

Active Transportation Case Studies

Identifying Opportunities for State
& Local Governments



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Introduction

ChangeLab Solutions developed this series of case studies in collaboration with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Nutrition and Physical Activity Branch (NPAB). These case studies are intended to help state policymakers and local leaders better understand policy strategies that have been shown to improve the health of residents. This resource focuses on active transportation practices and policies, using examples from Fresno County and Imperial County. In this resource, active transportation refers to human-powered ways of getting around, such as walking, wheeling, biking, or scooting, including travel to and from public transit.^{1,2}

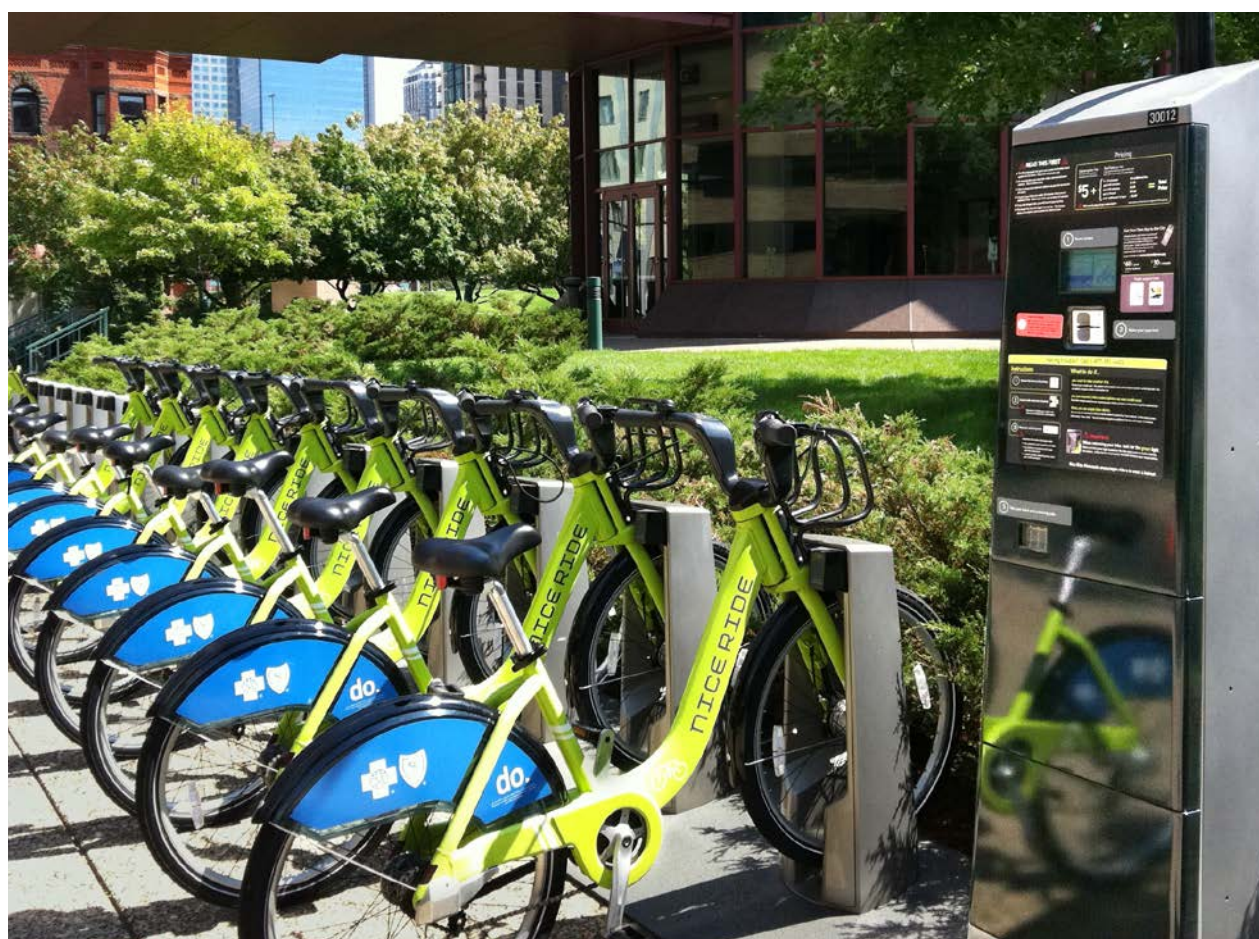
In the United States, transportation policy generally favors car ownership, contributing to declines in active transportation.³ However, a shift back toward active transportation was codified in federal law with the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). ISTEA funded active transportation infrastructure and gave state and local governments power to determine transportation policy.⁴ Today, active transportation policies aim to design roads and sidewalks for all users, including those with mobility differences, pedestrians, and cyclists.⁵ Promoting active transportation is crucial for public health, as it reduces chronic disease and mental health risks and can lead to built environment improvements that support health and well-being.^{6,7}

Communities fund active transportation infrastructure through a combination of investments and commitments included in plans and policies. Funding sources for this infrastructure at the local, state, and federal levels include transportation bonds, allocations from municipality general funds, voter-approved taxes and levies, revenues from fines, vehicle registration fees, gas taxes, and grants. Examples of grants include planning grants, [Sustainable Transportation Planning Grants](#), and the [US Department of Transportation's Safe Streets and Roads for All](#) grant program.

In addition, [California's Active Transportation Program \(ATP\)](#) plays a uniquely significant role in both Fresno and Imperial Counties' efforts as the state's primary source of funding and support for active transportation projects.⁸ Created in 2013, the ATP consolidates several federal and state funding streams, directing competitive funding to local, regional, and state agencies, with at least 25% required to benefit disadvantaged communities. Projects can include everything from new

bikeways and safer street crossings to Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs and community-specific active transportation plans.^{9,10}

When pursuing active transportation policies, jurisdictions can develop plans that include active transportation priorities. Such plans might include, for instance, general plans, transportation plans, Vision Zero action plans, or climate action plans. Alternatively, jurisdictions could choose to adopt a policy – for example, a Complete Streets policy or Vision Zero policy – and then find funding to implement its commitments. This case study focuses on strategies in which local health departments (LHD) are typically most involved: voter-approved taxes and levies, grant applications and implementation (specifically, the ATP in California), and planning processes.



Background

Fresno County and Imperial County have each taken different approaches to planning, creating, and funding active transportation infrastructure to reflect their unique contexts (e.g., population, geography, agency structures).

Fresno County

Fresno County's active transportation programs are in large part funded by Measure C, a half-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1986 for a twenty-year period and then renewed in 2006 for another twenty years, expiring in 2027.¹¹ Fresno County voters chose not to renew Measure C in 2022, with an opportunity for another vote on a transportation sales tax in 2026.¹²



In May 2024, the Fresno Council of Governments Policy Board approved the Fresno County Regional Active Transportation Plan, an update to an earlier plan from 2019.¹³ The 2024 plan aims to create a network of paths and bikeways to connect residents – including students and commuters – to schools, recreational facilities (e.g., parks), and public transit through safe active transportation infrastructure and facilities.

This planned active transportation network will increase walking and bicycling trips, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and improve regional air quality. The Fresno County Regional Active Transportation Plan serves eleven cities, ten unincorporated communities, and other unincorporated county islands, while also planning biking and walking connectivity with the four cities in the county – Clovis, Fresno, Reedley, and Selma – that already have or are pursuing their own active transportation plans.¹⁴ Funding sources for the 2024 plan include Measure C, the Bikeway Incentive Program administered by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, and other state and federal sources, some of which are administered by the Fresno Council of Governments.¹⁵

Imperial County

The [Imperial County Transportation Commission \(ICTC\)](#) and the [Imperial County Local Transportation Authority \(ICLTA\)](#) are the two agencies that manage and distribute funds for transportation projects in Imperial County. ICTC is the county's main transportation agency, while the ICLTA manages and distributes funds from Measure D, the local half-cent sales tax that funds transportation projects.¹⁶



In addition to Measure D and state and federal funding sources, Imperial County also raises transportation funds through municipal bonds. In April 2012, the ICLTA issued \$54 million in bonds on behalf of Imperial County and the cities of Brawley, Calexico, Calipatria, and Imperial. It later issued \$16.7 million in bonds in October 2018 on behalf of the cities of Calexico, Calipatria, and Holtville.¹⁷

Imperial County began developing an active transportation plan in 2016 after receiving a California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Sustainable Communities grant. The project team, including the County, Caltrans, local community representatives, and consultants, began planning in spring 2018, using existing transportation, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit plans to coordinate with other programs. The resulting plan presents active alternatives to existing transit options and will guide the funding and development of an integrated, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant active transportation network.¹⁸

Lastly, in 2018, Imperial County received a state ATP grant to develop a pedestrian master plan focused on connecting six unincorporated communities – Heber, Niland, Ocotillo, Salton City, Seeley, and Winterhaven – through an “integrated and safe pedestrian network.”¹⁹ Although development of this plan was led by Imperial County, ICTC administers the ATP funds as a pass-through agency.

Development

While the previous section described the funding mechanisms in place in Fresno and Imperial Counties at a high level, this section explores how these measures were developed, the impetus behind them, and the processes that shaped their adoption and evolution.

Sales Taxes

Fresno County's Measure C was first proposed because elected officials and agencies wanted to fund a transportation network to connect several of the county's cities. At the time, that meant building major highways and state routes that served as the regional backbone, helping connect rural and urban communities and providing greater access to services and key destinations like Yosemite National Park. As discussed above, voters chose to renew the tax in 2006 until 2027, but rejected a renewal opportunity in 2024, with another chance for renewal coming up in 2026. Moses Stites, executive director of the Fresno County Transportation Authority (FCTA), shared that the extension involved more non-governmental organizations (NGO) and other agencies, including health agencies. Stites also noted that "there needed to be more emphasis on public transit and other programs to



connect people to doctor's appointments, to schools, [to] pick up prescriptions, and so forth." The County used CalEnviroScreen to better understand health issues and socioeconomic disadvantages, such as unemployment, affecting residents, which helped spark discussions about new technology, transit-oriented development, public transit, bike lanes, and trails. As Stites described, "especially in some of these unincorporated communities and cities other than Fresno . . . the trend was to develop and think about, with the local cities in their general plans, more bike lanes [and] trails that would connect communities – not just cities, but communities [to the] north, south, east, and west."

Ultimately, revenue from the Measure C extension was allocated to a variety of programs under the FCTA:²⁰

- 15.3% to fixing potholes, repaving streets, improving sidewalks, and upgrading local transportation infrastructure
- 14.8% to flexible funding, which local agencies can use for the highest priority transportation projects, including public transit, pothole repairs, matching grants, equipment upgrades, and lighting
- 3.11% to the Pedestrian/Trails Subprogram to improve walking, biking, and other trails across the county
- 0.9% to the Bicycle Facilities Subprogram to create and maintain biking infrastructure in cities with at least 25,000 residents (if a city has a lower population, funds are directed to the flexible funding pool instead)
- 0.5% to improvements to make transportation accessible, such as adding curb cuts or ramps and supporting special transportation services²¹

As mentioned above, Measure D is Imperial County's local half-cent sales tax that funds transportation projects.²² Originally approved in 1989 for a twenty-year period, 81% of voters approved an extension of Measure D for an additional forty years starting in November 2008. According to a 2025 ICLTA fact sheet, "92% of [Measure D] funds collected go to the cities and County of Imperial to pay for critical road repair projects, 5% is targeted for regional highway projects, 2% for transit projects and 1% for administration."²³

For jurisdictions looking to establish a sales tax, including and building trust among diverse partners and starting early to address potential roadblocks and challenges are important strategies.

Partners could include private sector organizations, the local chamber of commerce, NGOs, health agencies, members of city or county government, transportation departments, transit agencies, or air districts. LHDs can get involved with messaging and media campaigns to help make the case to voters to support sales taxes. LHDs are also familiar with the health issues and needs of specific communities and can help prioritize funding for them.

Active Transportation Program-Funded Projects

Imperial County finalized its ATP-funded [Pedestrian Master Plan \(PDF\)](#) connecting Heber, Niland, Ocotillo, Salton City, Seeley, and Winterhaven in 2021.²⁴ These communities previously lacked safe sidewalks and multipurpose routes for residents. The partners involved in developing the plan engaged residents, conducted assessments, and identified high priority needs, such as safety and connectivity for pedestrian infrastructure. The plan ultimately proposed projects like safer crosswalks, brighter street lighting, and improved access to both active transportation options and public transit for residents, with the added goals of increasing sustainable travel options and reducing transportation system carbon emissions.²⁵



Plans

The Imperial County Pedestrian Master Plan details the plan development process, including community outreach and engagement efforts and data collection methods. Imperial County contracted Alta Planning + Design to prepare many of the materials required for the project, including the following:

- An existing conditions memo based on public data and walk audits, outlining demographics and equity considerations for transportation access – including active transportation – in the six communities served by the plan
- An outreach summary for each community, summarizing responses to a resident survey on existing active transportation conditions
- Community-specific active transportation plans responding to survey findings and feedback gathered through community meetings
- Recommendations for each community, centering on pedestrian infrastructure linkages and upgrades²⁶

The project planning team acknowledged the following challenges of building active transportation infrastructure in small, rural, unincorporated communities, like the six served by the project:

Unlike their developed city neighbors, these communities struggle to adapt to climate change and are environmentally and socially burdened with inadequate transportation growth. Not only do these communities lack basic infrastructure that their urban counterparts have access to, for many, these rural communities are remotely located between farmland. Some of the challenges in creating links to and from these rural communities and urban cities lies in the lack of funding, long distances between destinations, low density, and dependence on the car for transportation.²⁷

Despite these challenges, the project produced recommendations “specifically tailored to each community and influenced by climate-specific design strategies like xeriscape design and green infrastructure to offset greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to sustainable development.”²⁸

For the Fresno County Regional Active Transportation Plan development process, the team saw strong engagement with residents during in-person events and with community and advocacy organization representatives at virtual events.

Planning and transportation agencies can make intentional efforts to recruit LHDs and public health advocates to participate in planning processes. In general, LHDs can get involved in planning by participating in task forces and advisory groups, reviewing and providing feedback on plan drafts, offering health data to help inform priorities, articulating potential health benefits of active transportation (e.g., increased physical activity, improved air quality), and helping select evaluation and monitoring metrics.

It is also helpful to have a licensed engineer on the project team to advise on the feasibility of infrastructure recommendations.

Implementation

Building on the development of these funding mechanisms, this section examines how they have played out in practice.

Sales Taxes

In 2022, Fresno voters chose not to approve a proposed renewal of Measure C. The proposed renewal failed for a number of reasons – most notably because a successful opposition campaign drew attention to a proposal to cut public transit funding by 40%. Other unpopular parts of the 2022 renewal proposal included eliminating farm worker carpool programs and reducing funding for SRTS programs.²⁹

As the opposition campaign stated:

Today's transportation system is high-polluting, inequitable, and unsafe, and we cannot afford to continue to subsidize business as usual. Instead, new projects should be community-centered, with a focus on eliminating pollution and giving Fresno residents healthier transportation options – from safe sidewalks to public transit to shared and personal electric vehicles.³⁰

With Measure C up for a renewal vote again in 2026, Fresno County leaders and stakeholders are once again debating competing proposals. However, a new approach to the 2026 Measure C drafting process departed from Fresno County's previous top-down policymaking model by giving residents a more central role in

shaping the renewal. This change aimed to increase public decision-making power over transportation priorities ahead of the 2026 election.³¹ The 2026 renewal has since shifted to a grassroots, citizen-led initiative rather than a government-led one.³² The renewal requires only a simple majority to pass, and includes new metrics for bicycle and trail infrastructure construction.³³

Active Transportation Program

While Imperial County used ATP funding to develop a plan, Fresno County used it to implement projects identified in their active transportation plan. Fresno County has secured over \$25 million in funding to support active transportation projects in the region since 2023. Additional funding sources for projects identified in Fresno County's plan included Measure C, the Bikeway Incentive Program, and other state and federal sources.³⁴

Plans

LHDs can be involved in implementing strategies identified in active transportation plans, such as SRTS programs, and in evaluating the health effects of those plans. The Imperial County Pedestrian Master Plan mentions that ICTC operates an SRTS program in partnership with the Imperial County Public Health Department and Imperial County school districts.³⁵ The planning process and plan itself helped formalize the partnership between the transportation commission and the LHD. Naomi Robles, an administrative analyst for the Imperial County Department of Public Works, shared that meetings with schools and walk audits, which were part of the SRTS program, helped the team gather observations from a variety of people, identify priorities, and navigate applying for different sources of funding.

Results

This section discusses the results of the Imperial and Fresno County active transportation programs after they were implemented.

Sales Taxes

Fresno County's 2007–2027 Measure C extension has led to many successes, including funding the county's urban and rural highway system, creating over 14,000 jobs, advancing new technologies (e.g., electric vehicles, hydrogen fuel), supporting transit-oriented development, and significantly expanding the county's bicycle and trails network.³⁶ Measure C offers the fifteen incorporated cities of Fresno County considerable control over which transportation infrastructure projects to pursue and fund. The 2007–2027 measure extension included major investments in active transportation strategies, such as pedestrian and bike facilities, as well as “innovative programs to improve air quality, incentivize transit-oriented development, and foster new transportation technologies.”³⁷ The projects have been well received by the public and have led to positive outcomes. As Moses Stites describes, “We're starting to resonate with people, and they saw the positive results of it. Now, some of these trails have full-grown trees – canopies – and businesses now are flourishing in and around there, depending on the location. And a lot of the bicyclists take advantage of them as well. So, the precedent has been set.”

About 35% of Measure C extension funds go directly to the county and its fifteen cities, with 10% of that subtotal (3.5% of overall spending) dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian facilities. In Clovis, these funds have supported new trails and bicycle infrastructure. The tax also helped complete segments of the seven-mile Midtown Trail in southeast Fresno and begin construction on the Fresno County Rural Transit Agency's Operations and Maintenance facility, which will help strengthen rural transit services going forward.³⁸

Active Transportation Program

The Imperial County Pedestrian Master Plan has served as a tool to support other planning processes and funding efforts in the county. In developing the [2022 ICTC Regional Active Transportation Plan \(PDF\)](#), the planning team reviewed the Pedestrian Master Plan to ensure the newly proposed projects aligned with previous planning efforts. The Pedestrian Master Plan has also helped the County strengthen their applications for other federal, state, and local grants.

Plans

The Fresno Council of Governments has several standing committees that meet regularly to address transportation issues – not only when a specific project or plan update is underway. Some examples include the ATP Multidisciplinary Advisory Group, Environmental Justice Subcommittee, Fresno Council of Governments Policy Board, and SRTS Subcommittee. In other jurisdictions, LHDs could potentially participate in these types of committees to represent the public health perspective.

During the plan development process, many community members voiced concerns about students getting to school safely. As a result, Fresno County also started an SRTS initiative using Measure C funding and federal grants. Simran Jhutti, principal planner for the Fresno Council of Governments, describes other successes, including “creating resources to address critical needs of our region, because [in] a lot of these cities where there are rural school districts, these students are having to walk through dirt paths, so just elevating the quality of life for our residents.” Jhutti also credits the planning process with helping the Fresno Council of Governments, a regional agency, build stronger partnerships with individual cities and school districts.

State-Level Adoption

Although these case studies highlight sales taxes, use of ATP funds, and planning processes at the county level, similar strategies can also be pursued at the state level; however, these approaches may be less tailored to the specific needs of individual communities. The state plays a crucial role in supporting local efforts by funding programs like the ATP, ensuring the equitable distribution of federal and state transportation funds to smaller and more rural communities, and setting the overall policy direction to enable effective local implementation. States can also adopt policies, such as Complete Streets, Vision Zero, and SRTS policies, that provide general guidance about approaches and funding priorities.

Conclusion

Advancing active transportation approaches requires creativity and collaboration. Communities have many options for funding – such as the sales taxes, state grants, and bonds discussed above – and public health partners can add value by sharing their expertise throughout the planning and implementation processes. LHDs can get involved in active transportation planning by building strong relationships with transportation and planning partners. Transportation and health partners can both benefit from a shared understanding of how existing funding and planning structures can be leveraged to support active transportation.

If a jurisdiction already has a voter-approved funding source or transportation plan in place, LHDs can get involved by learning more about the timeline for plan updates and future elections that will affect funding sources. If a jurisdiction does not have an existing funding source for active transportation initiatives, LHDs could consider exploring opportunities to establish one with local community and government partners. Finally, as with all governmental initiatives, active transportation programs must center community voices and priorities to ensure long-term success. When decisions reflect local needs and lived experiences, active transportation projects are more likely to deliver lasting health and equity benefits.

Resources

From ChangeLab Solutions:

- [A Guide to Building Healthy Streets](#)
- [Long-Range Planning for Health, Equity & Prosperity: A Primer for Local Governments](#)
- [Planning for Healthy, Equitable Communities](#)
- [The Planner's Playbook: A Community-Centered Approach to Improving Health & Equity](#)



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