

## Ebel: Transportation as a Determinant of Health

Joe Ebel, Guest Columnist    Published 2:56 p.m. ET Oct. 6, 2019

Transportation, which may include owning a reliable vehicle, having access to a robust transit system, living in places with safe streets with sidewalks, bike lanes, and crosswalks, has a major impact on a person's health status and life expectancy.

Health is about more than access to healthcare, in fact, only 20% of our health status is determined by our access to, and the quality of, healthcare services. Our health behaviors, like tobacco use, physical activity and diet account for 30% of our health status. The remaining 50% of our health is determined by things like education, employment, income, family and social support, community safety, access to healthy foods, access to safe sidewalks and parks, and access to reliable transportation or an effective transit system.

Transportation impacts many of those other health determinants. Safe, affordable, and reliable transportation is critical in order to get to jobs on time, participate in after-school and recreational activities, get to medical appointments, access healthy food options, attend social service programs, connect with family and friends, and participate in educational activities.

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Low income neighborhoods often suffer the most as a result of "incomplete streets" where the lack of pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure, combined with an inadequate transit system, create barriers to achieving optimal health.

The Licking County Health Department has developed online maps identifying local recreational activities, including parks and trails, and a Healthy Food Access map showing stores that offer healthier food options and which ones accept SNAP and WIC benefits. Many low-income homes are located in "food deserts" where, without reliable transportation, there are no stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables, resulting in limited healthy nutrition options for those families.

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Newark and other communities have adopted “complete streets” policies to help make more local streets and roads safer and more inviting for walking and bicycling by addressing the need for safe sidewalks, cross walks, bike lanes, safe routes to schools, and transportation needs beyond car and truck traffic. While adopting a complete streets policy is great, effective implementation is key to success. The Newark Downtown revitalization is a clear example of a fully implemented complete streets project. However, every time a pavement project is planned or sewer or water lines are excavated along a roadway, we should be looking at opportunities to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and to enhance infrastructure.

The Licking County Area Transportation Study and Licking County Transit Board are currently revising the county transit plan and are asking for community input. A survey is available at <https://arcg.is/1aa1Cr> (<https://atginc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=84048f4d44cc400e9a715624ee1398a3>).

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The Licking County Health Department’s Healthy Food Access and Recreation Resources maps are available at [www.lickingcohealth.org](http://www.lickingcohealth.org) (<http://www.lickingcohealth.org/>).

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