



## Alternative Transportation Makes Sense (and Saves Cents!)

### Situation

Motorized transportation is the most significant source of air pollution in the United States and contributes to our use of about ¼ of the world's oil. Vehicle emissions put nearly ⅔ of the carbon monoxide, ⅓ of the nitrogen oxides, and ¼ of the hydrocarbons into the atmosphere, causing serious health problems and environmental impacts. Small particle pollution and ozone comes, in part, from mobile sources including cars, trucks, buses, and road dust. When inhaled, outdoor pollutants can aggravate the lungs, and can lead to chest pain, coughing, shortness of breath, and throat irritation. Outdoor air pollution may also worsen chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma. On days when ozone air pollution is highest, ozone has been associated with 10-20% of all respiratory hospital visits ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)). Asthma is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases in the United States and has caused 15 million missed school days yearly ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)). There are 30,000 children with asthma in Milwaukee County. The prevalence of asthma is increasing and it is the number one reason for hospital stays at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. **Ten million dollars is the annual estimated cost, including medical expenses, lost work, and missed school days, for Milwaukee children with asthma** ([www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)).

### Background

Studies have shown that air pollution is higher along major roadways. According to a 2005 California study, scientists found that the closer children live to a freeway, the greater their chance of being diagnosed with asthma ([www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)). While it is true that vehicles today are cleaner, there are more vehicles being driven. Wisconsin has about 4 million licensed drivers and has more than 5 million registered vehicles. Over a ten year period, Wisconsin has added about 3,000 miles of roadway and increased about 6.8 billion miles of vehicle travel. Milwaukee County is the largest contributor to the total vehicle miles travelled in Wisconsin amounting to over 7 billion miles a year ([www.dot.wisconsin.gov](http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov)). Since the automobile is so prevalent in our society, limiting exposure to vehicle emissions and using alternative means of transportation that reduce the amount of single occupancy vehicle usage makes sense (and saves cents). During the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, alternative transportation resources were heavily planned and encouraged. **As a result, travel behavioral change resulted in a 23% reduction in traffic, a 28% reduction in ozone levels, and 42% fewer asthma-related emergency room visits** ([www.jama.ama-assn.org](http://www.jama.ama-assn.org)).

### Assessment

While improved gas mileage in vehicles is important, a reduction in vehicle travel can save more than just fuel. Reducing the amount of vehicle travel also reduces costs of roads, parking, and accidents, as well as the lost time and stress caused by traffic congestion. According to the American Automobile Association, the average cost of driving a mid-sized car in the U.S. is more than 65 cents per mile. For every dollar invested in public transit in Wisconsin, more than three dollars is returned in economic benefits to the community. **One full bus takes 30 cars off the road—reducing fuel and congestion, saving riders money, and making the air healthier to breathe** ([www.ridemcts.com](http://www.ridemcts.com)).

### Recommendation

Walking or biking for transportation creates zero harmful emissions and is an easy way to fulfill the U.S. Surgeon General's recommendation of at least 30 minutes per day of physical activity. Try public transit. Even if you ride just once or twice a week, you will reduce traffic congestion, pollution, and save money. Contact your elected officials and request:

**A**dditional funding for affordable and integrated public transportation,

**B**ike infrastructure including lanes, paths, and racks- including racks on buses

**C**ommunities that are healthier and more livable

## References

1. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Transportation and Air Quality; [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
3. American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology; [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)
4. University of Southern California (2005, September 21). Researchers Link Childhood Asthma to Exposure to Traffic-related Pollution. *ScienceDaily*; [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)
5. Wisconsin Department of Transportation; [www.dot.wisconsin.gov](http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov)
6. The Journal of American Medical Association. *Impact of Changes in Transportation and Commuting Behaviors During the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta on Air Quality and Childhood Asthma*  
JAMA, Feb 2001; 285: 897 - 905. [www.jama.ama-assn.org](http://www.jama.ama-assn.org)
7. Milwaukee County Transit System; [www.ridemcts.com](http://www.ridemcts.com)

## For More Information

1. Wisconsin Partners for Clean Air; [www.cleanairwisconsin.org](http://www.cleanairwisconsin.org)
2. Healthy People 2010; [www.healthypeople.gov](http://www.healthypeople.gov)
3. Healthiest Wisconsin 2010; <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/StateHealthPlan/>
4. Southeast Wisconsin Transit Systems; [www.yourotherwheels.com](http://www.yourotherwheels.com)
5. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission; [www.sewrpc.org](http://www.sewrpc.org)
6. Wisconsin Bike Federation; [www.bfw.org](http://www.bfw.org)
7. Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity Program; <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/index.htm>
8. Wisconsin Walks; [www.wisconsinwalks.org](http://www.wisconsinwalks.org)