

How Transportation Investments Can Build Healthier Places

Health & the Built Environment – How can we do better?

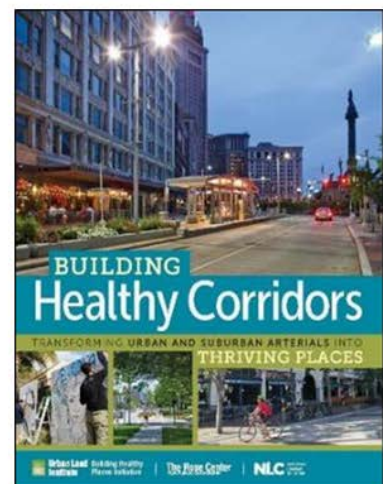
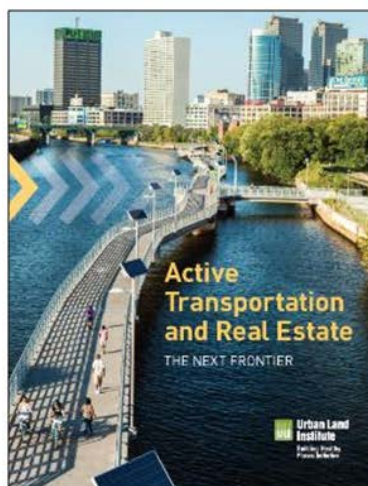
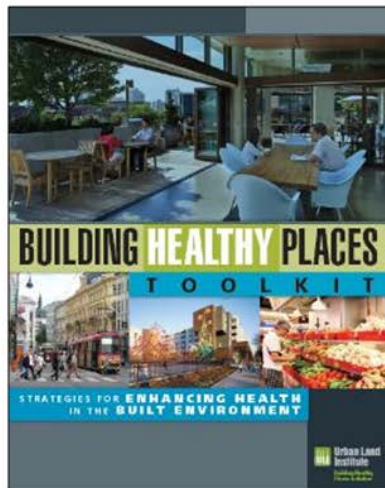
LAI Baltimore Chapter – January, 2017 Meeting

On January 18th, Rachel MacCleery of the Urban Land Institute presented her ideas on how transportation infrastructure and the built environment affects the health of the world's population.

Rachel's employer, the Urban Land Institute, is a research & education non-profit dedicated to promoting best practices in real estate and land use. ULI's mission is to promote the responsible use of land to create & sustain thriving communities, hence the intersection of health and the built environment goes to the heart of what her organization attempts to promote.

Against the backdrop of markedly rising healthcare expenditures, which have risen from about 5% of GDP in 1960, to over 18% in 2010, ULI has begun focusing on how our lifestyles and environment are contributing to healthcare spending. Rachel began by pointing out that in 1968, 48% of elementary and middle school students walked to school. Today that percentage is markedly smaller with only 13% walking to school as of 2009. One third of our citizens are overweight. Rachel, and ULI, opine that our built environment is partially to blame.

So in July, 2013 ULI launched its Building Healthy Places Initiative, with the goals of raising awareness and promoting healthy, thriving communities through engaging and inspiring ULI members. Members are encouraged to promote health through their investment & project decisions, and through their influence in their communities. Active transportation, i.e. biking and walking, is a major component of this initiative, and ULI has underwritten a number of publications intended to raise public awareness as is detailed in the following slide:



uli.org/health

The Building Healthy Places publication contains a “toolkit” of 21 recommendations, which are best absorbed by viewing Rachel’s helpful one-page summary:

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- 1 Incorporate a mix of land uses
- 2 Design well-connected street networks at the human scale
- 3 Provide sidewalks and enticing, pedestrian-oriented streetscapes
- 4 Provide infrastructure to support biking
- 5 Design visible, enticing stairs to encourage everyday use
- 6 Install stair prompts and signage
- 7 Provide high-quality spaces for multigenerational play and recreation
- 8 Build play spaces for children

HEALTHY FOOD AND DRINKING WATER

- 9 Accommodate a grocery store
- 10 Host a farmers market
- 11 Promote healthy food retail
- 12 Support on-site gardening and farming
- 13 Enhance access to drinking water

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING

- 14 Ban smoking
- 15 Use materials and products that support healthy indoor air quality
- 16 Facilitate proper ventilation and airflow
- 17 Maximize indoor lighting quality
- 18 Minimize noise pollution
- 19 Increase access to nature
- 20 Facilitate social engagement
- 21 Adopt pet-friendly policies

Interestingly, Rachel advised that 50% of U.S. residents now consider walkability a top priority or a high priority when considering where to live. And this percentage jumps to 70% among Millennials. Another statistic indicative of our changing societal attitudes: 52% of U.S. residents want to live somewhere that they don’t need to use a car on a daily basis. And that’s true of 68% of Millennials. So, we are already becoming a nation increasingly cognizant of healthier transportation alternatives it would seem.

With respect to bicycling, Rachel posed the question: “Is trail-oriented development the new “TOD”?” She then provided numerous examples of bike-centric developments that are popping up across the country and around the world. These projects appear to be perceived as providing their residents with an enhanced quality of life, as reflected in their higher prices (on for-sale projects). For instance, homes in Montreal’s Bixi bike share system area are valued an average of \$8,650 more than those outside of the bike share area.

Rachel also emphasized ULI’s “Healthy Corridors” initiative, which outlines strategies and tools for transforming underperforming commercial corridors into thriving, more inviting, places for local residents. This initiative is best conveyed in the following slide from Rachel’s presentation:

THE HEALTHY CORRIDOR TYPOLOGY



Improved infrastructure	Design + land use to support community needs	Engaged + supported residents + visitors	Linkages to other parts of the city
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bike/pedestrian infrastructure • Traffic calming • Utility and signal enhancements • Shade, benches, and visual interest • Human-scale lighting • Accessible to all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vibrant retail • Various housing options • Buildings adjacent to sidewalks • Improved parking strategies • High-quality parks and open space • Healthy food options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged residents, businesses, nonprofits, vulnerable populations • Regular programming • Pet accommodations • Defined identity • Safety, real and perceived 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multimodal, connected street networks • Sidewalk and trail connections • Transit • Bike infrastructure

With healthcare costs soaring and putting increasing stress on the fiscal health of our country, Rachel's and ULI's ideas on improving our built environment are not only welcome, but should be essential reading for any urban planning professional, real estate developer, Mayor or Governor in the U.S. The Baltimore LAI Chapter is grateful to her for her cogent presentation of this most important of topics.