

Presentation and Paper Abstract
***Go for Health! Partnership – Supporting the Link
Between Transportation Choices and Routine Physical Activity***

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Overweight and obesity are affecting the lives of children and families at increasingly alarming rates across the United States. In the past 20 years, the incidence of obesity has doubled in children ages 6-11 and tripled in children ages 12-19¹. In the majority of children and adults, overweight and obesity result from excess calorie consumption and/or inadequate physical activity. There are many other factors that contribute to creating an environment that fosters poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyles.² Communities are beginning to consider ways to reverse this trend, which has serious health and transportation impacts.

In Santa Cruz County, California, the *Go for Health!* partnership formed in August 2003 to address the rising instance of obesity. Representatives from schools, health and nutrition professionals, funding agencies, non profits, government agencies, parents, and businesses convened to develop an action plan with the goal of improving children's eating and physical activity habits. Collaborative partnerships such as *Go for Health!* are appearing in several communities and states across the nation with goals to develop blueprints for their region to prevent and reduce obesity.

Go for Health! recently developed a prevention plan that specifies changes in the modern environment that will increase opportunities for regular physical activity and healthy nutrition for families and children.

Trends and recent studies reveal that there is a correlation between the transition of our transportation systems to auto centric systems and the increase of overweight children and adults in our communities. Auto centric transportation systems have a tendency to be the same systems that discourage bicycling and walking for transportation. *Go for Health!* determined that addressing policy and programs that encourage children and families to walk and bicycle are important components of its multifaceted approach to prevent and decrease obesity.

Acknowledging, understanding and addressing the link between transportation choices, physical activity and the instance of overweight and obesity in our communities also serves to highlight local transportation objectives directed at increasing mobility by providing alternative transportation options. Transportation agencies can benefit from collaborating with partnerships like *Go for Health!* by receiving added value to existing alternative transportation programs, leveraging new resources to support projects that meet short and long term alternative transportation goals, and building broader information networks to achieve common objectives.

¹CDC. National Health & Nutrition Exam Survey (NHAMES) 1999-2000.
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/nhanes/NHANES99_00.htm

² US Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity in 2001.