



Rezoning for Light Rail Project Poses Health Risks and Benefits in the Twin Cities

Before the St. Paul City Council voted in 2012 to approve a rezoning plan to support the construction of a one billion dollar light rail transit project, it reviewed recommendations from a community-led effort to assess the potential health impacts on residents of the Central Corridor, the area through which the light rail will pass. The “Healthy Corridor for All” Health Impact Assessment (HIA), which was conducted by a steering committee comprised of residents and business owners likely to be impacted by the project, found that the rezoning plan would create both health benefits and risks for residents.

While the light rail will increase area residents’ access to public transportation and, therefore, improve their access to employment opportunities, grocery stores, health care facilities, public spaces, the assessment found that rezoning would have a negative impact on the availability of affordable housing in the area. The light rail, which will pass through some of the region’s most diverse and lowest-income communities, would likely push up property values and housing costs near the new train stations, leading to increased health risks for low-income residents who may struggle to afford rent, food, heat, and medicine.

Recommendations

The HIA, which was administered by PolicyLink, TakeAction Minnesota, and ISAIAH, with support from the Health Impact Project, made five policy recommendations:

- Establish a pilot project that would capture some of the increased value of the property closest to the proposed light rail stations to help cover the cost of reserving some of the new housing for low-income families.
- Codify the City’s commitment to affordable housing by specifying housing objectives within the traditional neighborhood zoning regulations that will apply to Central Corridor.
- Set-up an incentive program to encourage developers to include affordable housing in their property development projects.
- Adopt regulations that would permit use of undeveloped parcels of land for temporary parking lots to relieve anticipated parking shortages that could negatively impact local businesses during construction of the light rail.
- Ensure that Central Corridor residents are given the opportunity to apply for job openings with construction contractors hired to build the light rail.

Results

- The St. Paul City Council created a Task Force to identify ways to preserve and enhance access to affordable housing for low-income residents in the Central Corridor.
- The City allocated an additional \$1.5 million for affordable housing, and hired a consultant to work on the HIA’s zoning recommendations.
- The City also commissioned feasibility analyses on two of the recommendations: to create a pilot a project to help cover the cost of reserving some of the housing for low-income households, and to develop incentives for developers to create affordable housing.



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New Opportunities to Improve Health

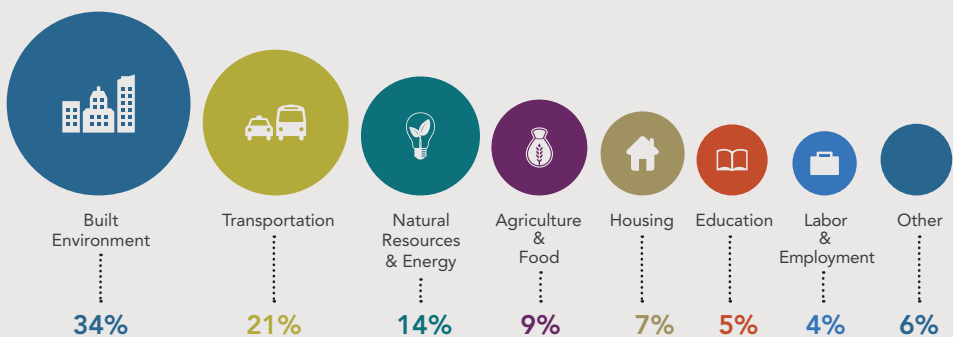
Preventable health problems are crippling the U.S. economy and its workers and their families. Heart disease and diabetes alone now account for more than 700,000 deaths in the U.S. annually and cost the nation more than \$650 billion in medical expenses, disability, missed work, and financial losses associated with premature death. For the first time in U.S. history, data suggest that today's children may live shorter lives than their parents.

Many of the most urgent health problems facing our nation—such as obesity, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and injuries—are shaped by the conditions in which we live and work. There is a large and untapped opportunity to improve Americans' well-being and address skyrocketing medical costs by bringing health into the decisions that shape the world outside the doctor's office. For example, well-designed and maintained housing can help prevent asthma and serious falls. Transportation projects and land use plans can minimize the risk of traffic injuries and allow people to be more active by including safe routes for pedestrians. And educational policies that lead to academic success can have the unanticipated benefit of reducing the risk of many illnesses and their related medical costs by expanding opportunities for employment and increasing access to better housing and other amenities throughout a person's life.

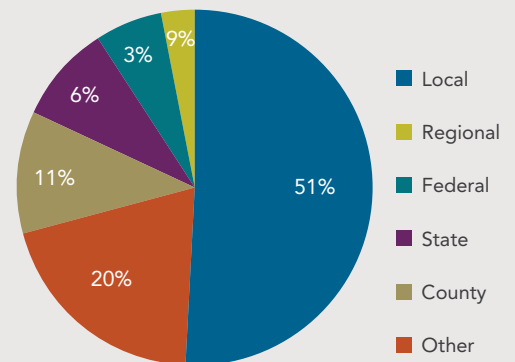
Considering health can help decision-makers leverage opportunities to improve wellness and avoid unintended consequences and associated costs. Health impact assessments, or HIAs, have proved to be an effective way to do that. HIAs bring together scientific data, public health expertise, and community input to inform decisions on proposed laws, regulations, projects, and plans in transportation, energy, education, economic policy, and other sectors.

HIP-Supported Health Impact Assessments in Action Across the U.S.

In what sectors have HIAs been done?



HIAs are used to inform decisions at what levels?



Health Impact Project: Advancing Smarter Policies for Healthier Communities

Launched in 2009, the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a national initiative designed to bring health into decision-making through the use of HIAs. The project works with government agencies and policymakers to help them implement HIAs; partners with foundations to fund HIAs; provides training and technical assistance; conducts research and policy analysis to support the field; and convenes the National HIA Meeting. The project also partners with foundations to guide and support regional HIA initiatives and collaborates with government agencies and nonprofits around the United States to find practical ways to build health into decisions.

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