Plan4Health: Active Transportation Community of Interest

SUMMARY
Plan4Health connects communities across the country, funding work at the intersection of planning and public health. Anchored by American Planning Association (APA) chapters and American Public Health Association (APHA) affiliates, Plan4Health supports creative partnerships to build sustainable, cross-sector coalitions. The Puyallup Watershed Initiative’s Active Transportation Community of Interest (AT COI) aims to increase access to safe, healthy, and affordable active transportation options and to educate the community on health, equity, and active transportation.

CHALLENGE
The Pierce County portion of the Puyallup Watershed has a population of more than 400,000 and is characterized as being more diverse, but with lower rates of education and lower median income when compared to the rest of the state. More than nine percent of families live below the poverty line and 14 percent do not carry health insurance. Pierce County ranked 21st out of 39 counties in Washington for overall health outcomes. Heart disease and cancer are two of the top causes of death, with rates higher than state averages. Obesity and smoking rates are also elevated and African Americans experience worse health outcomes when compared to other races. Pedestrian and bicycle safety are major concerns as well. Washington scored a 28.46 on the Pedestrian Danger Index, which ranked 36th nationally. Between 2013 and 2014, 16 deaths, 80 serious injuries, and hundreds of less severe accidents occurred in Pierce County.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY
Residents of Pierce County can stay up-to-date on coalition news and events by visiting the coalition’s website (www.pwi.org/collaboratives/active-transportation), Facebook page (www.facebook.com/PuyallupWatershed) and following @PuyallupWater on Twitter.

To learn more about the Active Transportation Community of Interest and all coalitions participating in Plan4Health, check out www.plan4health.us. Join the national conversation at the intersection of planning and public health on social media with #plan4health.

“We are well on our way to creating a historic effort on safety for our kids and our schools.”
City of Tacoma Councilmember Robert Thoms, when speaking about recent Safe Routes to School planning developments.
SOLUTION

The Active Transportation Community of Interest (AT COI) will empower the community to get involved with planning and policy making through community education and training—and will educate local policymakers, community leaders, and the public on the intersections between health, equity, and active transportation. Priority jurisdictions will be identified and the coalition will help each community develop and implement a policy, systems, and environmental change action plan focused on improving access to safe, healthy, and affordable active transportation options.

RESULTS

Last October, three young people were hit by cars in while walking to or from school in Tacoma during the span of one week. Shortly after these incidents, the AT COI released a report highlighting an alarming trend: every eight days a child in Tacoma is hit by a car while walking or bicycling. These collisions happen in more frequently in Tacoma’s lower income neighborhoods and racially diverse communities. While the safety of young people and speeding have been long-standing concerns for Tacoma residents, this report brought to light how extensive this issue really is at a time when the community was beginning to have a conversation with local decision makers about how to support young people to stay safe while walking, bicycling, and skateboarding.

This past spring, the City of Tacoma was selected to be one of three priority jurisdictions the AT COI worked with to implement policy, system, and environmental change to impact community health outcomes. The AT COI worked closely with city staff to first identify existing supportive active transportation policies and then developed recommendations for how to strengthen these plans and policies to have a greater impact. Of the recommendations, Safe Routes to School was identified as a priority strategy to focus on this year.

In order to be strategic in implementing city-wide change, the City of Tacoma launched a Comprehensive Safe Routes to School planning process. This process will bring together key stakeholders and community members from across the city to discern the barriers local students and their families face in choosing to use active modes to access schools, identify and catalog existing Safe Routes to School resources and programs, and discuss opportunities to build partnerships to carry this work forward. This plan will have a strong focus on equity and will develop action items and goals for each of the 5 E’s: Education, Encouragement, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation. The AT COI has supported this effort in a number of ways, including doing targeted outreach in the city’s most diverse neighborhoods to raise awareness of opportunities to get involved with this process and gather input. The first stakeholder meeting is set to take place in mid-October and will be followed by a Community Open House and public survey in November.

This plan kicked off this fall, one year after three students lives were changed after collisions with motor vehicles. The City of Tacoma has shown a strong commitment to seeing this work through and recently proposed including $1.5 million dollars in the 2017-18 biennium for school related projects; $500,000 of these funds will go towards initial implementation steps once the plan is finalized in March of 2017. This is the first time that Safe Routes to Schools has received dedicated funding in Tacoma.