

Harford County Obesity Task Force, Built Environment Sub-committee

Recommendations,

Submitted by Jeff Springer, PE, AICP

The primary issue relating to the built environment and its impact on overweight and obesity is known as Active Transportation. Active Transportation is engaging people to walk or bicycle or use transit as a means of transportation instead of using a car. A key issue in changing people's transportation behavior is to identify incentives for active transportation and disincentives for driving. Using an example of commuting from Harford County to Baltimore: incentives to riding transit (MARC train) could include wi-fi service on trains, improved amenities at station stops (shelter from rain, snow), or sufficient free parking; disincentives to driving could be increased gasoline taxes, increased cost to park in the city, or increased tolls for the harbor tunnels. Similarly, the same concept applies to the choices between walking or cycling and driving. Project or policy incentives to walking or cycling increases the attractiveness of people to walk or bicycle instead of driving.

Based on the documentation by Active Living Research ([activelivingresearch.org](http://activelivingresearch.org)), I make the following recommendations to address the built environment's role in increasing physical activity, and thus reduce the problems associated with overweight and obesity.

1. Every transit rider is a pedestrian before and after their transit ride. Incentives to increased use of transit would be to identify and reduce pedestrian risk at and in the vicinity of transit stops (see photographs below). Others include adding shelters or benches.

Recommendation: Harford County should review its bus stop placement for safety and access and evaluate the pedestrian network for a ¼-mile radius for sidewalks, crosswalk safety. The Federal Highway Administration published a guide to assist in conducting this study.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pedestrian Safety Guide for Transit Agencies, FHWA, 2008.  
[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/ped\\_transit/ped\\_transguide/](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/ped_transit/ped_transguide/)



Figures: Harford County Transit stops, Edgewood Shopping Center

2. The US Surgeon General recommends people participate in 30 minutes of moderate physical activity for at least five times per week. For school students, those within walking distance could achieve that goal. Incentives to walking/cycling to school include improving the safety of students who walk.

Recommendations: Harford County, in conjunction with the towns of Aberdeen, Bel Air and Havre de Grace, take steps to (1) develop walking plans for schools in/near walkable neighborhoods, (2) take steps to comply with the MUTCD, and (3) evaluate the walking infrastructure near schools to identify and mitigate safety risks to pedestrians. The National Safe Routes to School program provides a wealth of resources to support this goal

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>.

- a. Take steps for Harford County and the three towns in the county to comply with the signage and pavement markings stipulated in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)
  - b. Develop a walking route plan for each Harford County Public School within or adjacent to a walking neighborhood.
  - c. Evaluate the pedestrian infrastructure for elements relating to pedestrian safety, such as wide (>35 ft) crosswalks, presence of sidewalks, traffic speed and volume and develop a 4-year plan to program, budget and implement pedestrian infrastructure improvements.
3. Cycling as a mode of transportation in the United States is increasing, and several cities have shown that modest improvements in cycling infrastructure has shown significant increases in the number of cyclists. Incentives to cyclists would include bike lanes, safe secure bike parking, and facilities at their workplace to allow them to shower and change. Studies show that cyclists will go out of their way, ride a longer route to their destination if they can ride in bike lanes. Other studies have documented that bike lanes are safer for cyclists than riding on comparable public roads without bike lanes. (Items 5, 6, 7 attached).

Recommendations:

- a. Complete, and implement the Harford County Bicycle Plan.

- b. Develop county-wide standards in the building codes that requires bike racks be installed that meet the recommendations provided by the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals.
  - c. Take steps to address facilities for bicycle parking and personal showers, and locker storage at employer's facilities. Such facilities would have large benefit at office buildings/complexes where these facilities would allow employees to shower and change after cycling to work. Such facilities (shower and locker) could also be used by employees who choose to go for a lunch-time run or bike-ride for fitness purposes.
4. Multi-use trails have demonstrated their appeal in communities across the US. Many communities, and some in western Maryland are seeing direct financial benefit from the presence of trails adjoining their town. While initially there has been some "not in my back yard" complaints, research has shown that homes near trails have higher resale than comparable homes further away.

Recommendation: Explore opportunities to install multi-use trails in, or adjacent to the developed portions of Harford County. Such trails will provide people of all ages and abilities increased opportunities for physical activity. (Item 8, attached).

5. Streets across the US have, for many years, been primarily designed for the use of cars. An increasingly popular trend in the nation is to recognize the role of streets as transportation corridors and that they should be designed and built for broader transportation uses. 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. The concept of Complete Streets incorporates a context-sensitive concept in developing complete streets (Item 9, attached). (<http://www.completestreets.org/>)

Recommendation: The increasing Harford County should develop a Complete Streets Policy.

#### Supporting Technical References:

- Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, FHWA, Washington, DC.  
[http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009/pdf\\_index.htm](http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009/pdf_index.htm)
- Pedestrian Safety Guide and Countermeasure Selection System: Pedsafe, Federal Highway Administration, Report no. FHWA-SA-04-003,  
[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/ped\\_bike\\_order/](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/ped_bike_order/)
- Maryland SHA Pedestrian and Bicycle Design Guidelines,  
<http://www.sha.maryland.gov/Index.aspx?PageId=25>
- Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access, Part II, FHWA 2001.  
[http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle\\_pedestrian/publications/sidewalk2/pdf.cfm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/sidewalk2/pdf.cfm)

- Pedestrian Safety Guide for Transit Agencies, FHWA, 2008.  
[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/ped\\_transit/ped\\_transguide/](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/ped_transit/ped_transguide/)
- Traffic Calming: State of the Practice, ITE/FHWA, August 1999.  
<http://www.ite.org/traffic/tcstate.asp#tcsop>
- Roundabouts: An Information Guide. FHWA Publication FHWA-00-067, June 2000.  
Federal Highway Administration, Washington, DC.  
[www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/00067/00067.pdf](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/00067/00067.pdf)
- Walkability Workbook. US Environmental Protection Agency, April 2012.  
<http://www.walklive.org/project/walkability-workbook/>
- Bicycle Parking Guidelines, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 2002. Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals. <http://www.apbp.org/?page=Publications>