healthy Boston through data-driven, evidence-based health planning and improvement initiatives on the neighborhood and city-wide levels. Our goal is to reduce health disparities and improve the health status of Boston's residents.

So, why are we here at the Transportation Hearing? Over the past year we have been engaged in a city-wide and neighborhood-based planning process to identify a set of strategic issues that, if successfully addressed, will improve the health of Bostonians. One issue that emerged was the **importance of improving transportation policy and practice to improve health because we know that an accessible, affordable, equitable transportation system is integral to community health.**

Research shows that low-income communities and communities of color often do not have access to the benefits our transportation system can provide, yet they bear the burdens of that system. For example, many low-income neighborhoods have little or no efficient, reliable public transportation to get them to jobs and essential goods and services. But these communities are often situated near bus depots, highways, and truck routes, where pollution levels are high—and not coincidentally, asthma rates are high as well. In addition, many of these same communities live without safe, complete sidewalks or bike paths, making walking and biking difficult and often dangerous. As a result, these neighborhoods have lower levels of physical activity and higher rates of chronic diseases. Creating a more equitable transportation system must lie at the core of any analysis of transportation and must guide all reform.

While there are many aspects of transportation that are related to health, there are three strategies we would like to highlight that can have significant impact on improving the health of Bostonians. They are: **Transit Oriented Development, Safe Routes to Schools, Complete Streets**

1. **Create Transit Oriented Development** to build compact, walkable communities centered on high quality transportation systems. TOD is a mixed-use residential and commercial area designed to maximize access to public transport, and often incorporates features to encourage transit ridership. This makes it possible to live a higher quality life without complete dependence on a car for mobility and survival.
2. **Promote Safe Routes to School-** SRTS programs examine conditions around schools and conduct projects and activities that work to improve safety and accessibility, and reduce traffic and air pollution in the vicinity of schools. As a result, these programs help make bicycling and walking to school safer and more appealing transportation choices thus encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age**.**

**Example:** The Walking School Bus is one of several strategies that this urban and densely populated Massachusetts city has used to reduce chronic absenteeism and improve the health and safety of Springfield children. The Walking School Bus started slowly, beginning with a small but consistent group of six to 10 children and supportive teachers walking every morning at the Brightwood School. By the end of the first year, the number of students participating increased to 40 to 50 students. The next school year, the program expanded to include three separate walking routes led by school staff on Monday through Friday, with about 134 students consistently walking to school each day!

Some exciting early results show that students participating in the walking school bus program have a better attendance rate than their peers (approximately 2 percent). The Brightwood Health Center nurse who leads the program at the Brightwood School stated, “one student who was tardy or absent 22 days in the 2010-11 school year has not been late or absent once since joining the program.”

1. **Instituting a Complete Streets policy** ensures that transportation planners and engineers consistently design and operate the entire roadway with all users in mind – including bicyclists, public transportation vehicles and riders, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities. This will ensure that roadways are safer, more livable, and welcoming to everyone.

***“Environmental sustainability, access, and our collective well-being must combine with mobility and safety as the cornerstones of our transportation investments. With a greater recognition of the strong linkage between public health and transportation, I believe we can build a network that supports our mobility and creates access and economic strength while promoting equity, sustaining our good health and quality of life.”***   
-Representative Jim Oberstar, Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

Transportation is more than a means to move people and goods; it is a way to build healthy, opportunity-rich communities. We look forward to working on these and other issues that recognize the strong connection between transportation and improving the health of all Bostonians.

Submitted by

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