



Health Impact Assessment Overview

AN OPPORTUNITY OF A GENERATION

In the past, little attention was given to health impacts of transportation projects. Less was known about it, but decades of research has changed that. There is undeniable evidence that transportation systems have major effects on the people who use them and live near them. This knowledge of health impacts offers an opportunity to implement transportation projects in a way that embraces Cobb's commitment to provide a healthy community for all people.



TRANSPORTATION HAS CHANGED

Cobb County will gain 167,000 people in the next 25 years. Roads alone cannot accommodate all these people. In addition, people are changing how they travel. People are buying vehicles that use less fuel, are driving them shorter distances, and are relying more on alternatives such as transit, bicycling and walking. A successful transportation system must reflect these changes and not focus solely on moving cars.

HEALTH AND JOBS

Increasing traffic congestions and an absence of transportation choices will impede Cobb's growth. Workers and employees now demand healthy transportation alternatives including transit, walkable communities, and bike connectivity. In order to continue to attract quality employment, transportation improvements that promote options and health must be implemented.



HOW IS HEALTH DEFINED?

Good health is viewed as a state of physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Cobb's future transportation system can support alternatives to the car, reduce pollution-causing emissions, improve access to needs and services, and provide options that improve mental and physical well-being.

WHAT IS A HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA)?

A HIA is a tool by which a policy or project is judged for its potential effects on the health of a population. It is used to help decision makers recognize the health consequences of their decisions and provide a healthier living environment. The HIA also includes mitigation for projects with negative health impacts.



WHAT ARE THE KEY HEALTH INDICATORS IN COBB?

A HIA Committee identified the following as the primary public health concerns within Cobb County:

- Access to grocery stores, transit, healthcare, schools, and parks
- Safety and accidents
- Vulnerable populations
- Chronic disease
- Obesity and physical exercise

The HIA reviewed the proposed Cobb transportation projects against each of these five health indicators.

HIA Recommendations:

Traffic Safety & Operational Improvements

Examples include intersection improvements, turn lanes, and the construction of roundabouts.

- Decrease walking distance at intersections and adjust signal times. This will allow seniors, children, and disabled citizens to safely cross during the designated signal timing.
- Provide pedestrian refuge islands or medians in large intersections to decrease crossing distance.
- Improve site distance for turning cars where applicable to decrease pedestrian-auto crashes.

Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Trail

More and better pedestrian and bike facilities are needed to improve safety, facilitate active and alternative modes, and connect to transit. All five identified health factors are positively impacted.

- On-street bike facilities should be considered in the design or reconstruction of new or existing streets. They should follow low-volume streets with linkages to high-volume streets. Include road markings, signage, and wayfinding signs. Provide bike parking at major destinations.
- Pedestrian facilities should include traffic calming, and amenities such as benches, shade trees, water fountains, and wayfinding signs particularly near transit stops. Re-design large intersections to decrease walking distances; provide appropriate spacing between safe pedestrian crossings.

Transit

More and better transit will ensure access to needs and services, especially for vulnerable populations. It increases physical activity, and reduces emissions, pollutants and chronic disease.

- Provide pedestrian amenities at transit stops such as wide sidewalks, additional passenger waiting space, bus shelters, seating, and lighting.
- Accommodate transit in the design of roadway projects.

Traffic Signal Timing

Improving signal timing can lead to shorter trip times, more free time for physical activity, less stress, and mental health benefits. Conversely, it can lead to increased speed and more accidents.

- Provide traffic calming, lighting, and other safety features on corridors with signal timing.
- Provide signal prioritization for transit where possible.
- Allow for enough time for safe crossing of all persons including elderly, disabled, and children.

Interchange & Grade Separation

These projects provide congestion relief. The shorter trip times allow time for being active, social interaction, and less stress and back pain. With increased vehicle speed, more accidents can result.

- Discourage speeding through appropriate lane widths and enforcement.

New Roadway Connections

New roadway connections contribute to alternate routes and potentially a more grid-like system.

- Opportunities to provide pedestrian facilities, streetscaping, and on-street bicycle facilities should be considered in design which may increase physical activity and decrease chronic disease.
- Implement traffic calming measures as needed. Traffic calming may reduce vehicular speeds, improve safety, and encourage pedestrian and bicycle use and physical activity.
- Actively implement the existing Complete Streets Policy in the design of new roadway connections.

Roadway Capacity

Road widening has many negative health outcomes including increased vehicle speed and accidents, more vehicle use leading to chronic diseases and obesity. These projects need extensive mitigation.

- Discourage speeding through appropriate lane widths and enforcement.
- Implement the existing Complete Streets Policy in the design of all roadway projects.
- Provide traffic calming, lighting, and safety features along corridors with road widening.

The full HIA report is available at www.cobbinmotion.com.