

WALKING/BIKING GUIDE

Advocating for Environmental Change



Produced by The University of Texas at Austin
Department of Kinesiology and Health Education
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WALK TEXAS!

Walking/Biking Guide

WALK TEXAS! is a community-based program with the mission to promote the health of Texans by increasing awareness and opportunities for individuals to engage in regular physical activity, especially walking. Walking is one of the safest and most natural forms of exercise and can help control a variety of chronic diseases, particularly diabetes, obesity, and coronary heart disease. Walk Texas! takes a multifaceted approach to facilitating walking and physical activity among Texans through the support of the following:

- ★ Community coalitions
- ★ Environment and policy change
- ★ Health provider assessment and counseling
- ★ Walking groups
- ★ Media and special events

Because most organizations follow a *Plan, Do, Check, Act* cycle to systematize program development, the Walk Texas! guides are organized around this cycle and are meant to complement each other.

This guide is designed to assist individuals in the assessment of their neighborhood and community for walkability and bikeability. Safe environments promote increased physical activity. The guide includes a checklist to assess the neighborhood for walkability, steps to making the community more walkable, and tips on becoming a force for change.

Other guides in this series include:

- ★ Media Guide: Navigating Media Relations
- ★ Planning Guide for Community Events
- ★ Quick Start Guide to a Physically Active Organization
- ★ Evaluation Guide



WHAT IS A WALKABLE COMMUNITY?

The *Walk America* website holds a contest of “America’s Most Walkable Communities.” These communities serve as examples by encouraging residents and visitors to become more physically active. The features of such communities include:

- ★ A comprehensive network of well maintained sidewalks
- ★ Trails weaving together what otherwise would not be connected to travel by foot
- ★ People out walking and biking
- ★ Open space, water and wildlife
- ★ Mature trees that provide shade and separation from the street
- ★ Destinations



FIVE CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF A WALKABLE COMMUNITY

- ★ Compact, varied development
- ★ Few impenetrable barriers
- ★ Many places to walk
- ★ Pleasing surroundings
- ★ Safe walking environments



YOU CAN START TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE BY SPONSORING A PEDESTRIAN AUDIT

You can use a pedestrian audit to grade your neighborhood for walkability.

The purpose of the pedestrian audit is to:

- ★ Generate concern about the pedestrian safety and walkability issues
- ★ Channel that concern into a commitment to “do something about it”
- ★ Structure that commitment into a realistic plan of action

The first step in the process of the pedestrian audit is to identify the key players in the area who would be interested in the program. They should represent a cross-section of the community, including government agencies, local businesses, non-profit organizations, and community members.

Participants could include:

- ★ City traffic engineers and planners
- ★ State department of transportation planners or engineers
- ★ Local safety coalitions and biking associations
- ★ Law enforcement
- ★ Business leaders/organizations
- ★ Local activist groups: environmental groups, alternative transportation groups, disabled community activists, etc.
- ★ Decision makers: mayor or city council members
- ★ Health care providers and local health department staff
- ★ Fire/EMS organizations
- ★ Local media outlets
- ★ Educators/school officials or PTA representative
- ★ Senior citizen organizations or agencies



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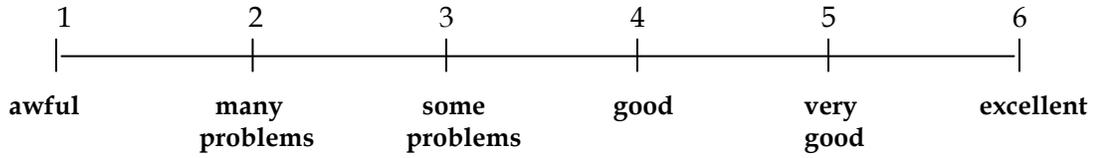




Walkability Checklist

Pick a place to walk, like the route to school, a friend's house or just somewhere fun to go. Read over the checklist before you go and, as you walk, note the locations of things you would like to change. At the end of your walk, circle an overall rating for each question. Then add up the numbers to see how you rated your walk.

Rating scale:



Location of walk _____

2 Did you have enough room to walk?

- Yes Some problems:
- Sidewalks or paths started and stopped
 - Sidewalks were broken or cracked
 - Sidewalks were blocked with poles, signs, shrubbery, dumpsters, etc.
 - No sidewalks, paths, or shoulders
 - Too much traffic
 - Something else _____
- Locations of Problems: _____

2 Did drivers behave well

- Yes Some problems: Drivers....
- Backed out of driveways without looking
 - Did not yield to people crossing the street
 - Turned into people crossing the street
 - Drove too fast
 - Sped up to make it through traffic lights or drove through red lights
 - Drivers honked while passing you
 - Something else _____
- Locations of Problems: _____

2 Was it easy to cross streets?

- Yes Some problems:
- Road was too wide
 - Traffic signals made us wait too long or did not give us enough time to cross
 - Needed striped crosswalks or traffic signals
 - Parked cars blocked our view of traffic
 - Trees or plants blocked our view of traffic
 - Needed curb ramps or ramps needed repair
 - Something else _____
- Locations of Problems: _____

2 Was it easy to follow safety rules?

Could you and your child . . .

- | | | |
|-----|----|---|
| Yes | No | Cross at sidewalks or where you could see and be seen by drivers? |
| Yes | No | Stop and look left, right, and then left again before crossing streets? |
| Yes | No | Walk on sidewalks, or shoulders facing traffic where there were no sidewalks? |
| Yes | No | Cross with the light? |
- Locations of Problems: _____

RATING: 1 2 3 4 5 6
(circle one)

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② Was your walk pleasant?

Yes Some unpleasant things:

Needs more grass, flowers, or trees

Scary dogs

Scary people

Not well lighted

Dirty, lots of litter or trash

Something else _____

Locations of Problems: _____

RATING: 1 2 3 4 5 6
(circle one)

HOW DOES YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD STACK UP? ADD UP YOUR RATINGS AND DECIDE.

1. _____ **26-30** Celebrate! You have a great neighborhood for walking.
2. _____ **21-25** Celebrate a little. Your neighborhood is pretty good.
3. _____ **16-20** Okay, but it needs work.
4. _____ **11-15** It needs lots of work. You deserve better than that.
5. _____ **5-10** Call out the National Guard before you walk. It's a disaster area.

TOTAL _____

*Reference: Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center Walkability Checklist.
Retrieved February 1, 2006, from <http://www.walkinginfo.org/cps/checklist.htm>*



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Making



Your Community

Walkable

STEP 1 BUILD AND WIDEN SIDEWALKS

- ★ Eight feet is the minimum recommended sidewalk width in town centers
- ★ Sidewalk space taken up by mailboxes, streetlights and trees is not good for walking

STEP 2 DEVELOP A NETWORK OF FOOTPATHS

- ★ Pedestrians want to take the most direct routes to their destinations
- ★ Create sidewalk networks, which provide walkers with many alternative routes

STEP 3 SLOW VEHICLE TRAFFIC

- ★ Walkers feel most comfortable walking on streets where traffic speeds are 20 mph or slower
- ★ The majority of pedestrian fatalities occur on streets where vehicles are traveling at speeds of 35 mph or faster

STEP 4 NARROW STREETS

- ★ The most effective way of slowing traffic for pedestrian safety is to construct narrow streets with narrow – sometimes fewer – lanes
- ★ The perceived width of streets can also be narrowed by incorporating strong vertical elements along the sides of streets (e.g., mature trees, street lights, and even parked cars tend to slow down drivers)

STEP 5 MAKE INTERSECTIONS SAFE FOR WALKERS

- ★ Small corner turning radii slow the speed of turning vehicles



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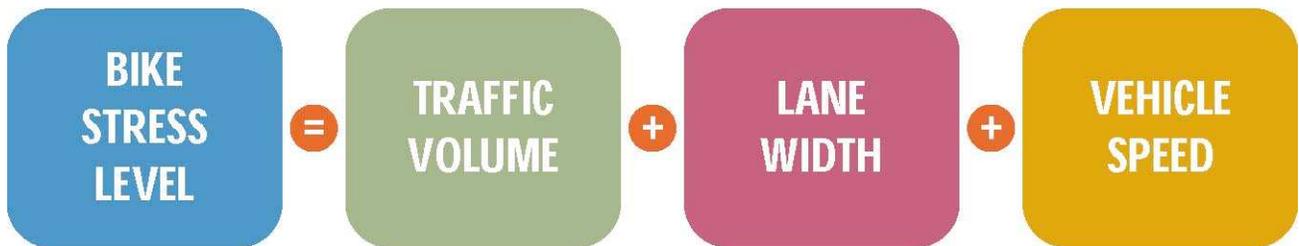


Bikeability

WHAT ABOUT COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD BIKEABILITY?

Communities can be graded on their bikeability. However, bikeability is more difficult to define because biking involves more individual skill including balance, coordination, reaction time, concentration, strength, and stamina. A beginning cyclist might consider a particular route dangerous while a more experienced cyclist may deem the same route quite comfortable.

Consider this:



Two things consistently improve conditions for bicyclists of all skill levels:

- ★ Separation from motorized traffic (usually through bike lanes or paved shoulders)
- ★ Road design and law enforcement efforts that slow or “calm” traffic

One way to encourage individuals to utilize the biking areas in your community is to provide detailed maps of the routes around the community. The maps should include safety information and ratings that cover traffic volume, lane width, and vehicle speeds. It would also be beneficial to include the roadway conditions, distances, and some indication of the presence of hills and their grade and length.

To rate your community for bikeability, download the “Bikeability Checklist” at <http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/>

To estimate cost of developing a new bikeable area and what benefits will be derived go to <http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/bikecost/>



OTHER SAFETY TIPS FOR BICYCLISTS

- ★ Watch out for dangerous drain grates
 - ★ The worst grates are parallel-bar grates, which can trap a bicyclist's wheel and cause a serious crash
- ★ Be aware of road debris and road patches
 - ★ Many bicycles have narrow tires and no shock absorbers so good surface conditions are essential
- ★ Be aware of railroad crossings
 - ★ Tracks that cross the roadway at less than 45¼ degrees can divert a bicyclist's front wheel and cause a crash
- ★ Pay extra attention when using a shared trail with pedestrians
 - ★ Mixing bikes and pedestrians on a trail can lead to serious conflicts if either bike volumes or pedestrian volumes are high
 - ★ Use caution and slow your bike speed when this happens
- ★ Learn and understand the laws of the road
- ★ Always wear a helmet

IMPROVING THE SAFETY OF YOUR LOCAL STREETS

- ★ Improve sight distance at crossings
 - ★ Visibility at intersections is crucial to bike safety because bikes are so much smaller and often harder to see than the typical car
- ★ Add effective intersection control
 - ★ Effective intersection controls include both stop and yield signs, depending on local preferences
- ★ Use traffic calming measures
 - ★ Traffic speeds and volume can be reduced using mini-traffic circles, diverters, and speed humps
- ★ Raise awareness of the cyclist's right to the road
- ★ Road signs alerting drivers to the presence of cyclists can be placed at intersections and on bike routes



Advocacy

HOW AN INDIVIDUAL CAN BECOME A FORCE FOR CHANGE

- ★ Change can be as easy as finding a single intersection in your neighborhood or community that seems particularly dangerous
 - ★ Determine how to make the intersection safer and implement change
- ★ Volunteer to be on community advisory committees or attend public meetings
 - ★ Talk with people who have a stake in making the community more walking and biking friendly
- ★ Find websites and organizations that promote walking and biking in your community and get involved in their projects
- ★ Sponsor a pedestrian or bikeability audit
- ★ Contact your school district to lobby for safer walking/biking routes to schools and promote the Walk Our Kids to School program



DECIDING WHERE TO GO AS A GROUP

★ Decide your focus

- ★ The decisions about what to start working on are judgment calls

You can use the following criteria to steer your decision:

- There is room to make meaningful improvement
- People in the community are interested
- We have or can likely get the resources needed to make the change (expert advice, etc.)
- We have some idea of action that we can take

★ Gather ideas

- ★ The group can generate ideas about how to begin to create change by brainstorming, talking to other community members, and using additional resources
- ★ Don't worry about whether the ideas are good or bad; as the change process continues, the bad ideas will be weeded out and the good ones will come to the forefront

★ Set Priorities

- ★ Decide which of your ideas needs to be addressed first
- ★ Do not try to do too many things at once
- ★ Start with a quick win and don't take on the most difficult problem first

★ Develop action plans

- ★ A good action plan includes the steps that need to be taken, who is responsible, the deadline for getting it done, and what resources it will take
- ★ Define the timeframe for the action plan

★ Take Action

- ★ Organize to get it done
- ★ Implement the first steps of the action plan
- ★ Keep going until the change is made

★ Learn from your experiences – successes as well as failures

★ Celebrate your success and communicate it to others





Helpful Resources

This short list of organizations, web sites, and free or low-cost publications is designed to get you started. Most of the resources include lists of additional resources and ways to link with other people and organizations that are working toward walkable, bikeable communities.

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (www.pedbikeinfo.org/) has information on safety, advocacy, education, and access. The PBIC serves those interested in pedestrian and bicycle issues, including planners, advocates, private citizens, educators, and the health community.

The National Center for Bicycling and Walking website (www.bikewalk.org/) provides Pedestrian and Bike Guides full of information and actions you can use to improve conditions for walking and biking.

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (www.walkinginfo.org/) provides a walkability checklist, in which individuals can assess how walkable their neighborhood is.

Kids Walk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is a comprehensive guide which addresses organizing a neighborhood, starting a program and working with the media and elected officials. It includes safety tips, a walkability survey, and a long list of other valuable resources. Download the guide at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk.htm, order it via email at ccdinfo@cdc.gov, or order a single copy by calling 1-888-CDC-4NRG.

Street Design Guidelines for Healthy Neighborhoods from the Center for Livable Communities (www.lgc.org/center/index.html) is an easy-to-read overview of elements that make communities pedestrian and bicycle friendly. The CLC can also be reached at 1-800-290-8202.

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) (www.railtrails.org/) is designed for trail users, builders, advocates, and enthusiasts of all ages. The RTC was established “to enrich America’s communities and countryside by creating a nationwide network of public trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors.” The site describes the organization and activities and is linked to TrailLink.com, an RTC website that provides detailed, up-to-date information on trail access, services and activities throughout the world.

The Trans Texas Alliance (www.transtexas.org/) was created in 1992 to educate metropolitan, suburban, and rural communities in Texas about transportation issues. Its mission is to help Texans envision and create a transportation system that enhances their communities and quality of life. It supports livable communities, great streets and public spaces, smart growth, and a balanced transportation system. Find out about scheduling Pedestrian Safety Roadshows, Pedestrian Safety Workshops, and Walkability Tours all across Texas.

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