

# Moving Forward

Health by Design's Five-Year Progress Report: 2006 – 2011



**Health by Design**

creating built environments to foster healthy living

an ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH PROMOTION initiative

## **About us**

Health by Design is a coalition of diverse partners working to ensure that Indianapolis and communities around the state have neighborhoods, public spaces and transportation infrastructure that promote physical activity and healthy living.

By raising awareness, providing education and encouragement, advocating for policy change and monitoring how the places we create affect how well we live, Health by Design champions a built environment that promotes active living and protects the natural environment.

## The environment in which we live often makes it difficult to choose healthy behaviors.

Over the past several decades, as the automobile took a central role in our lives, and convenience became an obsession, we designed our communities accordingly ...

- ... neighborhoods with no sidewalks
- ... retail and service outlets more accessible by car than other means
- ... suburbs spread far and wide, disconnected from services, amenities and each other
- ... schools built far from homes, for students arriving by bus and car
- ... streets unfriendly to pedestrians, cyclists and other non-motorized travelers

The impact? A nation that grows increasingly physically inactive, and that suffers from health problems as a result, including obesity and related chronic diseases.

Health by Design exists to help community leaders and policy-makers examine and improve the places we live, work, learn and play, advocating and encouraging environments that accommodate and inspire physical activity – and that, as a result, help us become healthier and happier.

On the following pages, you'll learn how we've done this for the past five years and what we intend to achieve moving forward. At the same time, you'll get to know some of the people and programs that have made our work possible – and that are helping to make Indiana a healthier place.

# A Complete View

As the leading Indiana proponent of Complete Streets (a national movement to ensure road networks that are safer, more livable and welcoming to everyone), Health by Design and its partners advocate for policy and planning decisions that help to deliver the many economic, social, environmental and community benefits of streets designed and operated for all users. In Indianapolis, Health by Design organized testimony and provided education to the mayor and members of the City-County Council about the need to improve sidewalk and bicycle infrastructure and the corresponding health and community benefits. One example of the effort's results, the sidewalk amendment passed in April 2008 has resulted in funding for priority sidewalk projects. Now HbD and several key partners are working to draft, develop and implement state and local Complete Streets policies throughout Indiana, with the goals of seeing the passage of a Complete Streets ordinance in the City of Indianapolis, making Complete Streets standard policy through the Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization, and passing Complete Streets legislation in the 2012 General Assembly.



Irene Wegner

*For decades, Americans designed streets for cars and trucks, leaving pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders out of the picture.*

## MAKING MOBILITY MATTER

Not many people get teary-eyed about bike and pedestrian pathways, but Irene Wegner says that when she heard the city was putting pathways along a key stretch of Michigan Road on the northwestside, “I almost wanted to cry.”

What Irene doesn’t mention is that she can take a lot of credit for that pathway. In the spring of 2010, she organized a walkability assessment in the area, attracting some 50 participants and a fair amount of attention – and action – from City Hall.

Of course, that kind of advocacy isn’t new to Irene. She’s been a force for change in Indy since she came to town 15 years ago to work as associate state director for community outreach at AARP. A force behind the success of Health by Design, she has led efforts for improved bicycle and pedestrian access across the state.

While everybody benefits from the improvements Irene helps spark, she

has been especially mindful of the needs of older citizens and people living with disabilities. “You try to be as mobile as you can in your house, and then, when you open the door, you can’t get where you want to go,” says Irene, who recently retired from AARP but expects to remain active in community efforts. “When you can’t drive, or don’t drive, or don’t have sidewalks, your mobility is severely limited.”

The problems are all around us, Irene says: narrow or non-existent sidewalks, damaged curbs, curbs that aren’t accessible to everyone, streets with room only for automobiles and left-turn lanes that put everyone at risk. Sometimes, the issues are simple to address. For example, traffic lights often change too quickly to allow older or disabled folks to get across the street before they change again. A little adjustment in timing could result in a big increase in safety.

“It’s all about raising awareness and looking at the streets holistically,” she says.

## FACT CHECK

**Residents are 65% more likely to walk in a neighborhood with sidewalks.**

**Among people living in areas without safe places to walk, only 27% meet recommended daily activity levels.**



# Students on the Move




## FACT CHECK

30% of Indiana youth are overweight.

Parents driving children to schools make up as much as 30% of morning traffic.

Half of children struck by cars near schools are hit by parents driving children to school.



### DRIVING THE BUS

Many mornings during the school year, you'll find Jennifer Pyrz piloting a bus through her north-side Indianapolis neighborhood. But her bus doesn't belch diesel fumes or clog roadways. Instead, it give kids a little extra physical activity and the neighborhood a little more togetherness.

Over the past couple of years, Jennifer's been one of the parents in her neighborhood who lead "walking school buses." In these walk-to-school efforts, parents guide groups of students through the neighborhood before and after school, passing a series of designated "bus stops" to gather or drop off more kids.

Individual "buses" range from a half-dozen regular walkers to nearly 20, and they run every day school is in session, rain or shine, hot or cold. "We're out there in all kinds of conditions," Jennifer says with a laugh. "Even in the worst weather."

St. Thomas Aquinas School – Jennifer's

kids' school – was the first of the area schools to launch the program, in 2009. Its success prompted Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Indianapolis Public School No. 84 and St. Joan of Arc School to follow suit.

Jennifer notes that schools wanting to get on board have resources available to them, in the form of federal funds administered through the Indiana Department of Transportation, and guidance from Health by Design and national Safe Routes to School partners.

But, she notes, it takes more than funding and guidance to get the walking school buses moving. It takes parental involvement, leadership and coordination, as well as school and neighborhood support.

The pay-off? It comes in many forms, from exercise and fresh air for the kids, to better connections among parents and neighbors. The added bonus? Teachers and principals see a difference in the classroom: Kids who walk to school, they say, show up with a sharper focus and a better attitude.

*Forty years ago, more than 40 percent of kids got to school on two feet or two wheels. Today, that rate has dropped to 15 percent.*



St. Thomas Aquinas students

Health by Design wants to see neighborhoods filled with kids walking to and from school each morning and afternoon. Not so long ago, such visions were commonplace; it used to be assumed that children who lived “in town” would walk or bike to school. These days, however, even kids a few blocks away tend to be driven or bused to school, and schools often are located in places that make walking or biking unsafe – meaning kids miss out on built-in physical activity, a daily dose of fresh air and social interaction. As the leading Indiana advocates for Safe Routes to School initiatives, Health by Design partners provide assistance to individuals, neighborhood groups and school and community leaders working to advance Safe Routes to School projects and to increase the overall rate of children walking and biking to and from school.



# More Ways to Get There

As transit has emerged as a high-profile issue in Central Indiana, Health by Design has established itself as a key contributor and leading voice in the conversation. Having been instrumental in the development of the Indiana Citizens' Alliance for Transit (ICAT), Health by Design partners are now working to increase that group's statewide reach and independence. The organization has helped to spread the word about the state's transit challenges and opportunities, generated grassroots support throughout Indiana, and written op-eds, letters to the editor and other communications to push for increased funding for transit options. Recognizing the economic impact, health and environmental benefits of mass transit, Health by Design and ICAT have urged Indiana residents to let their legislators know they support more transit options, better transit funding and more local funding options.

Amelia Miller



**Support  
Transit**

*While most American cities enjoy a range of transit options, Indianapolis generally has offered two choices: drive or rely on an underfunded, minimalist bus system.*

## A VOICE FOR TRANSIT

Amelia Miller came home to Indianapolis with a habit she didn't want to break: using public transit.

Having spent time in Germany and Switzerland when she was younger, and also having lived in St. Louis, Amelia had come to appreciate the benefits of mass transit. When the North Central High School grad looked around Indy, however, she saw a great void where transit should be. So when she heard about a series of public forums on transit in 2008, she knew she had to be there. What she didn't know is how attending a forum would shape the next few years of her life.

As attendees at the forums discussed their vision of improved mass transit for Central Indiana, one thing became clear: Indiana lacked an organization that could bring together transit advocates from various sectors and connect them to the general public so that everyone's voice could be heard.

That realization led to the creation

of the Indiana Citizens' Alliance for Transit (ICAT). And Amelia's enthusiastic support of transit earned her the role of ICAT Chair.

Pushing for dedicated funding for transit, ICAT developed as a statewide organization because its founders believe broad vision and support are essential to a successful mass transit initiative. The group hopes to help connect the many groups working for improved transit in Indiana, and to push for strong grassroots support and involvement.

"Legislators would tell us, 'That's great, but it won't be a hot issue until I hear about it from my constituents,'" Amelia says. "So now we are doing all we can to make sure they hear about it."

ICAT has seen how that can work. "Last year, when IndyGo was facing a major budget shortfall, fare increases and service cuts, we had a really big advocacy push and hosted a rally," Amelia says. "In the end, solutions were found that didn't hurt riders."

## FACT CHECK

**Only 1% of Indianapolis-area commuters use public transit; less than 3% walk or bike to work.**

**83% of commuters ride alone in their cars.**

**Traffic injury and fatality rates decline as transit ridership increases.**




# Indy's on a Roll



## FACT CHECK

Indianapolis has more than 40 road miles for every mile of bike lane or path.

24% of Hoosiers engage in no leisure-time physical activity; access to trails makes them 55% more likely to be active.



### LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Stacie Hurre admits that when she was younger, she didn't think much about exercise. Since she walked or rode her bike just about everywhere, she didn't have to think about exercise. It just sort of happened.

Stacie, who works as a diabetes health educator for the Marion County Public Health Department, understands that this kind of routine physical activity isn't common any more. That's why she and many of her colleagues at the Marion County Public Health Department work closely with Health by Design and various City departments to make sure Indianapolis is an urban environment that facilitates healthy, active living.

A key emphasis in this effort has been cycling. The city has added miles and miles of bike lanes on main thoroughfares downtown and beyond; and for the first time, Indianapolis has dedicated staff support for multi-modal transportation: Andy Lutz, who works as a senior project manager and bicycle-pedestrian coordinator for the Department of Public Works.

Stacie, Andy and many other Health by Design partners have provided significant leadership in planning and coordinating encouragement, enforcement and outreach activities; providing education and safety materials to residents, businesses and churches; and hosting events like Bike to Work Day, the Mayor's Bike Ride and bike safety trainings.

It also hasn't hurt to have a citizenry that's open to two-wheeled possibilities. As an example, Stacie points to a man she recently met on the Monon Trail. Crossing paths on the city's north side, Stacie and the man started chatting, and he explained that, inspired by the Monon Trail, he recently bought a bike and began taking regular rides. And it had paid off.

"He was a big guy – probably 300 pounds," Stacie says. "And he was losing about a pound a week, exercising, watching his eating habits and enjoying himself."

And – who knows? – maybe before long he won't even have to think about his new regimen. It'll just be a part of his daily routine.

*America's streets have become increasingly auto-oriented, sometimes leaving pedestrians, cyclists and others squeezed in along the edges, and often leaving them out altogether.*

Stacie Hurre



Look around at any event that advocates for active transportation, and you'll likely find Health by Design on the front lines. Rather than simply pushing people to be more active, though, Health by Design pushes communities to make active transportation more feasible.



In this effort, Health by Design advocates for increased funding for and implementation of bike and pedestrian projects in Indianapolis and beyond. The coalition collaborates with public officials to identify specific projects, urges them to make bicycle and pedestrian projects top priorities in budget discussions and advocates that such infrastructure be included in planning for all projects. On the cycling front, for example, the organization already has seen considerable progress in the Circle City alone: Indianapolis has created more than 30 miles of on-street bike lanes, and has set a goal to have 200 miles of bike lanes within 12 years.

# Ground-level Vision

Health by Design's land-use premise is simple: the neighborhoods in which we live, work, learn and play have a big impact on our health and well-being. Communities need to have housing and transportation options; schools, shops and services that are conveniently located and easily accessible; safe parks, playgrounds and trails; and protected natural environments. Collaborating with partner organizations whose interests align with this agenda, Health by Design monitors local and statewide planning initiatives, attends local government and community planning conversations, participates in land-use workshops and discussions, promotes comprehensive community economic development, and advances the goal of improved coordination between transportation and land use planning activities.



Sara Laycock

*A disconnect between transportation and land use planning has resulted in the creation of neighborhoods and public spaces that actually inhibit physical activity.*

## SMART LAND USE, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In some ways, it's simply a practical matter: REALTORS® know they need vibrant and attractive communities in order to sell homes.

In other ways, though, it's a labor of love: REALTORS® have a tendency to want what's best for the communities in which they sell homes. After all, Sara Laycock points out, they live there, too.

That explains why the Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS® (MIBOR) advocates for the best land-use policies, and encourages communities to make big-picture planning decisions, says Sara, who serves as MIBOR's Economic and Community Development Liaison.

The way Sara explains it, strategic land use and smart growth connect directly to the health and wealth of communities. In order to attract residents, communities need a strong economic foundation, access to employment, cultural amenities and connections to surrounding communities. In order to provide all of those components, com-

munities need to be well-planned and visionary.

"We all carry the flag of smart growth, comprehensive land-use and strategic planning to strengthen our communities," Sara says.

For an example of how this works, Sara points to public transit. MIBOR believes transit feeds a community's economy by connecting people to jobs, giving them access to services and amenities, and, as a result, making the community a practical and attractive place to live.

In fact, MIBOR was ahead of the curve on the transit conversation. The organization has for years had a transit task force, and in 2008 it outlined its own transit policy. As a result, as transit became a higher-profile issue in Central Indiana, REALTORS® were ready to jump into the conversation.

"We see transit as the current major economic development movement that can really reshape communities," Sara says. And that helps to build communities where REALTORS® can sell homes . . . and happily live, as well.

## FACT CHECK

**Most area residents use their cars to run errands, even when they're staying within a mile of home.**

**The presence of transit can increase property values and result in valuable development opportunities.**



# Ambitious Vision

When the Health by Design coalition was formed five years ago, our members cast an ambitious vision: to help create a future in which Indiana's neighborhoods, public spaces and infrastructure support and inspire physical activity and healthy living.

I call that vision ambitious because the state faces big challenges in this effort. Nearly two-thirds of Hoosiers are overweight or obese; nearly a quarter engage in no leisure-time physical activity. In the state's largest metropolitan area, Indianapolis, only 1 percent of residents use public transit for their daily commute, and less than 3 percent walk or bike to work.

Of course, the causes behind these problems are many, but the Health by Design coalition members recognized one common denominator: the communities we have built. The way we design our streets and neighborhoods ... the options we provide for getting from one place to another ... the obstacles we create to walking and biking ... these and other man-made factors affect our opportunities for living healthy, active lives.

In 2006, our members recognized a need to address these factors, and the need for a unified voice. So they launched Health by Design, an initiative of the Alliance for Health Promotion, to use education, advocacy and action to help create built environments that promote physical activity and protect the natural environment.

Five years later, we can see that the timing was fortuitous. Even as the coalition was forming, a new attitude was taking shape across Indiana. Conversations about public transit shifted from "What if?" to "When?" Communities began investing more in pedestrian and bike trails. Parents and administrators discussed allowing students to walk and bike to school. Elected officials talked about "connecting the dots" in their communities, helping people get from one neighborhood to another or to nearby


amenities. Sidewalks appeared in areas where they had been left out of original plans.

This timing gave Health by Design the opportunity to contribute to these efforts, acting as a catalyst and advocate. To that end, Health by Design has led programs and initiatives ranging from serving as a public voice on infrastructure issues to sponsoring community conversations and expert presentations. Highlights have included:

- Coordinating the Urban Planning Scholar Series, bringing national experts to Indiana to discuss opportunities and best practices
- Strengthening the coalition through trainings and leadership development
- Developing and implementing a strategic communications plan
- Convening and coordinating Complete Streets partners
- Educating and advising elected officials, planning officials and others in state and local government on policy and fiscal matters
- Publishing articles in media outlets across the state
- Assisting in the development of neighborhood groups facilitating Safe Routes to School efforts
- Leading the creation of the Indiana Citizens' Alliance for Transit
- Supporting the Mayor's Bike Ride in Indianapolis and other bicycling initiatives

As proud as we are of these achievements, we're even more excited about the future. That's why we have continued to put forth an ambitious vision and set big goals. In the months and years ahead, we intend to pursue the following objectives:

- Develop, grow and maintain Health by Design as an effective coalition
- Pass a Complete Street ordinance in the City of Indianapolis
- Pass a Complete Streets policy through the Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization

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- Pass a statewide Complete Streets policy
  - Increase funding for and implementation of bike and pedestrian projects in Indianapolis
  - Increase funding for and implementation of bike and pedestrian projects through the Indiana Department of Transportation
  - Increase funding for transit options in Central Indiana
  - Further establish the Indiana Citizens' Alliance for Transit's independence
  - Increase rates of children walking and biking to/from school in Indianapolis
  - Develop an independent Safe Routes to School state partner network
  - Improve coordination of transportation and land use planning in Central Indiana
  - Advance Health by Design priorities through federal policy advocacy.

Strong collaboration has been the key to our success. As such, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge those who helped make our work possible: the Marion County Public Health Department, which has provided financial support from Day One, and the many generous individual and organizational partners who have given time, expertise, knowledge, in-kind services, sponsorship support, volunteer leadership and so much more to Health by Design.

On behalf of the countless Hoosiers who are already benefiting from the work of the Health by Design coalition, I thank you all for your support and for your ongoing dedication to our big vision of a healthier, more active Indiana.



Kim Irwin, MPH  
Executive Director  
Alliance for Health Promotion

## Health by Design's goals:

- **Increase walking, biking and other public transit options**
- **Encourage land use decision-making that promotes public health**
- **Increase neighborhood, city and regional connectivity**
- **Reduce dependency on automobiles**

# Programs and Activities

## Policy and Advocacy

As a core activity, Health by Design partners explore policy options, recommend policy changes and mobilize coalition members and the general public to advocate for policies that promote multimodal transportation options, wise land use and connectivity.

Key examples of this work include:

- Developing talking points and advocacy messages for coalition partners
- Organizing testimony for public hearings
- Providing formal written comments during public review and comment periods
- Monitoring and tracking project-related processes (selection, prioritization, completion)
- Communicating with policy makers on projects and policies
- Meeting with elected officials and their staff
- Conducting media advocacy through letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, news articles, and television segments



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## Education and Events

Health by Design conducts educational activities and hosts events that build the coalition and advance our programmatic and policy objectives.

We hosted two statewide conferences which highlighted research, case studies and policy initiatives related to the built environment and public health. The ongoing Urban Planning Scholar Series creates a vision for land use and transportation planning in Indiana, with each event designed to raise awareness of frequently overlooked issues in community and transportation planning and to educate professionals and policy-makers about the critical effects on public health, the environment and quality of life.

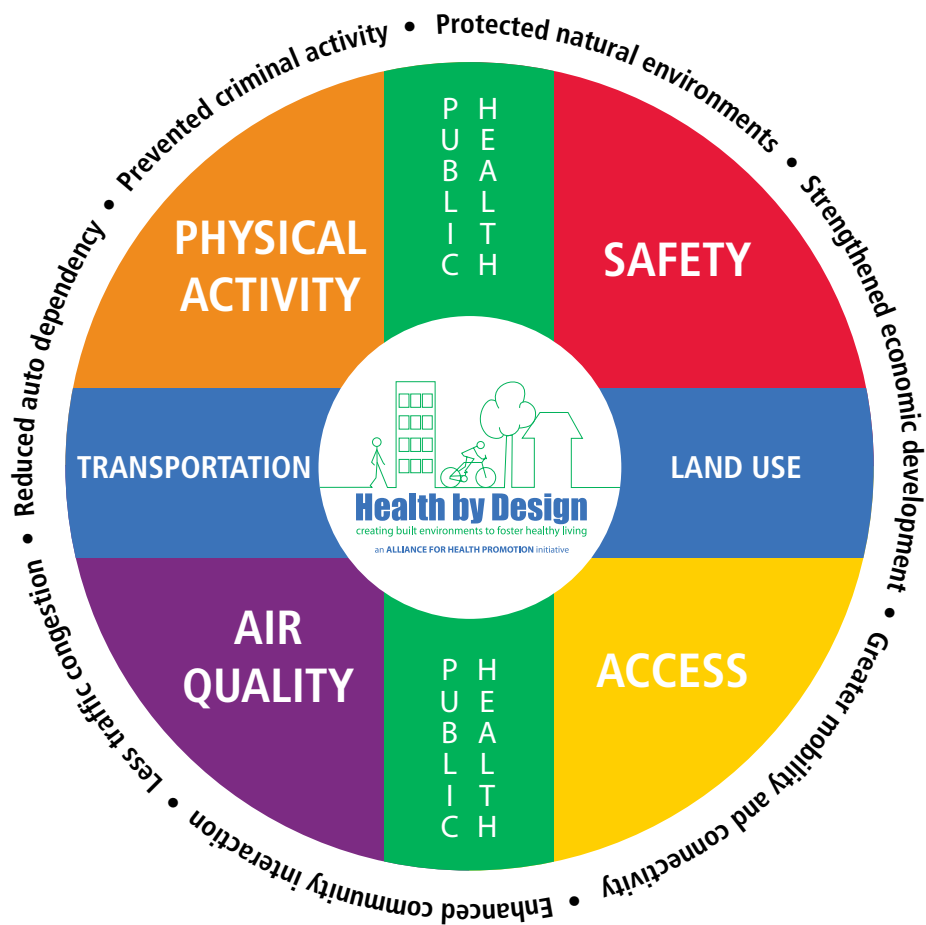
In addition, the work of Health by Design has been presented at scores of meetings, classes, conferences and events and to local, state and national audiences. We frequently exhibit at and provide sponsorship for partner events, as a way to continually expand our network and grow the coalition.

Health by Design partners have been directly involved in several neighborhood-based walkability assessment projects. These activities have raised awareness of the benefits of safe and connected pedestrian infrastructure and provided citizens an opportunity to observe and evaluate the conditions in their own neighborhoods. Detailed results have been used to make a stronger case in advocating for needed sidewalks, and, in several cases, have led to improvement projects.



# A Key Intersection

Health by Design works at the intersection of the built environment – transportation and land use – and public health. The connections among these issues have four primary health impacts: physical activity, safety, air quality and access (such as to medical care or for emergency/disaster response). Numerous other related topics also support health and quality of life, including: protected natural environments, strengthened economic development, greater mobility and connectivity, enhanced community interaction, less traffic congestion, reduced auto dependency and prevented criminal activity.



# Get Involved

Health by Design is a collaboration of committed individuals and organizations working to achieve policy, systems and environmental changes that will better integrate physical activity into Hoosiers' lives. Our focus is on how we can shape the built environment to promote active, healthy living for Hoosiers of all ages and abilities.

Your support – financial and in-kind – helps us to provide education to citizens, civic leaders and policy makers on the importance of transportation options and wise land use in creating thriving downtowns and neighborhoods. Your contributions – large and small – allow us to advocate for the positive changes that will yield healthy, vibrant communities. We need your assistance to conduct our education, advocacy and event activities and to accomplish our coalition goals.

Please make your donation today, making your check payable to the **Alliance for Health Promotion** and mailing it to the address below.

Health by Design is an initiative of the Alliance for Health Promotion, a 501(c)(3) organization.

For more information on how to donate to Health by Design, please contact us at [info@healthbydesignonline.org](mailto:info@healthbydesignonline.org) or by calling 317.352.3844.

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