



Sidewalks and Streets Survey

A step-by-step
tool kit for
conducting a
community
walk audit

Overview

The problem

Too many communities in the United States are designed for automobile travel, with very little consideration given to the needs of walkers. A scarcity of sidewalks, the placement of sidewalks too close to roads and a lack of maintenance are all factors that discourage people from walking.

The solution

You can help make walking safer by conducting a walk audit (also known as a “walkability survey”) as well as by teaching or encouraging others to do the same.

Time commitment

It takes about an hour to complete a walkability survey and a bit more time to follow up and pursue the needed improvements. The latter will depend on the extent of the necessary improvements and the community’s cooperation in getting the work done.

Special considerations

None

Who can do this?

Anyone

After driving, walking is the most popular means of travel in the United States. It’s easy, cheap and gentle on the body and the environment.

Great reasons to do a walk audit

- It increases exercise opportunities for your communities
- It boosts social interaction among neighbors by creating a pedestrian-friendly environment
- It helps reduce traffic congestion and pollution by enabling people to leave their car at home
- It can lead to increase property values since walkable communities have higher home values!

The Basics

STEP 1: Recruit People to Conduct a Survey

You can do a walk audit on your own but it's more fun to do with other people. It's helpful to include a person who has a walking or physical challenge (e.g., someone who uses a walker, wheelchair or cane, or even a parent pushing a baby stroller). That will help you get a true sense of an area's walkability.

STEP 2: Identify Your Route

Map out a walkable area that can get you to and from where you need to go.

STEP 3: Gather Your Supplies

- Street maps
- Clipboards
- Notepaper and pens
- A digital or smartphone camera
- Comfortable walking shoes
- A hat and sunscreen.
- The survey documents (it starts on page 5)

STEP 4: Choose a Date and Time for the Survey

STEP 5: Conduct the Survey

STEP 6: Rate the Route

STEP 7: Take Action to Make Your Community More Walkable

The Sidewalks and Streets Survey

Review the checklist before you go and as you walk note the locations of things you'd like to change. Take photos of problem areas as well as features you like and would like to see more of.

Suggestions for photos to take include:

- Crossing signals
- Overhead traffic lights
- Turning lanes
- Curb cuts
- Sidewalks
- Crosswalk lines and vehicle stop lines
- Important signage

The survey contains the following sections to help guide and record your observations:

Section A. Mapping the Walk Audit

Section B. Crossing Streets and Intersections

Section C. Sidewalks

Section D. Driver Behavior

Section E. Safety

Section F. Comfort and Appeal

Section G. Overall Ratings and Observations

Each section asks you to rate your streets or intersections. Here's what each rating means:

Excellent	The area is very pedestrian-friendly and safe
Good	The area is moderately pedestrian-friendly and safe
Fair	The area is somewhat pedestrian-friendly and safe
Poor	The area is not pedestrian-friendly or safe

Section A: Mapping the Walk Audit

This survey will tell you what to look for on sidewalks and streets within the walkable area you choose to survey. Your walkable area could be as small as one intersection or it could include several streets and intersections. Consider starting small, with one or two intersections and a connecting street.

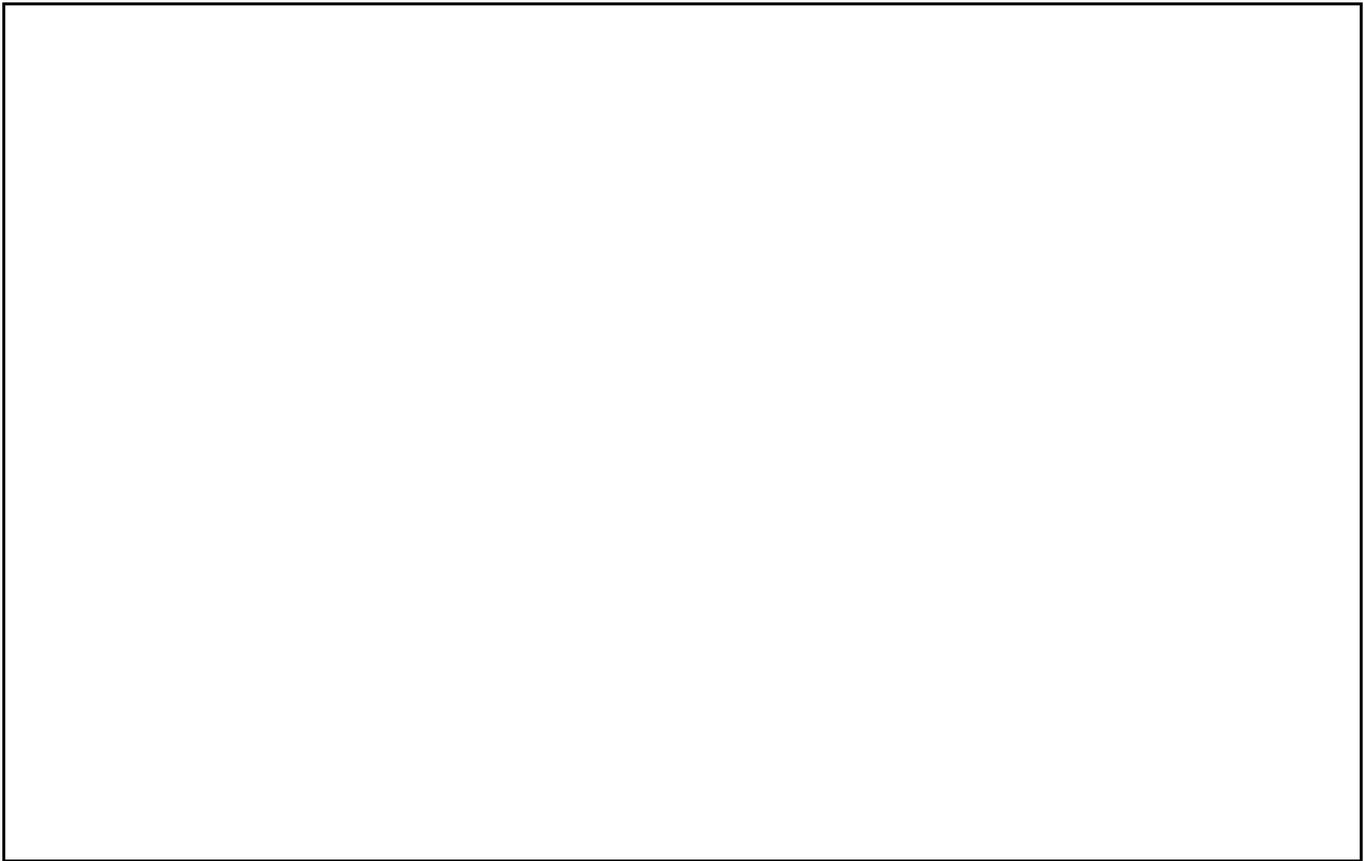
ADVICE: The smaller your walk survey area, the easier it is to follow-up and get results.

Record the following for your walk survey area:

County _____ City/Town _____

State _____ Zip Code _____

Next, draw a simple map of your walk survey area and label the streets. Be sure to indicate North, East, South and West on the map to show which direction the streets are facing.



Section B: Crossing Streets and Intersections

Complete one Section B page for each intersection you observe within your walkable area.

(We suggest allowing 20 to 30 minutes per intersection.)

Intersection observed: location at _____ and _____
Street Name 1 *Street Name 2*

Day of week: _____ Time observations began: _____ a.m. ___ p.m. ___

Date: _____ Time observations ended: _____ a.m. ___ p.m. ___

DIRECTIONS: Place a **V** next to any items that are a problem for pedestrians and note:

- What might be especially problematic for a child, older adult or person with disabilities?
- What is the exact location(s) of each problem? Record a landmark or side of street (North, South, East or West) on the line to the right of each item you check.

PROBLEMS FOR WALKERS

LOCATION

- Crossing doesn't have a pedestrian signal or audible signal _____
- The pedestrian signal doesn't give people walking at an average speed enough time to cross. _____
Time allowed for crossing: _____ (Minutes) : _____ (Seconds)
- Pedestrian signal doesn't give slower walkers enough time to cross _____
- The traffic signal makes pedestrians wait too long before crossing _____
- The location needs a traffic signal or crosswalk _____
- A Push-to-Walk signal is not available/operating/accessible _____
- The crosswalk is not marked or is poorly marked _____
- Need to walk too far (>300 feet) for a safe place to cross the street _____
- The road is too wide to safely cross _____
- There's no median on a streets with two or more lanes _____
- Parked cars or utility poles block the view of traffic _____
- Other issues and observations: _____

WHO'S USING THE CROSSWALK?	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS OBSERVED (use hash marks for counting)	TOTAL #
People walking at average speed		
People walking slowly		
People with young children or strollers		
People crossing against the signal		
People using assistive devices (canes, wheelchairs, walkers, etc.)		
Bicyclists		
Skateboarders or Scooters		
Other		

OVERALL RATING OF THE STREET CROSSING(S) IN THE SURVEY AREA: ___ Excellent ___ Good ___ Fair ___ Poor

Section C: Sidewalks

Complete one Section C page for each sidewalk-equipped street within your walkable area.

Street observed: _____ between _____ and _____
Street Name *Cross Street 1* *Cross Street 2*

Day of week: _____ Time observations began: _____ a.m. ____ p.m.

Date: _____ Time observations ended: _____ a.m. ____ p.m.

DIRECTIONS: Place a **✓** next to any items that are a problem for pedestrians and note:

- What might be especially problematic for a child, older adult or person with disabilities?
- What is the exact location(s) of each problem? Record a landmark or side of street (North, South, East or West) on the line to the right of each item you check.

PROBLEMS FOR WALKERS

LOCATION

- There are no sidewalks, paths or shoulders _____
- The sidewalks are not continuous (i.e. segments are missing) _____
- The sidewalk isn't wide enough for two people to walk together side-by-side (minimum needed: 5 feet) _____
- The sidewalk is broken or cracked _____
- There's no buffer between traffic and the sidewalk _____
- The sidewalks are interrupted by driveway s _____
- There are no ramps (curb cuts) or they're misplaced
(Note: There should be two per corner.) _____
- The curb cuts aren't textured or marked for people with visual impairments _____
- The sidewalk is blocked or interrupted by poles, signs, shrubs, dumpsters, low hanging trees, etc. _____
- Cars, trucks, vendors are blocking the sidewalk _____
- Other issues and observations _____

OVERALL RATING OF THE STREET CROSSING(S) IN THE SURVEY AREA: ___ Excellent ___ Good ___ Fair ___ Poor

Section D: Driver Behavior

Complete one page for the entire walkable area on your survey map.

Day of week: _____ Time observations began: _____ a.m. ___ p.m. ___

Date: _____ Time observations ended: _____ a.m. ___ p.m. ___

DIRECTIONS: Place a **✓** next to any items that are a problem for pedestrians and note:

- What might be especially problematic for a child, older adult or person with disabilities?
- What is the exact location(s) of each problem? Record a landmark or side of street (North, South, East or West) on the line to the right of each item you check.

PROBLEMS FOR WALKERS

LOCATION

- | | |
|---|-------|
| <input type="radio"/> Drivers do not stop at stop signs | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Drivers do not obey traffic signals | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Drivers appear to be speeding | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Drivers don't yield to pedestrians, especially at right turns | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Drivers do not stop behind the crosswalk | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Drivers don't look when leaving or backing out of driveways | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Drivers make unexpected turns/maneuvers | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Other issues and observations _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

OVERALL RATING OF THE STREET CROSSING(S) IN THE SURVEY AREA: ___ Excellent ___ Good ___ Fair ___ Poor

Section E: Safety

Complete one page for the entire walkable area on your survey map.

Day of week: _____ Time observations began: _____ a.m. ___ p.m. ___

Date: _____ Time observations ended: _____ a.m. ___ p.m. ___

DIRECTIONS: Place a **V** next to any items that are a problem for pedestrians and note:

- What might be especially problematic for a child, older adult or person with disabilities?
- What is the exact location(s) of each problem? Record a landmark or side of street (North, South, East or West) on the line to the right of each item you check.

PROBLEMS FOR WALKERS

LOCATION

Pedestrians don't feel safe walking here because:

- Car speeds are too fast _____
- Too much traffic _____
- Drivers are distracted (e.g. they're using cell phones) _____
- There is loitering or suspicious/criminal activity _____
- There are unleashed dogs _____
- The signage or directions for drivers/pedestrians are confusing _____
- Other issues and observations _____

OVERALL RATING OF THE STREET CROSSING(S) IN THE SURVEY AREA: ___ Excellent ___ Good ___ Fair ___ Poor

Section F: Comfort and Appeal

Complete one page for the entire walkable area on your survey map.

Day of week: _____ Time observations began: _____ a.m. ___ p.m. ___

Date: _____ Time observations ended: _____ a.m. ___ p.m. ___

DIRECTIONS: Place a **✓** next to any items that are a problem for pedestrians and note:

- What might be especially problematic for a child, older adult or person with disabilities?
- What is the exact location(s) of each problem? Record a landmark or side of street (North, South, East or West) on the line to the right of each item you check.

PROBLEMS FOR WALKERS

LOCATION

Pedestrians don't feel comfortable walking here because:

- The street needs shade trees _____
 - The street needs grass, flowers, landscaping _____
 - The street needs benches and places to rest _____
 - The grass/landscaping needs maintenance _____
 - There needs to be water fountains and bathrooms _____
 - A sidewalk is needed to the bus stop _____
 - The bus stop doesn't provide shelter _____
 - The bus stop doesn't have adequate lighting _____
 - There's graffiti or vacant/rundown buildings _____
 - There's too much trash or litter _____
 - Other issues and observations _____
- _____
- _____

OVERALL RATING OF THE STREET CROSSING(S) IN THE SURVEY AREA: ___ Excellent ___ Good ___ Fair ___ Poor

Section G: Overall Ratings and Observations

Now it's time to tally your scores from each observation section.

Place a **V** next to each rating from the previous sections. If you observed more than one location for Sections B and C, record the average of your observations.

SECTION	RATING
B: Crossing the Street (Intersections)	_____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor
C: Sidewalks	_____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor
D: Driver Behavior	_____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor
E: Safety	_____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor
F: Comfort and Appeal	_____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor

TOTALS: _____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor

Your Overall Rating will be more than just your checkmark total. Think about your observations as a whole. Were some areas much better or worse than others? For example, the sidewalks might be good for walking, but intersections might be poor for crossing the street. This might justify reducing the overall rating of your walk survey area. With this in mind:

OVERALL RATING OF THE ENTIRE SURVEY AREA: _____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor

Additional comments about what works well and what needs improvement:

Take Action

It can be a challenge to persuade municipal bureaucracies to make needed improvements and changes. Obstacles abound, ranging from politics to price tags. But individuals and community groups can get the ball rolling by identifying problems and calling attention to them.

Some next steps:

Rally community members to work with the local government and transportation officials to add new walkways and sidewalks and help improve the safety and accessibility of your community.

Contact the local public works and transportation departments, or the area's elected community representative, to report unsafe sidewalks. Provide copies of the completed "Sidewalks and Streets Survey" as well as photographs that demonstrate the problems.

Ask local officials to create crosswalks, install traffic signals and use traffic-calming measures (such as a road diet) to help control the speed of traffic. If a traffic signal already exists, ask that the light's timing accommodate slower moving pedestrians, such as children, older adults and people with disabilities.

Organize a neighborhood watch group to keep an eye out for speeders, criminal activity or other conditions or activities that would prevent people from being able to safely go for a walk.

Advocate for the walkability features that will make your community walkable and welcoming for people of all ages and abilities.

A Few Words About Sidewalks

- Sidewalk requests can be complicated because, although a city's public works department often addresses sidewalk maintenance, the maintenance may actually be the responsibility of the adjacent property owner. Adding a new walkway could require negotiating with the respective property owners. Installing a sidewalk where one doesn't already exist is easier if the work involves filling in a gap in an otherwise continuous sidewalk.
- In most areas, a community's department of Public Works or Transportation can address concerns about the placement and width of sidewalks and the maintenance of publically managed sidewalks.
- Caring for trees and bushes that intrude upon a sidewalk is usually the responsibility of the property's owner, but the local government can send a notice asking the owner to perform the maintenance. If the property owner does not comply, a public works crew might be able to trim the bushes and bill the property owner. In some neighborhoods, a homeowners' association is responsible for sidewalks.
- Some communities or neighborhoods have ordinances restricting the installation of sidewalks or curbs for aesthetic reasons or to make the area appear less urban. Advocating for sidewalks in these types of communities can be challenging. If action on sidewalks is not possible, the local government can still make the streets safer for pedestrians by employing traffic-calming measures.

With the Problems Identified, It's Time to Find Solutions

THE PROBLEMS

- No sidewalks, paths or shoulders
- Sidewalks that start and stop, are broken or blocked
- Too much traffic

What can be done right away

- Identify another (safer) route
- Tell the traffic engineering or public works department about the problems and provide a copy of the "Sidewalks and Streets" survey results

What can be done with more time

- Speak up at board meetings
- Write or petition the city for better walkways
- Work with a local transportation engineer to develop a plan for a safe walking route
- Make the local media aware of the problems

THE PROBLEMS

- Roads are too wide to cross
- Traffic signals don't allow enough time to cross and/or regular opportunities to cross
- There aren't any crosswalks or traffic signals
- Views of traffic are blocked by trees, landscaping and/or parked cars
- Curb cuts are missing or are in need of repair

What can be done right away

- Identify another (safer) route
- Tell the traffic or public works departments about the problems and provide a copy of the "Sidewalks and Streets Survey" results
- Trim the trees or bushes that block the street and/or ask the property owner to do so
- Leave polite notes on the problem cars asking owners not to park there

What can be done with more time

- Attend community meetings to advocate for crosswalks, signals, parking changes and curb cuts
- Report parked cars that cause safety hazards to the police or traffic departments
- Ask the department of public works to trim trees and bushes that block views of the street
- Make the local media aware of the problems

THE PROBLEMS

- Drivers are backing up without looking
- Drivers aren't yielding to pedestrians
- Drivers are driving too fast and/or speeding up to make the light
- Drivers are running red lights and stop signs

What can be done right away

- Identify another (safer) route
- Set an example by being a safe driver
- Report unsafe drivers to the police

What can be done with more time

- Petition for better law enforcement
- Ask the municipalities transportation planners and engineers for traffic-calming solutions
- Organize a neighborhood speed-watch program

THE PROBLEMS

- The landscaping is in poor condition or non-existent
- Dogs are off-leash
- The area isn't well-lighted
- There's a lot of litter
- There's no place to sit and rest
- There's no criminal activity

What can be done right away

- Identify another (safer) route
- Report unleashed dogs to municipal authorities
- Report unlawful activity to police
- Report lighting needs to the police or department of public works
- Collect the trash yourself

What can be done with more time

- Request increased law enforcement
- Ask the municipalities transportation planners and engineers for traffic-calming solutions
- Organize a community cleanup day
- Start a neighborhood crime watch program
- Sponsor a neighborhood beautification day
- Begin an adopt-a-street program

AARP thanks the [Institute of Transportation Engineers](#) for its assistance with this survey.