

**Transportation & Health of African Americans in
Buncombe County**

State of Black Asheville: Spring 2014

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This projected trend is especially startling when coupled with the fact that vehicle-ownership rates amongst African-Americans in Asheville are much lower than whites. This results in greater use of multimodal transit options amongst African-Americans. According to data published by NCDOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Division, although 21.5% of North Carolina is African American, they constitute 40.0 % of pedestrian crash victims, 32.3% of pedestrian fatalities, and 50.0% of child crash victims. With regards to bicyclist crash victims, 42.2% are African American, and 35.7% of bicyclist fatalities are African American. In Asheville specifically, while 13.4% of the city is African American, they constitute 24.7% of pedestrian crash victims (Kostelec). This data points to an increase in air pollution, an increase in vehicle crash fatalities, and a decrease vehicle-ownership for African-Americans. Essentially, African Americans in the Asheville-Buncombe region are suffering disproportionately from health burdens generated by and related to automobiles and related infrastructure, though they own significantly less of these automobiles.

Current and Suggested Policy Initiatives

County Level Policy Initiatives in Buncombe County

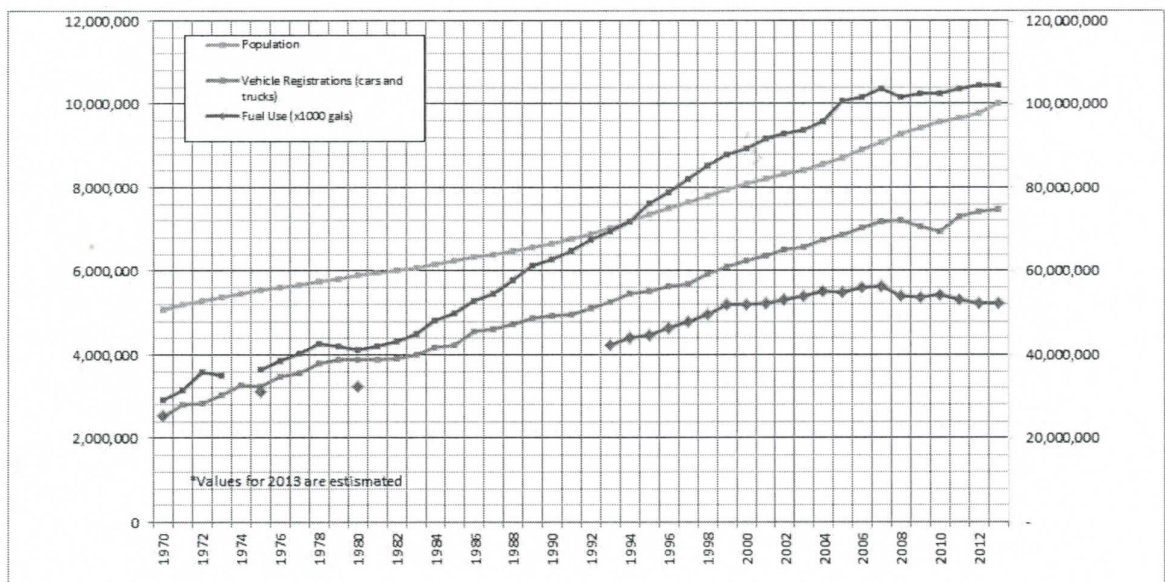
Amongst the greatest initiatives involving transportation in the Asheville-Buncombe region is the planning of "green ways". These green ways are essentially walkways lined with tree, shrub, and floral plantings that parallel busy corridors in a community. This provides a safe, aesthetically pleasing manner of transportation by foot or by bike that not only encourages physical fitness, and psychological well-being , but also a safer alternative to the sidewalks immediately adjacent to the busier streets in Asheville. These initiatives in planning of green

health clinics, and healthy food retailers. Part of the problem with many of the areas of disparity stems from inadequate access to healthy foods, a lack of safe passages for alternate transit, and the inability to receive any kind of preventative health care. These three entities specifically combat that problem. An approach requiring the establishment of all three entities in concert with each other inside targeted neighborhoods would be able to provide significant assets to African-Americans to reach health parity. Greenways and pedestrian routes would provide safe ways for lower income residents to be mobile, while also promoting healthy activity and exercise. Local health clinics located in public housing units or in close proximity (specifically within walking distance) would allow for specifically targeted primary care to handle the large but more cost effective route of preventative care for many of the causes of mortality. Finally, encouraging food retailers that can utilize the natural and healthy food resources in and outside of the county would be able to reduce the dependency of African-Americans on convenience stores and fast-food restaurants and help establish healthy diets.

Transportation

Connected with health outcomes such as mortality and reproductive health, health environments and economies inside the county can be measured to show distinct disparities for African-Americans. These areas include: transportation and air quality, access to health care professionals, and disability services.

Automotive emissions constitute a major source of air pollutants in any urban area. The degree to which a community is affected by automobile-polluted air is shown by the annual-vehicle-miles traveled by the regional population. Because of the concentrated and more urban population of African-Americans in Buncombe County, this number will disparately affect the population more so than whites. According to data published by the North Carolina Department of Transportation, the estimated average vehicle miles traveled for Buncombe County was 2,756,913 in 2013. This represents a slight increase from the calculated 2012 AVMT for Buncombe County of 2,743,663. Since at least 1970 in the state of North Carolina, population, fuel use, and vehicle registration have all exhibited a consistent increase.



ways have been a collaboration with the City of Asheville, the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization, Land of Sky Regional Council and a number of other private regional planning consulting firms (Kostelec).

However, the actions by the NC General Assembly and NC Board of Transportation during its current term to cut pedestrian and bicycle funding are preventing much movement to create a sustainable and viable alternate transportation infrastructure.

Suggestions to Public Policy

Similar to CHIP, the Asheville greenway initiatives represent a similar process where the voice of the African-American community has been underrepresented. While the greenways have a viable planning strategy to ensure less pedestrian/bicyclist crashes, at present, they are located in areas that are not accessible to Asheville's predominantly African American communities. Lack of political clout, visibility by city planning officials, and the opportunity to vocalize or present concerns about desires for the arrangement of civic space within and contiguous to their own communities represent a tremendous barrier to any sort of community planning initiatives for African American communities in Asheville. To ameliorate this problem, there needs to be a greater emphasis on presenting African American communities with the opportunity to voice their concerns and issues. This, in addition to allowing data and figures to inform the planning of various civic infrastructure, would work to the benefit of reducing transportation-related health disparities in the African American communities of Asheville.

The third and final policy suggestion would be to revisit urban planning and zoning ordinances to create a more healthy and sustainable community for African-Americans. A combination of three different strategies would be able to effectively handle the main disparities among African-Americans. These three entities are bicycle and pedestrian greenways, local

References

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