



# HEALTH **IMPACT** IN 5 YEARS

## Tailored Transit Options Get Floridians Moving

Florida Department of Health  
Stories from Public Health Innovators

### Introduction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [Health Impact in 5 Years \(HI-5\)](#)<sup>1</sup> initiative highlights community-wide approaches that can improve the places where we live, learn, work, and play. Efforts to expand public transportation in Florida were underway before the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed the HI-5 initiative, but this example showcases components that may be needed to carry out one of the HI-5 evidence-based approaches: [the introduction or expansion of public transportation systems.](#)<sup>2</sup>

The state of Florida is expanding public transportation with the goals of reducing traffic-related crashes and fatalities, increasing physical activity, and improving overall health and wellness. A key to its success has been serving the diverse needs of different populations, from millennials to seniors, by creating a multimodal menu of transportation options and resources.

### HI-5: Public Transportation System Introduction and Expansion<sup>2</sup>



**The goal:** Increase access to public transit—defined as buses, light rail, or subways—that are available to the public, run at scheduled times, and that may require a fare.



**The strategy:** Build or expand transportation systems to ensure people can reach everyday destinations—such as jobs, schools, healthy food outlets, and healthcare facilities—safely and reliably.



**The health impact:** Public transit is safer than private vehicles, improves air quality, provides opportunities for physical activity, and increases access to vital services.



**The value:** Providing high-quality transit services, including urban rail or “bus rapid transit” systems has the ability to produce per capita annual health benefits of \$355.<sup>3</sup>

## Problem

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of serious and fatal injuries in Florida, and result in extensive human suffering as well as significant emergency health costs. With many highly congested urban areas, the Florida Public Transit Association considers the health and financial impacts of automotive travel to be one of the state's most pressing issues.<sup>4</sup> Expanding public transit options can decrease health impacts related to traffic crashes as well as pollution, and can save money over time.<sup>2</sup>



However, due to changing demographics, Florida needs more than a one-size-fits-all approach to public transportation and safety. Across the U.S., rural and urban areas have different needs. In rural areas, public transportation systems may not exist, and residents may need to cover greater distances to reach employment, healthcare and other vital services. In urban settings, residents may generally

have shorter distances to travel, which could be done by biking or walking. Biking and walking may also be used to reach bus stops or other transit stations.<sup>5,6</sup>

Further complicating the picture, roughly 20% of Florida's population is over the age of 65.<sup>7</sup> Some of these older residents are unable to drive safely, and biking or walking long distances may be too difficult for many. Some seniors may also be intimidated by riding public transportation. Florida DOT is also aware of the preferences of its growing millennial population, which also hovers around 20%.<sup>8</sup>

Millennials in general have a stronger preference for high quality transportation and a desire to live where they can be less dependent on a car.<sup>9</sup>



**“ It’s imperative to have accessible transportation options so people can get to the county health department—often the only form of public health within miles of where they live—as well as to food and other health needs. ”**

Ernie Bradley,  
Florida Department of Health

## Building Strong Partnerships

To meet the varied needs of Florida's residents, public and private organizations have joined forces to promote expanded transportation options. Partners include the Florida Department of Health and the Florida Department of Transportation, as well as the state's Department of Economic Opportunity. Law enforcement, elected officials, community

planners, school systems, pedestrian and bicycle safety advocacy organizations, and many community organizations are also getting involved. Local sports teams have helped promote the use of transit options, and city and county governments have worked together to encourage people to use public transit to get to sporting events.

## Overcoming Barriers

Successful public transportation systems need riders. Florida has invested resources to overcome common barriers to taking public transit and increase usage. For example, they have developed mobile apps to help people know when the next bus is coming so that they can reduce their time waiting in the heat or rain for a bus.



Potential public transportation riders may also worry about being without a car if they had an emergency, for example, if they have a sick child or needed to work late. Cities like Tallahassee, have started “guaranteed ride home” programs that ensure that regular riders of the city’s StarMetro bus system can get a free taxi ride home in an emergency. This Commuter Services of Florida Program, funded by the transportation department, is also available to commuters who carpool, vanpool, bike, and walk.<sup>10</sup> A transit ambassador program helps people who are less experienced with public transit navigate the system, and helps community members with

changing routes. “Find-a-Ride” databases are also available on the Florida Safe Mobility of Life website to help residents find ride-sharing services.<sup>11</sup> The health department saw that many Florida communities embraced public transportation, although some were initially slow to warm up to the idea. Many still viewed public transit as a less desirable way to travel and the people who used public transit as those without any other choice. To try to reduce this perceived stigma, some communities have created “take a trip on transit day” programs that showcase local leaders using public transit and encourage people to give public transportation a try.

## Making the Case

Local health departments provide county and community-level data to decision-makers—including health rankings, obesity levels, and food access—as well as community-level data from transportation partners. Communities are then able to use their own data to develop interventions and emphasize efforts that meet their unique challenges.

There are also two larger data systems that transportation planners and decision makers use to inform their efforts. The Florida Department of Transportation sends statewide information to the [National Transit Database Program](#) which serves as the primary source for information and statistics on the transit systems within the United States, and is designed to support local, state and regional planning

efforts. Planners within the state are able to use information from the database to make multi-year comparisons and analyze trends. The transportation department’s [Office of Freight, Logistics and Passenger Operations](#) also provides a collection of all regulations, standards, and responsibilities outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act, including design standards, plans, data sets, and a quick reference guide.

Like other states, [Florida law](#)<sup>12</sup> requires local governments to consider transportation and mobility issues in their comprehensive planning processes. Where possible, plans must include several transportation choices, with a focus on options that have the ability to lead to economic development.

## Creating a Win-Win by Introducing People to a Wide Variety of Options

Florida supports multimodal networks that offer people lots of different ways to get around, including bus, rail, bicycle, automobile, or foot. This approach can create a more efficient transportation network that helps to increase community economic development and reduce the number of vehicle trips taken, and contributes to a healthier environment by decreasing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>13</sup>

### Key features of multimodal design include:

- An interconnected grid network of streets, safe intersections, and sidewalks;
- A mix of residential, commercial, and retail properties with higher population density to make transportation efficient;
- Improved possibilities for pedestrian and bicycle travel; and
- More efficient ways to help move the flow of freight through the state so the economy can continue to grow.

Florida has a statewide focus on [complete streets](#), which connects pedestrian routes, neighborhoods, and key locations in a community. This has helped cities like Tallahassee create transit programs as diverse as the populations they serve. There are transit options designed for individuals of different ages, abilities, or socioeconomic status, including standard transit, dial-a-ride, volunteer rides, and a weekday trolley that focuses on moving riders around the downtown business district. A mobile app helps people plan bus trips and avoid long wait times in the



Tallahassee weather that is typically hot year-round. Bike racks have also been attached to city buses, empowering riders who travel longer distances to divide their trip between bicycle and transit.

“ As a state, we’ve really embraced transportation options, putting the information out there, helping stakeholders understand their roles, and getting to work. ”

Ernie Bradley,  
Florida Department of Health

## Impact

Ridership across all travel modes has been increasing in Florida. The Florida Public Transit Association, a nonprofit association composed of more than 40 urban and rural transit systems—including two commuter railroads, a heavy-rail commuter system and two people mover systems<sup>14</sup>—reports that their programs provide over 270 million trips for Florida

residents and visitors each year.<sup>15</sup> Facing some of the nation’s highest rates of bicycle and pedestrian fatalities, Florida is making progress in this area. The number of total crashes that involve bicycles or pedestrians dropped for the first time since 2011, countering a national trend that is on the rise.



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For more case examples of HI-5 approaches, please refer to [www.cdc.gov/hi5](http://www.cdc.gov/hi5)

