

Chapter 25: Walking

Walking plays a critical role in our health, safety, and overall quality of life. No doubt you have heard of research showing an increasing trend in obesity, which has been attributed in part to our dependence upon cars. The lack of sidewalks, crosswalks, and other pedestrian safety measures has made walking to school unpleasant and dangerous for many of our children. Yet, walking for pleasure and recreation is **THE** most popular form of recreation in the country. Well designed development projects can do much to increase the safety of existing walking opportunities and to create new ones. But projects designed with little thought to this vital issue can make a bad situation worse and force more of us into cars.

WALKING & HEALTH

According to the National Institutes on Health¹⁹⁷

Obesity in kids is now epidemic in the United States. The number of children who are overweight has doubled in the last two to three decades; currently one child in five is overweight.

This trend is attributed in part to fewer opportunities to walk. Many kids now live in communities designed for travel by car; not by foot or even bicycle. Sidewalks are nonexistent and street crossings are poorly designed for adults, much less children. In fact, parents identified the danger posed by traffic as the second leading reason for why they do not permit their children to walk to school.¹⁹⁸

The lack of adequate facilities has made walking the most dangerous mode of travel as shown by the following excerpt from a 2004 report¹⁹⁹ by the Surface Transportation Policy Project:

Although only 8.6 percent of all trips are made on foot, 11.4 percent of all traffic deaths are pedestrians. And while the 2001 fatality rate per 100 million miles traveled is 0.75 for public transit riders, 1.3 for drivers and their passengers, 7.3 for passengers of commercial airlines, the fatality rate for walkers is an astonishing 20.1 deaths per 100 million miles walked.

¹⁹⁷ *Childhood Obesity on the Rise*: <http://www.nih.gov/news/WordonHealth/jun2002/childhoodobesity.htm>

¹⁹⁸ See *The Decline in Walking & Bicycling* from the Safe Routes To School Project at: http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/introduction/the_decline_of_walking_and_bicycling.cfm

¹⁹⁹ See *Mean Streets: 2004* at: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>

WALKING FOR RECREATION

Since 1994, the Recreation Roundtable²⁰⁰ has conducted an annual survey of outdoor recreational pursuits in America. The latest published survey (2003) showed that 46% of us participated in walking for fitness or recreation²⁰¹. In 1995, *Walking for fitness/recreation* was first added to the survey. From 1995 on, more Americans have walked for fitness and recreation when compared to all other outdoor activities.

NEW DEVELOPMENT & WALKABILITY

Following is a summary of provisions that should be incorporated into a new development project to preserve - even enhance - existing opportunities to walk safely about a community.

Sidewalks

Research shows that sidewalks are the single most important physical feature for increasing the number of children who walk to school and the presence of a sidewalk reduces the likelihood of vehicle-caused injury by 88%.²⁰² Sidewalks should be five- or six-feet in width to allow two people to walk side-by-side. There should also be a buffer (separation) between the edge of the sidewalk and vehicle travel lanes. A narrow sidewalk abutting a road with lots of high-speed traffic can be intimidating to many.

Generally, every new development project should include sidewalks along at least one side of the roads within and on the perimeter of the site. The exception would be projects in rural areas where a new sidewalk would not connect with an existing one (either now or in the far future) or where traffic volume is so extremely low that a sidewalk would do little to add to safety or the number of walkers.

For further guidance on sidewalks visit the *Safe Routes To School* website:

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/index.cfm>

and the Federal Highway Administration webpage on sidewalk design:

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sidewalk2/sidewalks204.htm#sid>

²⁰⁰ Recreation Roundtable: <http://www.funoutdoors.com/taxonomy/view/or/62>

²⁰¹ The 2003 survey - *Outdoor Recreation In America 2003: Recreation's Benefits to Society Challenged by Trends* - can be viewed online at: http://www.funoutdoors.com/files/ROPER%20REPORT%202004_0.pdf

²⁰² See the Safe Routes To School webpage on sidewalks at: http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/introduction/the_decline_of_walking_and_bicycling.cfm

Lighting

The presence of lights along a street can make a big difference in the perception of safety and the enjoyment of walking after dark. Lighting should be designed so the illumination is uniform with no dark spots. Of course, lighting should be designed to prevent the impacts described in the chapter of this book on light trespass.

Traffic Calming

Streets with a high-volume of traffic can be very difficult to cross, particularly when vehicles are going fast. *Traffic calming* measures, such as speed humps, can slow traffic down but are not appropriate for every street. The Institute for Transportation Engineers has an excellent website on Traffic Calming: <http://www.ite.org/traffic/tcdevices.htm>

An analysis of opportunities to improve pedestrian safety and walking opportunities with traffic calming measures should be made of every proposed development project. For example, would the placement of speed humps or a pedestrian refuge island make it easier for people to cross a busy intersection? If a project will increase through-traffic on a residential street then consideration should be given to measures for reducing and slowing traffic.

Neighborhood Commercial

With trends towards ever larger stores and shopping centers, opportunities to walk to shop are dwindling these days. Larger projects, such as Planned Unit Developments, should include retail stores designed to serve neighborhoods along with the means for those living within and nearby the project to walk and bicycle to these businesses. Land use plans, zoning regulations, and growth-related policies should encourage neighborhood-scale commercial projects over larger and distant projects that are only accessible by car.

Neighborhood Scale Schools

Keeping schools small and oriented towards a community increases the likelihood that students can walk to school. In fact this is one of the *Smart Growth* principles advocated by the Smart Growth Network.²⁰³

Walking To Work

The number of people who walk to work declined by 25% from 1990 to 2000.²⁰⁴ Projects should be encouraged which locate a mix of housing types near new places of employment. Of course, provisions for walking from residences to jobs or mass transit facilities must be included.

²⁰³ See *Getting to Smart Growth: 100 Policies for Implementation* available from the Smart Growth Network at: <http://www.smartgrowth.org/pdf/gettosg.pdf>

²⁰⁴ See *Mean Streets: 2004* at: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>

Bicycling

See the chapter of this book on *Bicycling* for measures to compliment this form of recreation and travel.

Following are links to additional sources of information on improving walking opportunities:

[American Automobile Association Foundation for Traffic Safety](#)

[National Highway Transportation Safety Administration](#)

[Pedestrian Safety Guide and Countermeasure Selection System](#)