

KEEPING KIDS MOVING: HOW THE FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION BILL CAN HELP

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Keeping Kids Moving:

How the Federal Transportation Bill Can Help Stop Childhood Obesity

Washington, D.C. July 15, 2010 – With the federal transportation authorization bill up for renewal this Fall, today's national roundtable sponsored by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity (RWJF Center), Transportation for America, The Convergence Partnership, and PolicyLink, brought together national and local leaders to explore the vital connections between transportation policy and the childhood obesity epidemic in America.

"This generation of children is threatened with a future of chronic disease, economic burden, and an eroding quality of life unless our nation starts taking action now," said Joe Thompson, MD, MPH, director of the RWJF Center. "The upcoming transportation reauthorization gives us a valuable chance to work towards reversing the epidemic of childhood obesity by creating opportunities so that the healthy choice can be the easy choice."

At a time when obesity has become a threat to the lifespan and quality of life of American children, senior federal officials and leaders representing rural and urban communities from across the country convened at The National Press Club to discuss promising ways transportation policy can help promote active lifestyles and decrease obesity rates, especially among poor children and children of color. Together, they are finding effective ways to promote transportation policies that can help reverse the epidemic: one-third of American children today are overweight or obese, and children from low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately affected by the disease.

"We need a transportation system that makes it easier for kids to be healthy and active," said James Corless, Director of the Transportation For America campaign. "Today, fewer than 15 percent of children in

America walk or bike to school. Children who have access to safe and convenient walking and bicycling opportunities get more exercise and develop healthy active habits that can last a lifetime. Embracing key policies at the federal level such as complete streets or Safe Routes to School will make a world of difference for the health of children across the country."

Martha Coven, Special Assistant to the President, Domestic Policy Council; Dr. Howard Koh, Assistant Secretary for Health, Department of Health and Human Services; and Roy Kienitz, Undersecretary for Policy, Department of Transportation, discussed the role of federal transportation policy in addressing the childhood obesity epidemic. Remarks included a discussion of the First Lady's Let's Move initiative and work to address the recommendations from the report to the President from the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity.

"The lack of quality transportation options in low-income areas has a tremendously negative impact on the health and vitality of those living there – and will continue without urgent, targeted action," said Laura Kettel Khan of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on behalf of the Convergence Partnership. "Healthy communities need inclusive policies that expand access and make active living and healthy eating possible for all children and families."

Chip Johnson, the Mayor of Hernando, Mississippi; 14 year-old Julia Lopez, a youth advocate, from the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program; Adetokunbo "Toks" Omishakin, Director of Healthy Living Initiatives for the Office of the Mayor in Nashville, Tennessee; and Barbara Stiffarm, Executive

Director of Opportunity Link in Montana, shared success stories about how equitable transportation policies have positively impacted the wellbeing of people in their communities. They highlighted promising ways to provide affordable, accessible, and convenient transportation for low-income individuals with the goal of solving the childhood obesity epidemic within a generation.

"If we're going to effectively tackle America's childhood obesity crisis, we must begin where rates are the highest - in low-income communities of color," said Angela Glover Blackwell, founder and CEO of PolicyLink, and chair of the RWJF Center National Advisory Board. "Children and families in poor areas are too often disconnected from quality transportation options that make access to fresh grocery stores, good schools, and safe, clean parks possible. At a time when where you live determines how you live, we must become policy advocates and push for the kinds of environments all people - regardless of race or income - need to live stronger, longer, healthier lives."

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity is a national organization dedicated to reversing the childhood obesity epidemic by changing public policies and creating healthier environments in schools and communities.

www.reversechildhoodobesity.org

Transportation for America is a growing, national coalition committed to creating a new national transportation program that will take America to the 21st Century by building a modernized infrastructure and healthy communities where people can live, work, and play.

www.t4america.org

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by

Lifting Up What Works.

www.policylink.org

The Convergence Partnership is a collaboration of funders that came together with the shared goal of changing policies and environments to better achieve the vision of healthy people living in healthy places.

www.convergencepartnership.org

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