

CARTS AND THE CART PROJECT

Maggie McGehee and Rebecca Deehr

Feet First - 2109 Third Avenue, Suite 110, Seattle, WA 98121 - 206.652.2310 - www.feetfirst.info - info@feetfirst.info

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SECTION I – CARTS, ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION, AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

A. Summary

Good health and physical activity go hand in hand. Most of us know that being active helps maintain a healthy weight. Moreover, physical activity is good for your heart, joints, lungs, and bones. Being active helps prevent chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease, and even some cancers. Too many of us are inactive, and our soaring weights, health care costs, and disease trends reflect our sedentary lifestyles.

Through the course of a day, there are many opportunities to get physical activity. We can choose to walk while completing errands, commuting to school or work, or visiting friends. People who incorporate such active transportation into daily tasks and routines accumulate healthful physical activity without having to schedule separate time for formal exercise.

One deterrent to choose walking for daily tasks may be the need to carry along numerous or heavy objects, like groceries, work bags, or books. Carts allow users to transport such items while making a healthy walking trip. The widespread theft and abandonment of shopping carts attests to the need for and usefulness of carts. Personal carts, owned by individuals or shared among groups, could enable and encourage more residents to walk to shop and easily add healthful physical activity to their regular routines.

B. Promoting Health through Active Transportation

Physical activity and health

Nationally, sedentary lifestyles and poor nutrition are now second only to tobacco use in causing illness, disability, and premature death (Mokdad 2004). In Washington, the lack of regular physical activity in adults causes an estimated:

- 27% of diabetes
- 20% of falls with fractures due to osteoporosis
- 15% of cases of colon cancer
- 12% of all cases of high blood pressure
- 12% of heart disease

(Washington State Department of Health, 2000)

Despite years of encouragement to exercise, 25% of us are completely sedentary, getting no physical activity at all (CDC, 2003). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) recommend being active for at least 30 minutes a day, 5 days each week. Activity doesn’t need to be strenuous, or take

place in one 30-minute block. Beneficial physical activity can be spread throughout the day in 10-minute increments (TRB, 2005). Individuals who go from being completely sedentary to getting smaller amounts of physical activity during the day can also experience significant health benefits.

✿ *Active transportation and personal carts*

The national epidemic of physical inactivity is not due solely to inadequate personal motivation. Individuals face a variety of obstacles to being physically active: family and work demands, inadequate sidewalks and bike lanes, cars driving at unsafe speeds, or few destinations close to home.

Because it is difficult to fit time for structured exercise into busy schedules, the idea of integrating physical activity into daily tasks holds special appeal. “Active transportation” is one way to achieve physical activity while completing errands unrelated to the goal of getting exercise. This includes walking or cycling to reach school, work, shops, or even to visit friends. For example, even walking 5 minutes to a bus stop and back translates into 10 minutes of healthful activity.

Too often, we choose driving over active transportation options. In the central Puget Sound region, 500,000 car trips made each day are less than half a mile. This distance would be an easy 10-minute-or-less walk (PSRC 1999). One reason for making the choice to drive may be the difficulty of carrying groceries, work bags, and books during everyday errands. Personal carts offer a tool for moving heavy or cumbersome items from place to place without a car. Carts give us the ability to choose walking over driving to accomplish daily errands, increasing the chance that we’ll incorporate physical activity into a normal routine.

C. Shopping Cart Theft: Evidence of Cart Demand

● *Cart theft and legal concerns*

Each year in Seattle, approximately 1,000 shopping carts are taken from stores and abandoned (Seattle PI). The frequency and high number of shopping carts found far from stores demonstrates that carts are used and needed. Importantly, removing a store’s cart from the premises is a misdemeanor. This law applies if the cart is affixed with a permanent sign that names the owner, address, and contact information, and informs the reader that removing the cart is illegal (RCW 9A.56.270). Current shopping cart takers may need to be informed that their purported borrowing in reality constitutes theft.

Criminal activity is not the only legal concern of cart theft. Dumping unattended carts on roadsides, at bus stops, and in residential parking lots creates traffic hazards and neighborhood eyesores. SDOT ordinances govern debris in rights-of-way, though these laws do not specifically address shopping carts. The City of Seattle advises residents who spot an abandoned cart to call the vendor for retrieval. Vendors may face penalties in the future, should Seattle follow the example of neighboring Auburn and Renton. Both cities fine store owners for abandoned carts. Auburn impounds shopping carts and charges stores to pick

them up. If not retrieved after 14 days, carts are destroyed, and stores are charged a double fee. In Renton, fines are assessed after owners receive 24 hours notice to pick up impounded carts. Vendors are required to file Shopping Cart Containment and Retrieval Plans with the City of Renton. (WFI)

Economic costs

Even without a City fine, Seattle store owners shoulder hefty financial losses related to stolen carts. Lost carts cost anywhere from \$250 to \$700 each to replace. Even when retrieved, stolen shopping carts may have been damaged and need repair. Searching for and recovering abandoned carts wastes store staff time that could be spent on other duties. If businesses do not remove carts from neighborhood streets, City law enforcement and hazard removal staff must devote government time and tax dollars to the search and recovery process. All of these fees may fall back on residents in the form of higher shopping costs and taxes.

D. Social Factors of Cart Use

Demographics and transportation

As we age, we become less able to drive. Our communities are too often built to accommodate cars over pedestrians, contributing to the isolation of many older adults who may end up stuck at home. Notably, Washington's population is aging more rapidly than most other states. The number of Washington residents aged 65 and older expected to double by 2020 (Washington Office of Financial Management 1999).

Older African Americans (42%), older Latinos (39%) and older Asian-Americans (45%) are much more likely to not drive than older Caucasians (16%) (Bailey 2004). Urban minority communities are disproportionately affected by an over-reliance on cars for transportation. Seniors who become confined indoors face social isolation and depression, and have even fewer opportunities to be physically active.

The transportation system must serve those who cannot afford a car, are not able to drive, or who choose to walk to accomplish daily errands. Such service necessarily includes the transportation of goods purchased in stores. Personal carts that function on safe and attractive walking routes featuring well-maintained and fully-connected sidewalks would help close this key gap in the current transportation network. Legal, government-sanctioned cart programs must work in conjunction with the established transit system to make it easy for all residents to run errands by walking and using transit, and to fully reduce the problem of shopping cart theft.

Current perception of carts

Personal carts most readily offer a benefit and solution for those who already use store shopping carts, take transit, or walk to shop. Among the general population, there exist certain negative perceptions about carts and about

shopping cart users. Residents may think of carts as unstylish, awkward, or difficult to store. Some associate using a cart with being elderly or physically impaired, or even equate shopping cart use with homelessness. This is partly the result of an over-reliance on cars and an assumption that those who walk or take transit do so because they cannot afford a car, or are too old, too young, or physically unable to drive.

Along with helping current shopping cart users adopt personal carts for increased mobility, personal carts could help expand active transportation to others. If personal carts were perceived positively, cart use could increase walking among residents who now drive to shop. As more residents see their neighbors, friends, and colleagues using personal carts, it is more likely that cart use and active transportation will spread, bolstered by community example rather than lectures from outside agencies.

🌿 *Treating the broken window syndrome*

The idea of the “broken window syndrome” asserts that signs of disorder in a neighborhood lead to feelings of neglect and helplessness in its residents. Signs of disorder may include items like broken windows, dumped garbage, and buildings in need of maintenance. When residents feel that no one cares about the neighborhood, eventually safety, security, and civic cohesion may decline as appearances, community pride, and maintenance deteriorate.

Seeing shopping carts abandoned on sidewalks, in parking lots, and along streets contributes to the broken window syndrome. If current users of store shopping carts were to switch to personal carts, the number of abandoned vendor shopping carts could be reduced. This addresses an issue that is not only aesthetic, but also impacts community health, and influences how safe and secure we feel in our neighborhoods.



Photo:
Seattle Post-Intelligencer

E. Cart Designs – Different Appeal for Different Users

● *Shopping carts*

The typical cart seen at grocery stores today is long, wide, and on four small wheels. These carts accommodate a large load of goods within a single deep container. The small wheels, bulky design, and single holding space make these carts unsuited to long-distance transportation, movement over uneven surfaces, travel by bus, or easy storage. It is no wonder that shopping carts are so frequently found abandoned at bus stops, and damaged when removed from store property.

Store carts are also sometimes used as a community resource unrelated to transporting shopping. Residents may use shopping carts to move other items from place to place within a neighborhood. Residents of a single housing



Photos: target.com

complex may corral and use store carts to move laundry and other belongings within the building. Too, some cart users prefer store carts because the sturdy horizontal design gives them something to lean on, making walking easier. Such uses point to a larger demand for carts beyond shopping trips.

✿ *Personal carts – metal grid*

In contrast to the cumbersome shopping carts used at stores, personal shopping carts come in a variety of styles and sizes, with a number of different optional features. The style that many people think of when they hear the words “personal cart” is a vertical cart made of chrome in an open wire grid. These collapsible carts are currently available for purchase at many standard housewares stores in the Seattle area. Instead of raw chrome, the cart cage may be coated with rubber in white or black, or even basic colors like red and blue.

Photos: www.target.com

● *Personal carts – accessories and construction*

Personal cart wheels may be rubber or plastic, and the cart may have four wheels or only two back wheels. The weight and sturdiness of the carts vary due to construction and materials. Accessories like cart liners are available to protect contents from rain and dirt, and prevent small items from falling through the holes.



Photo: organize-everything.com

✿ *Personal carts – other designs*

Many more personal cart designs are available and are widely used in European countries. Personal carts may be purchased that fold into shoulderbags, or have tri-wheels that allow the cart to climb stairs. Carts may be made of fabric that can be imprinted with a broad range of colors and designs.



Photo: trekroller.com



Photo: shoppersworld.co.uk



Photos: perigot.fr



Photo: ibolit.com

Rollator

Seniors or people who have difficulty walking may be concerned about the stability of a personal cart. For those who want something sturdy for support, there are options beyond using a walker or a store shopping cart for mobility assistance. For example, the Rollator pictured below is lightweight and fully collapsible for easy storage, is made of metal and equipped with brakes for stability, and provides a padded seat for rest. Its wheels pivot in all directions so users can turn without having to pick it up. A Rollator also provides some storage space, offering the carrying benefits of a cart and allowing its user to stay physically active.

F. Personal Cart Use – Potential to Change Transportation Patterns

With the right cart availability, marketing, and community and business participants, we can begin replacing driving to shop and shopping cart theft with widespread walking and personal cart use. Personal carts will allow more people of all incomes to choose walking over driving for more trips. Even for those trips that range beyond comfortable walking distance, collapsible carts that fit on busses will make it easy for walkers to use transit for covering greater distances. When carts make it possible for residents to walk and use transit to complete all kinds of errands, fewer cars on the road will mean less congestion, fewer parking issues, and safer streets.

SECTION II – THE CART PROJECT

A. Summary

Feet First’s Cart Project is funded by a Special Opportunity Grant from Active Living by Design, a program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The target community is the Westwood area of the Delridge neighborhood, City of Seattle, King County, Washington. The project began with a focus group of Delridge and Westwood leaders who met to develop a social marketing plan under the leadership of consultant Nancy Lee. Feet First interviewed residents in the target community to gather information on current shopping habits, discuss perceptions of cart use, and assess interest in the Cart Project. These interviews became the basis for the Cart Project plan to select a cart design, distribute personal carts and promote their use, and create a pilot cart-sharing program.

The primary goal of the project is to increase physical activity among residents by adding at least one walking trip to the store each week using the personal cart. Desirable secondary outcomes include improving neighborhood aesthetics and safety by reducing the problem of stolen and abandoned shopping carts. We hope that the outcomes of this pilot project will be sustained and expanded, as it becomes a visible practice and social norm to walk to the store, using a personal cart for assistance in carrying purchases.

B. Social Factors of Cart Use in the Westwood Neighborhood

Geography of cart loss

Much of Seattle’s shopping cart theft and abandonment occurs in Delridge (SPI). This prompted Seattle Public Utilities to explore a Shopping Cart Reclamation Action Program (“SCRAP”) in the area, in which Department of Corrections crews collected abandoned carts to return to the vendors. The SCRAP program is currently in limbo, but the problem of cart theft remains. Some store managers now pay private citizens to do this cart search-and-retrieval. The King County Sherriff’s Office keeps records of the locations where searchers find abandoned carts and the carts’ store of origin.

Three target residential communities were selected for the Cart Project in the Westwood area in Delridge:

- 1) Westwood Heights, a Seattle Housing Authority (“SHA”) apartment building for seniors and people with disabilities;
- 2) Westwood Heights East, an SHA low-income residential complex; and
- 3) Single-family residences to the west of Westwood Village, a shopping center complex in Delridge.

These target areas were chosen to reach a diverse sample of Westwood residents, including households with a range of incomes, ages, and structures. Interviews were conducted in person and over the phone to assess current cart use and perceptions within and across each of these groups. These

conversations confirmed that the target communities house a variety of residents with diverse shopping and travel habits, including people who always drive to shop and those who walk, some who regularly take store shopping carts and others who never do, and individuals who have used personal carts, those who haven't, and those who are interested in trying walking to shop with a personal cart.

Special cart design considerations in Westwood

Creating positive perceptions begins with exploring different types of carts to select a cart design appropriate for this project. Based on the interviews with target community members, it was determined that the carts chosen for this project should be:

- 1) Sizable enough to carry many items and large purchases;
- 2) Sturdy enough to lean on for support when walking;
- 3) Durable and large-wheeled, to support heavy loads and longer walking trips;
- 4) High enough at the base (or accompanied by an object to place in the bottom of the cart) so that you don't have to lean far over to lift items in and out;
- 5) Not too bulky, and collapsible into a flat and compact shape for easy storage;
- 6) Easy to push and pull up and down hills;
- 7) Safety-tested for children;
- 8) White, metallic, or with other reflective material, so the cart is more visible when crossing the street;
- 9) Available with rainproof/weatherproof covers or canvas bags; and
- 10) Available in different sizes and styles to attract new and current cart users' choice and personal preference.

Many residents in Westwood Heights currently use vendor shopping carts and express interest in personal carts. With the right cart design and availability, these residents may most readily adopt the Cart Project, substituting personal carts for vendor shopping carts and making additional weekly walk-to-shop trips for light shopping.

Before expansion to residents who currently drive to shop or never use a cart can occur, any current negative perceptions of carts – or cart users – must be addressed. Some interviewees link carts with transients, or think of cart users as elderly, poor, or “decrepit,” images with which they themselves do not want to be associated. The Cart Project must select carts that are aesthetically appealing, or that users can personalize to their tastes.

Importantly, increasing the number of program participants and cart users will spread awareness and acceptance of personal carts simply by making such carts more visible in the neighborhood. It is important to begin by reversing negative cart perceptions, and then spreading the idea of walking to shop as common, accepted, and even expected from Delridge residents of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds.

● ***Recommendations for Cart Project administration and promotion***

Carts will be distributed to a select group of residents culled first from those who expressed interest during the interviews. Personal carts will be sold for a discounted price of \$10-15, and will come with a coupon for groceries which residents may either use or donate to a local food bank. These personal carts will belong to the individuals. Additionally, 10 shared carts will be available in the Westwood Heights lobby. To check-out these shared “go-carts,” residents must leave a membership card. For both the shared and personal carts, Cart Project participants will be asked to sign a Pledge that they will use a cart to walk to shop at least once more each week than they walk now, and must agree to complete a follow-up survey about the program.

The Cart Project will also create messaging and incentives to make using carts and walking to shop attractive. Educational materials need to highlight specific health benefits of walking (eg. “walking is good for your bones and joints” vs “walking is good for your health”) or emphasize that walking with a personal cart makes it easy to do unexpected light shopping (“Ran out of milk? Grab a gallon with your cart”) and take advantage of sales (eg. carts allow you to buy items you hadn’t expected to purchase, but discovered on sale once you got to the store). Potential incentive programs include a coupon book or a stamp card that rewards walking to shop.

C. Predicted Cart Project outcomes

Personal carts will enable a variety of neighborhood shopping, business, and leisure trips to be made on foot. Positive community outcomes will range from improving physical fitness and social ties to addressing shopping cart loss. Long-term results may even include alleviated traffic congestion due to a decreased reliance on private vehicles.

● ***Increased physical activity in our target demographic***

Immediately, Cart Project participants will add at least one physically active walk to shop trip each week. As this becomes habit, personal cart owners could also use carts to walk and transport books to the library, toys to the park, casseroles to friends’ homes...in short, personal carts would help people walk more often and carry needed items. This would ease current walking trips, and also enable extra walking trips that might otherwise be made by car or not at all. It would allow parents to more easily walk with their children without also having to carry items in their arms. Personal carts may also help residents save time on walking trips by combining errands when they are able to carry many more things at one time by using a cart.

● ***Community building***

Residents, community groups, and stakeholders have already organized to administer the Cart Project. Neighbors will meet and interact with each other in new ways and work together to develop marketing strategies and events, manage cart retrieval and storage programs, and promote Walk to Shop days.

Many enduring connections and partnerships will be built, creating lasting neighborhood strength and establishing a network of individuals and groups ready to take action on future issues. The Cart Project will help treat broken window syndrome in Delridge by curbing shopping cart theft and dumping, building community connections, and getting more residents walking, interacting with each other, and exploring their neighborhood.

Creating activists

As carts enable more and longer walks, cart users new and old will get a sense of walking conditions in Delridge. They will come to understand what it's like to walk in different areas and experience walking in different built environment conditions. Many may be motivated to become pedestrian advocacy leaders in Delridge and in the Seattle region, teaching neighbors about walkability and promoting safe and attractive designs in development projects and policy decisions.

D. Opportunities to Get Involved

A variety of opportunities is available to groups and individuals to get involved in the Cart Project. As a business or community liaison, you could assist the task force that decides the next steps for the program, or simply promote the Cart Project by spreading the word and the habit as you participate in the 10 ideas outlined below.

Interested in spreading active transportation and personal cart use in your community?

- 1) Get your own personal cart, to carry your groceries around with ease and in style, and show your friends and neighbors the benefits of walking to shop.
- 2) Take your personal cart to community events.
- 3) Get to know your neighbors! Organize group Shop on Foot trips with friends, and make new friends with your neighbors.
- 4) Advertise personal carts on your store's shopping carts – along with a message spreading the knowledge that borrowing store carts is stealing.
- 5) Create walk-to-shop rewards for those who walk and bring their own carts to your store.
- 6) Offer personal folding carts for sale at your business.
- 7) Create a cart storage space or cart-sharing program in your neighborhood or residential complex.
- 8) Organize a cart retrieval program in your neighborhood to keep abandoned carts from becoming hazards, to maintain community pride and cohesion.
- 9) In conjunction with your cart retrieval program, build a cart corral at a bus stop, in your housing complex, or in a nearby parking lot.
- 10) Spread the word: tell your neighbors, employees, and customers about the benefits of personal carts. Shop without stress, stop wasting gas on walkable trips, and explore your neighborhood on foot and get exercise while you run errands.

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