Photo Credit: cityclock.org

Active Transport

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One area of consideration that determines the age-friendliness of a city is how its active transportation network and infrastructure respond to the mobility needs of the aging population[15]. This in turn, has a strong influence on the social and civic participation of older adults. Active transportation is an umbrella terminology which includes walking, jogging and running, cycling, non-mechanized wheel chairing, Skateboarding, rollerblading, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing[5]. It has the double advantage of personal and public health and has been regarded as a major "contributor to physical activity"[2].

According to the *small towns and rural multimodal networks,* "A walkable and bikeable community is one in which active transportation trips are safe and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities" (p.8)[3].

Older adults' usage of active transportation

Active transport makes seniors confident, connected and give them control

Some older Adults engage in active transport activities such as cycling or walking for leisure and recreational purposes while to others, it is the primary transportation source they rely on. It enables older adults to get connected with their outdoor spaces, exercise their bodies, and makes them more independent as well as increase their confidence. Danes, within the ages of 10 - 84 years, make an average of 1.4km of a journey a day using a bicycle[6]. Age is not necessarily a barrier to cycling or other forms of active transport.

Land use and active transportation

Land use is the primary contributing factor in determining the urgency of travel over varied distances to access essential services[7]. High-density neighborhoods encouraged walkability and cycling. Neighborhoods with compelling destinations and walkability give added motivation to older adults to explore their outdoor spaces and streets[13]. Proximity to resources (Grocery stores, gym, parks,restaurants), within distances of 650 meters of where seniors live, increases the walking frequency of seniors to these destinations[4] .


Photo Credit: insitemagazine.co.nz

Figure 2: Seniors jogging in a park

Figure 3: An active bike fixation stand in Portland

Figure 4:Shared road (Sharrow) in Lincoln park Chicago

Active transportation infrastructure

The city of Wausau with a population of around 39100, used shared lane markings (sharrows) to increase cycling spaces on its roads. They incorporated Bike fixation locations, to give cyclists added comfort and assurance while riding. The bike fixation locations contain up to 8 tools for quick bike repairs such as bicycle pumps[12]. They do have designated repair shops with spare parts and technicians if a more technical problem is developed which is beyond the capacity of the rider.

Infrastructure and safety are key in promoting active transport usage among older adults

Pedestrian infrastructure is as crucial as cycling infrastructure in making active transport fruitful in cities. Downtown Vancouver has improved its pedestrian infrastructure with the inclusion of wide and connected sidewalks, pedestrian controlled intersection crossings, unfluctuating pavements which are cleared of snow and ice in winter, sidewalk benches at regular intervals to give rest to older adults, well-lit pavements at night[7]. This, coupled with their connectivity to essential services like grocery shops have increased walking among older adults residing in the downtown.

Cities Initiatives to increase Walkability

Anaconda, a city of 9,000 people in Montana, decided to fight obesity and diabetes through walking. They relied on adapted wayfinding to make walkability more appealing and welcoming. This was done through the incorporation of the "walk your city programme" into the city outdoor space, which focused on integrating signages that direct people to places and facilities within walking distances in the city[11]. Knowing which direction to go to get to the desired destination, makes the journey more interesting and less confusing.

Figure 5: Wayfinding with user powered signs in Memphis

Hendersonville, a 13,000 populated city in North Carolina, made its downtown more walkable by narrowing the downtown streets, which resulted in reduced vehicular speeds. This single act gravitated to more people walking in the downtown and increase in businesses especially retail outlets as a result of the increase in pedestrians[11].

To increase safety and a liveliness city, the city of Hernando, Florida, with a population of 15000, implemented the 'complete streets law' into its traffic system. This law advocates for a safe, convenient

Figure 6: A walking trail along a river in Berlin

Figure 7: People walking and cycling on a car free Sunday in San Francisco

and comfortable access to public places by walking or biking[11].

The city of Vancouver, used educational programs such as "the people are fragile" road safety awareness and "safe routes to school" program to make the city friendly to active transit patrons[9].

Walking is enhanced when it is periodically tied to events or street activities

Open street events

The city of of San Francisco has incorporated car free sundays into its road activities from March to October each since 2008. It is a once a month activity and attracts between 15000 to 20000 participants each time[1]. The success of the project has been replicated accross other cities in the USA. Paris has increased the game plan by extending car free movement one sunday in every month over the whole of the city[14]. The open street idea is expected to increase street activity, enable people to socialize, draw out seniors and less able people and have fun. The city of Cleveland in Ohio, US instituted the walk+roll activity for skateboarders on street in 2006 and 2011 and have set the pace for furthur street activities of that sort[1].

Figure 8: Victoria park and fitness trail in Adelaide

Green walks and Fitness trails

The city of Berlin has a range of walks, shortcuts and jogging trails which are set away from road traffic and are dubbed the "20 green walks in Berlin" [8]. They are a series of extended walkways which give patrons a scenic view and a breath of freshness due to its seclusion from the main streets.

The Victoria parks fitness trail in Adelaide, Australia has a series of walking trails. They each have several exercise elements added to them for patrons to have a worth repeating experience[10].

Final Thoughts

Different cities have shown the different ways the call for walkability and cycling can be realised without necessarily allocating a huge budget for active transport. By altering what already exist, cities can achieve increased cycling and walking and reap the associated advantages. Active transport is a positive way of creating bonds between seniors and their communities as well as improving health, activity and community participation.

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