



HEALTH **IMPACT** IN 5 YEARS

To “be well,” a Denver Neighborhood Engages in a Partnership between Public Health and Transportation

Denver Public Health
Stories from Public Health Innovators

Introduction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) [Health Impact in 5 Years \(HI-5\)](#)¹ initiative highlights community-wide approaches that can improve the places where we live, learn, work, and play. The following example from Denver, Colorado, was implemented before CDC developed the HI-5 initiative, but showcases the components that may be needed to carry out one of the HI-5 evidence-based approaches: [the introduction or expansion of public transportation systems](#).²

In Denver’s Stapleton neighborhood, The Stapleton Foundation for Sustainable Urban Communities made use of a CDC REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) grant to connect community members and area health and academic organizations in nontraditional partnerships. These partnerships enabled residents to inform an expansion of the public transportation system in their community. Coming together to inform local transit decisions helped build Stapleton residents’ knowledge about the health impacts of transportation in their community, and laid the groundwork for progress in other areas of community outreach.

HI-5: Public Transportation System Introduction and Expansion²



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 \$355.³

Problem

In 2007, the Regional Transportation District in Denver embarked on a plan to expand light-rail service to better serve commuters and take passengers to the Denver airport. This included building a commuter line through low-income neighborhoods in northeast Denver, which raised significant concerns among the residents. Community members worried about how they would access the new transportation. They wondered if current bus stops that connected



them to services would be removed, if the new train stops would be too far away, and if the rail tickets would become too expensive. The plans proposed eliminating two vital neighborhood bus routes, one of which led to the only nearby grocery store. Not having access to efficient transportation alternatives can disproportionately affect vulnerable populations such as the poor, the elderly, people who have disabilities and children because it can limit their access to jobs, health care, social interaction, and healthy foods.⁴

Overcoming Barriers

The Stapleton Foundation (Foundation) serves the Stapleton development and five neighboring communities. The Foundation developed a community action plan that they named the “*be well* Health and Wellness Initiative” to advance equitable policies, programs, and research, and support residents’ abilities to live healthy lives by providing them with tools and resources. The Foundation felt it was critical for the regional transportation district to hear community feedback about the expansion plans and encouraged residents to talk to public and transit officials. However, residents were not eager to get involved, so the two groups did not communicate effectively at the beginning of this process.

The Foundation’s *be well* Initiative worked to overcome this barrier with specific steps. First, they identified the project’s developers and the city and county officials who would be involved, and determined which groups or individuals would be the best to approach with the residents’ concerns. They also worked with community members to help them better understand how to communicate with

the transportation district, using terminology that transit officials would understand and value.



They convinced decision makers of the importance of listening to members of the community and the value of understanding their concerns about the light-rail expansion. Additionally, the Foundation collaborated with the transportation district

to host “Transit Community Conversations,” a forum for stakeholders and community members to communicate about the proposed expansion. Members of the *be well* Initiative also worked with transit officials to make their presentations more relevant and relatable for community members.

“ Our community members were concerned. They were concerned that the plan wouldn’t address the challenges they had; namely, stops were not convenient, or if they were accessible, they may not be able to afford [to ride]. ”

Jennifer Moreland, MPH, Denver Public Health

Building Strong Partnerships

The Foundation's *be well* Health and Wellness Initiative formed a number of important partnerships that were essential to their success. [Denver Public Health](#) provided compelling data and assisted with evaluation efforts. The Initiative's REACH grant from CDC allowed them to hear from community residents in multiple settings, including apartment complexes and recreational centers and through a number of groups (organizing committees, businesses, local transportation, and environmental organizations) which allowed the initiative to better determine community needs. The *be well* Initiative also worked with the University of Colorado Denver to complete a transit equity study and to analyze data collected through this effort.

The Impact

Involving the community in decisions helped preserve access to transit services for the northeast Denver neighborhoods. The transit authority revised its initial proposal and kept the two vital bus lines, as well as decided to reroute two other bus lines into the neighborhood for residents to get to schools and grocery stores. More than 200



Sustainability

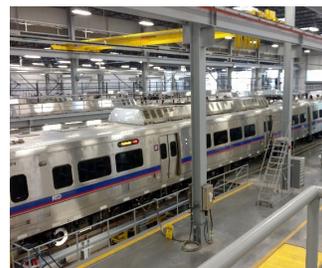
Following the successful community engagement in northeast Denver, the transportation district hired a transit equity coordinator to employ some of the same strategies in other areas of metropolitan Denver. The transit equity coordinator serves as the link between community residents and the local transit authority—educating neighborhood residents about transit connections and pedestrian access to the light-rail system, developing educational materials, and working with community stakeholders to help the transit authority make decisions that are informed by the community. The success of the collaboration between the *be well* Initiative and community partners has attracted even more

Keys to Collaboration in Northeast Denver

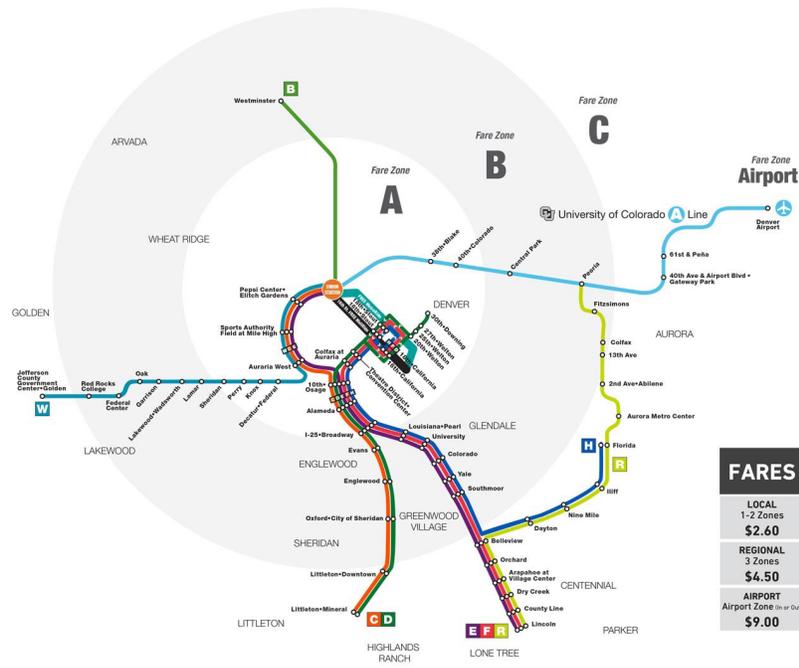
- The Stapleton Foundation involved local residents early and often, educating them about interacting with decision makers and ensuring that they had a say in the project design.
- Decision makers were willing to listen and learn from area residents.
- The local health department engaged with community residents to assess their readiness and needs, allowing for information to be shared with other stakeholders.
- The Stapleton Foundation's overarching strategy, included civic engagement, leadership, education, and the *be well* "Block Captain" program.

Stapleton residents took part in the *be well* "Transit Community Conversations," allowing them to raise concerns with transit officials. Residents also shared opinions on the proposed transit expansion during the transportation district's official hearing. In the end, the combination of *be well* Initiative data and personal stories from neighborhood residents helped persuade the transit authority to revise its plans and better serve the community.

residents to get involved. Community members continue to get valuable information about ways to



have a voice in decisions and collaborate with decision makers to inform decisions that will affect them. Data from the Foundation has been used to inform the citywide community health improvement plan—[Be Healthy Denver](#)—which was developed to guide public health improvement efforts throughout the city.



A map of Denver, Colorado's light rail service including expanded service to the airport.

About CDC's HI-5 (Health Impact in 5 Years) Initiative

HI-5 strategies can help you achieve healthy outcomes in your community in 5 years or less, providing good economic value for the investment. CDC reviewed the science to focus on 14 proven approaches that rose to the top as attainable wins for public health. The introduction or expansion of public transportation is just one of the 14 evidence-based interventions identified. CDC's HI-5 initiative can help you make decisions about what works and where to focus efforts to improve public health. To find out more about how your community can use the HI-5 initiative to improve the health of all people, visit the HI-5 website: www.cdc.gov/hi5.

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References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health Impact in 5 Years: <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/hst/hi5/>. Accessed November 16, 2017.
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3. Litman, T., Evaluating Public Transportation Health Benefits. 2010, Victoria Transport Policy Institute: Evaluating Public Transportation Health Benefits. Accessed November 16, 2017.
4. CDC Recommendations for Improving Health through Transportation Policy. (2010, April). Retrieved August, 2017, from <https://www.cdc.gov/transportation/docs/transportation-fact-sheet.pdf>. Accessed November 16, 2017.

For more case examples of HI-5 approaches, please refer to www.cdc.gov/hi5



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