

Connect Columbus Multi-Modal Thoroughfare Plan HIA

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Do you live in a car centric city? Do some residents not have access to an automobile and are at a distinct disadvantage when seeking services, education and employment? Take a look at how Columbus, Ohio is reversing the auto-first thinking of traditional traffic engineering and the unequitable distribution of transportation resources.

Decision and Stakeholders

The City of Columbus is currently developing the Connect Columbus Multi-Modal Thoroughfare Plan to serve as an unprecedented long-range transportation plan for the city. The Connect Columbus Plan will establish the community's vision and goals for the transportation system; conduct a transportation needs assessment; formalize the City's Complete Streets Policy and develop Complete Streets Design Guidelines; designate multimodal level of service goals for each street typology; and identify priority corridors for each mode.

With a plan of this breadth, the entire City of Columbus will be affected; ensuring that an equitable perspective is taken into consideration is utmost importance. Columbus Public Health worked with the City of Columbus Department of Public Service, Nelson/Nygaard (the consultants on the project) and community partners while engaging the general public in order to discover the needs of the stakeholders involved and to discuss the equity implications of the plan.

Process

This HIA is the latest in a series of HIAs that Columbus Public Health has performed, starting with rapid HIAs and moving to intermediate and comprehensive HIAs. This HIA's geographical scope was the entire City of Columbus, Ohio; however, certain disadvantaged neighborhoods in Columbus were identified by the HIA. The HIA recommended that these disadvantaged neighborhoods to be given priority when deciding upon the proposed infrastructure projects.

The screening process began when the request for proposal (RFP) was being written in 2013. The plan officially kicked off in early 2015 and we started the scoping process and coordinated with the Department of Public Service and Nelson/Nygaard to gain a better perspective on the scope of the Connect Columbus plan. We decided upon physical activity, food access, air quality and traffic safety for our focus areas and began an extensive literature review around those 4 topics. We also gathered and mapped demographic data to find which census tracts in Columbus have the most need. We moved through the recommendation, reporting and monitoring stages after the literature review, public outreach which included surveys, a social media campaign, and data modeling. The plan will conclude in the summer of 2016.

Results

We worked hand-in-hand with the Department of Public Service and Nelson/Nygaard to have an impact on the plan since day one. We assisted in public outreach during the vision and goals process to bring stakeholders to the table, which resulted in Health & Safety and Equitable Access as 2 of the 6 main goals of the plan. We helped create and refine evaluation measures and performance metrics that will be used to prioritize transportation investments in the plan. For the Fact Book that explored current conditions and trends, we contributed health data such as obesity and active transportation, air quality and asthma prevalence, socioeconomic status and healthy food access, and distribution of disabled and aging populations. We also conducted a transportation survey that gathered the travel behaviors, preferences, and desires from Columbus area residents. Finally, the results of a travel model comparing two alternative future scenarios will be translated into predicted health impacts, using the Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT). All of this data and all of the analyses performed provided new information that was made available to the general public in addition to the stakeholders and decision-makers involved in the Connect Columbus Plan.

Lessons Learned

Close collaboration and communication between the stakeholders involved in a project is of the utmost importance to any HIA, and the Connect Columbus HIA did just that. We had to maintain flexibility and make adjustments to our timeline as the Connect Columbus timeline was altered. We also had some issues obtaining the data we sought which prevented us from running the ITHIM model that we originally planned on using and provided some challenges for the HEAT model that we ended up utilizing.

Building relationships with other City of Columbus departments has provided us with many opportunities to have a seat at the table when infrastructure and planning decisions are made. Without these relationships that we have fostered we wouldn't be able to have the impact that we do on city-wide decisions that are being made, especially transportation related decisions. We have and are actively using a health in all policies approach to our work with the end goal of working our way out of a job as HIA practitioners while integrating health into the decision making process of all city departments.

<https://columbus.gov/publichealth/programs/Healthy-Places/Health-Impact-Assessment/>

<https://columbus.gov/publicservice/Connect-Columbus/>