



Tips,  
Tools and  
Resources for  
Organizers

# Sidewalks and Streets Survey

Communities can make walking safer by teaching small groups to take simple “walkability” surveys and to take recommended actions for community improvements. Your involvement will make a difference to people you care about.

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## 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. Lack of sidewalks, construction of sidewalks too close to roads and lack of maintenance are all factors that discourage people from walking regularly.

### The solution

You can help make walking safer by teaching small groups to take simple “walkability” surveys. Once people rate an area and identify concerns, the group can take action to improve walkability. This toolkit will help you do that.

### Time commitment

About an hour to complete a walkability survey. More time to follow up and pursue the needed improvements; this will depend on the extent of improvements and community cooperation to get the work done.

### Special considerations

None

### Who can do this?

Everyone.

### Great reasons to do this project

- Increase exercise opportunities for your community.
- Boost social interaction among neighbors by creating a walking-friendly environment.
- Helping reduce traffic congestion and pollution by leaving the car at home.
- Increase property values: Walkable communities are associated with higher home values!



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



## The Basic Steps

### STEP 1: Get Ready

You'll want to map out a walkable area that can get you and your neighbors to and from where you need to go. This could be your own neighborhood or one surrounding your local faith-based group or senior center. You'll also want to gather a few materials, such as street maps, a digital camera, comfortable walking shoes, a hat and sunscreen.

### STEP 2: Recruit People To Do A Survey

Start with friends and neighbors. It's helpful to include someone with a physical challenge (e.g., someone using a walker, wheelchair or cane, or even someone who pushes a baby stroller). That will help you get a true sense of an area's walkability.

### STEP 3: Review the Survey and Identify Your Route

- See the walkability survey below.
- Map out a logical walking route in your community, ideally one that would take you and your neighbors to and from where you need to go.
- Gather the following materials:
  - Street maps
  - Clipboards, notepaper, pens and disposable or digital cameras (all important for documenting what needs to be improved)
  - Comfortable walking shoes and, if needed, a hat and sunscreen.

### STEP 4: Choose a Date and Time for the Survey



## STEP 5: Conduct the Survey and Rate Your Route

Print out and bring surveys and materials for each member of your group. Conduct the survey and see how your community stacks up.



4,378 pedestrians were killed by motor vehicles in 2008 in the U.S., according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

## STEP 6: Take Action to Make Your Community More Walkable

After you've rated your walk and identified problem areas, review "Take Action: How to Improve Your Community's Rating from the Sidewalks and Streets Survey" (see below), and work with your group to take action.

## STEP 7: Inspire Others on CreateTheGood.org!

### TELL US WHAT YOU DID!

We want to hear stories about how you helped give back to your community.

[www.createthegood.org/stories](http://www.createthegood.org/stories)

You just might inspire others to do the same.

### SHARE FEEDBACK

We are always looking for feedback on our materials, so please let us know how this guide was helpful or what additional information you wish we could have included. Share lessons learned and other tips for others who are using walkability surveys: [www.aarp.org/community/groups/CreateTheGood](http://www.aarp.org/community/groups/CreateTheGood).

### KEEP UP THE GOOD!

Remember: Whether you've got five minutes, five hours or five days, you can make a positive impact in your community. And if you have more time, consider organizing another service activity, finding local opportunities and posting your events at [www.CreateTheGood.org/post-opportunity](http://www.CreateTheGood.org/post-opportunity).



## Sidewalks and Streets Survey

Review the checklist before you go, and as you walk, note the locations of things that you'd like to change. Take photos of problem areas and things 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 Out Your Walk Survey Area
- Section B: Crossing the Street (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 as Excellent, Good, Fair or Poor. Here's what each rating means:

- Excellent: Area is very walk-friendly and safe
- Good: Area is moderately walk-friendly and safe
- Fair: Area is somewhat walk-friendly and safe
- Poor: Area is not walk-friendly or safe

Finally, explore how to improve your community's rating by reviewing the ideas in "Take Action: How to Improve Your Community's Rating From the Sidewalks and Streets Survey" (on page 14).

So...got your cameras, street maps and other gear? Then get ready, set, go!



## Section A: Mapping Out Your Walk Survey Area

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

Remember, the smaller your walk survey area, the easier it is to follow up and get results.

Please 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. Here is an example:

**Survey Map**



**Now draw your own walk survey area. Be sure to write in N, E, S and W (North, East, South and West) next to the arrows to show which direction the streets are facing.**

Your map will help you organize fellow walkers and review the area you have surveyed. Make a copy for each fellow walker to make notes on. For example, they can note the spot where a telephone pole blocks the sidewalk or where a curb cut is needed and then take photos of what they find. If you are creating a final report, include a clean copy of your map along with the photos taken.



## Section B: Crossing the Street (Intersections)

Please complete one Section B page for each intersection you observe within your walkable area. We suggest allowing 20-30 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 ✓ below next to any items that are a problem for walkers and note:

- What might especially be a problem for a child, senior 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 blank line to the right of each item you check.

### Problems for walkers

### Location

- Crossing doesn't have a pedestrian signal or audible signal \_\_\_\_\_
- Pedestrian signal doesn't give people walking at average speed enough time to cross (WALK+DON'T WALK)  
Time allowed on signal (minutes:seconds) \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_
- Pedestrian signal doesn't give people who walk more slowly enough time to cross \_\_\_\_\_
- Traffic signal makes pedestrians wait too long before crossing \_\_\_\_\_
- Need a traffic signal or crosswalk \_\_\_\_\_
- Push-to-walk signal is not available/operating \_\_\_\_\_
- Crosswalk is not marked or poorly marked \_\_\_\_\_
- Have to walk too far (>300 ft.) for a safe place to cross the street \_\_\_\_\_
- Road is too wide to cross safely \_\_\_\_\_
- No median on streets with 2+ lanes \_\_\_\_\_



# Sidewalks and Streets Survey

Parked cars on the street or utility poles are blocking the view of traffic

\_\_\_\_\_

Other issues and observations **(please specify)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Who is using the crosswalk?	Make hatch marks to indicate number of people/ things observed
People walking at average speed	total #:
People using assistive devices (canes, wheelchairs, walkers)	total #:
People with young children or strollers	total #:
People crossing against signal	total #:
Cyclists	total #:
Skateboarders	total #:
Scooters	total #:
Other	total #:

Overall rating of street crossings in walk survey area:

Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor





## Section D: Driver Behavior

Please 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 ✓ below next to any items that are a problem for walkers and note:

- What might especially be a problem for a child, senior or person with disabilities?
- Note landmarks, streets or sides of streets (north, south, east or west) on the blank line to the right of each item you check.

### Problems for walkers

### Location

- Drivers do not stop at stop signs \_\_\_\_\_
- Drivers do not obey traffic signals \_\_\_\_\_
- Drivers seem to be speeding \_\_\_\_\_
- Drivers do not yield to pedestrians, especially at right turns \_\_\_\_\_
- Drivers do not stop behind the crosswalk \_\_\_\_\_
- Drivers don't look when leaving or backing out of driveways \_\_\_\_\_
- Drivers make unexpected turns/maneuvers \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (**please specify**) \_\_\_\_\_

Overall rating of driver behavior in walk survey area:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor



## Section E: Safety

Please 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 ✓ below next to any items that are a problem for walkers and note:

- What might especially be a problem for a child, senior or person with disabilities?
- Note landmarks, streets or sides of streets (north, south, east or west) on the blank line to the right of each item you check.

### Problems for walkers

### Location

#### Don't feel safe walking here because:

- Car speeds are too fast
- Too much traffic
- Drivers are distracted (for example, using cell phones)
- There is loitering or suspicious/criminal activity
- Unleashed dogs
- Unclear signs or directions for drivers or pedestrians
- Other **(please specify)**

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Overall rating of safety in walk survey area:

Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor



## Section F: Comfort and Appeal

Please 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 ✓ below next to any items that are a problem for walkers and note:

- What might especially be a problem for a child, senior or person with disabilities?
- Note landmarks, streets or sides of streets (north, south, east or west) on the blank line to the right of each item you check.

### Problems for walkers

### Location

#### Don't feel safe walking here because:

- Need shade trees
- Need grass, flowers, landscaping
- Need benches and places to rest
- Grass/landscaping needs maintenance
- Need water fountains and bathrooms
- Need sidewalk leading to bus stop
- Bus stop doesn't have shelter
- Bus stop doesn't have adequate lighting
- There is graffiti or vacant/run-down buildings
- There is trash on the route
- Other (**please specify**)

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Overall rating of comfort/appeal in walk 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 ✓ below 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

Total checkmarks:

\_\_\_\_\_

### Overall rating

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 walk survey area:**

Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor

Additional comments on what works well and what needs improvement:

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## Sidewalks and Streets Survey

*Thank you for participating and making the community more livable for everyone.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

*Number of participants in this survey activity* \_\_\_\_\_

**AARP would like to thank the Institute of Transportation Engineers for providing the original content for this survey.**

**Now that you've identified the problems, read the next section. It will help you take action to fix the flaws.**



## Take Action: How to Improve Your Community's Rating From the Sidewalks and Streets Survey

Now that you've identified the problems, you can find the answers. Check out these ideas on ways to improve your community's rating.

<p><b>1. Did you have room to walk?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sidewalks or paths started and stopped</li> <li>• Sidewalks broken or cracked</li> <li>• Sidewalks blocked</li> <li>• No sidewalks, paths or shoulders</li> <li>• Too much traffic</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you can do immediately:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify another (safer) route and share information with friends and neighbors.</li> <li>• Tell local traffic engineering or public works department about specific problems and provide a copy of the checklist.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you and your community can do with more time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak up at board meetings.</li> <li>• Write or petition the city for walkways and gather neighborhood signatures.</li> <li>• Make the local media aware of the problem.</li> <li>• Work with a local transportation engineer to develop a plan for a safe walking route.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Was it easy to cross streets?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road too wide</li> <li>• Traffic signals made us wait too long or did not give us enough time to cross</li> <li>• Crosswalks/traffic signals needed</li> <li>• View of traffic blocked by parked cars, trees or plants</li> <li>• Curb cuts were missing or in need of repair</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you can do immediately:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pick another route for now.</li> <li>• Tell your local traffic engineering or public works department about the problems and give them a copy of your checklist.</li> <li>• Trim trees or bushes that block the street and ask neighbors to do the same.</li> <li>• Leave nice notes on problem cars asking owners not to park there.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you and your community can do with more time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At city meetings, push for crosswalks, signals, parking changes and curb cuts.</li> <li>• Report to local traffic engineer the locations of parked cars that pose safety hazards.</li> <li>• Report illegally parked cars to the police.</li> <li>• Request that the public works department trim trees or plants.</li> <li>• Make the local media aware of problem.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Did drivers behave well?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backed without looking</li> <li>• Did not yield</li> <li>• Turned into walkers' path</li> <li>• Drove too fast</li> <li>• Sped up to make traffic lights or drove through red lights</li> <li>• Stopped too close to crosswalk</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you can do immediately:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pick another route for now.</li> <li>• Set an example by slowing down and being considerate of others; encourage your neighbors to do the same.</li> <li>• Report unsafe driving to the police.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you and your community can do with more time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petition for better law enforcement.</li> <li>• Request protected turns.</li> <li>• Ask city planners and traffic engineers for traffic-calming ideas.</li> <li>• Organize a neighborhood speed-watch program.</li> </ul>



<p><b>4. Was it easy to follow safety rules?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross at crosswalks or where you could see and be seen?</li> <li>• Stop and look left, right, left again, before crossing?</li> <li>• Walk on sidewalks or shoulders facing traffic?</li> <li>• Cross with the light?</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you can do immediately:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate your community about safe walking.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you and your community can do with more time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage schools to teach walking safety. Help schools start safe-walking programs.</li> <li>• Encourage corporate support for flextime so parents can walk children to school.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Was your walk pleasant?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs grass, flowers, trees</li> <li>• Dogs off leashes</li> <li>• Unsafe people</li> <li>• Not well-lit</li> <li>• Dirty, litter, pollution</li> <li>• Lots of traffic</li> <li>• No resting places</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you can do immediately:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point out areas to avoid; agree on safe routes.</li> <li>• Ask neighbors to keep dogs leashed or fenced.</li> <li>• Report unleashed dogs to the animal-control department and to your neighborhood association.</li> <li>• Report unlawful activity to the police.</li> <li>• Report lighting needs to the police or appropriate public works department.</li> <li>• Collect trash during your next walk by taking a trash bag along.</li> <li>• Plant trees and flowers in your yard.</li> <li>• Select an alternative route with less traffic.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you and your community can do with more time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request increased police enforcement.</li> <li>• Start a crime-watch program in your neighborhood.</li> <li>• Organize a community cleanup day.</li> <li>• Sponsor a neighborhood-beautification day.</li> <li>• Begin an adopt-a-street program.</li> </ul>
<p><b>A quick health check:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you not go as far or as fast as you wanted?</li> <li>• Were you tired, short of breath or had sore feet or muscles?</li> <li>• Was the sun really hot?</li> <li>• Was it hot and hazy?</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you can do immediately:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with short walks and work up to 30 minutes of walking most days.</li> <li>• Invite a friend along.</li> <li>• Walk along shaded routes where possible.</li> <li>• Use sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher; wear a hat and sunglasses.</li> <li>• Try not to walk during the hottest time of day.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you and your community can do with more time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get the local media to do a story about the health benefits of walking.</li> <li>• Call the recreation department about community walks.</li> <li>• Encourage corporate support for employee walking programs.</li> <li>• Plant shade trees along routes.</li> <li>• Have a sun-safety seminar.</li> <li>• Learn about unhealthy ozone days and the Air Quality Index (AQI).</li> </ul>

AARP would like to thank the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center for providing the original content for improving your community’s walkability rating.



## Further Steps to Improve Your Community's Rating

City and county bureaucracies can be a challenge to persuade to make changes. You can get the ball rolling by identifying problem areas and calling them to public attention. In the meanwhile, identify alternative routes that can keep you and your community walking, moving and thriving.

- **Rally** your neighbors to work with the appropriate local traffic and transportation officials and with local government to add new walkways and sidewalks and help improve the safety and accessibility of your community.
- **Contact** your local public works and your county department of transportation or elected community representative to report broken, cluttered or otherwise unsafe sidewalks. Give them copies of your survey report and photos that demonstrate the problems.
- **Ask** city or county officials to install pedestrian and traffic signals to mark crosswalks and to add traffic-calming devices (such as speed bumps and traffic circles) to help control the speed of traffic. Make sure the timing of traffic signals is long enough to accommodate older pedestrians, people with disabilities and other slower-moving pedestrians.
- **Organize** a neighborhood watch group to prevent crime from taking place in your community. More awareness of activity in the neighborhood can reduce crime so your community can have safer streets that everyone can enjoy.
- **Advocate** for raised medians with curb cuts to easily accommodate all pedestrians and wheelchair users.

## So Just Who Are the Players Who Can Help You Make a Difference?

### City or County Public Works or Department of Transportation:

- Your public works agency can address concerns about placement and width of sidewalks and sidewalk maintenance. Responsibility for specific sidewalk issues may vary. For example, even though the city public works department often addresses sidewalk maintenance, the maintenance may actually be the responsibility of property owners. Adding a new walkway may require negotiating with the respective property owners about paying for it. This process is easier if a gap can be filled in, as opposed to installing a completely new walkway that crosses a number of private properties.



- Trimming bushes that overhang the sidewalk is the property owners' responsibility, but the city or county will send an official notice to request that property owners take care of it. If a property owner does not comply, a public works crew may trim the bushes and bill the property owner. In some neighborhoods, the homeowners' association is responsible for sidewalks.
- Some communities or neighborhoods have ordinances restricting installation of sidewalks or curbs for aesthetic reasons or to make the area appear to be less urban. In these communities, you must present the need for sidewalks to the city or county council, and it can be quite challenging. Consider directing your energies more effectively toward ensuring that neighborhood streets are well-maintained.
- If action on sidewalks is not possible, your group can still help make it safer to walk along the streets by urging that the city install traffic-calming measures such as roundabouts, speed tables or speed humps to reduce cut-through traffic or speeding cars. You can also organize a neighborhood watch group to deal with any criminal activity in your community. More awareness of activity in your neighborhood can reduce crime, which means the streets are safer for everyone to enjoy.

## Other Community Partners:

- Contact your local public works department or elected community representative to report broken, cluttered or otherwise unsafe sidewalks. Consider forming an alliance with downtown merchants or others who may be interested in advocating for more effective streetlights, benches and shade trees to improve your community's appeal. Contact the planning department, which would be involved in improving streetscapes, or the parks department, which might be involved in planting trees. Local parent-teacher associations (PTAs) may also be interested in ensuring safe school routes.
- The traffic manager in the city or county department of transportation is responsible for controlling the speed of traffic through traffic signals. Make sure the timing of traffic signals is long enough to accommodate older pedestrians, people with disabilities and other slow-moving pedestrians.
- Signalized crosswalks with flashing lights or special signals activated by a walk sign are safest because they help reduce the number of pedestrians stranded at crosswalks when the light changes. New types of crosswalks that feature a striped path that lights up when activated by a pedestrian demonstrate the potential of technology to enhance pedestrian safety. Older residents particularly benefit from these types of improvements at major street crossings.



## Resources

### **Pedestrian Mobility and Safety – Audit Guide** (<http://www.ite.org/PedAudits>)

This guide, written by AARP and the Institute of Transportation Engineers, explains the numerous issues related to pedestrian safety and mobility. It includes photos of what to look for and findings from surveys in four cities.

### **Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center** (<http://www.pedbikeinfo.org>)

Information includes walking basics, solutions and resources.

### **Get Fit on Route 66** (<https://www.hesonline.com/route66>)

Convert your physical activity minutes to miles as you take a virtual journey down this legendary highway.

### **Staying Motivated** (<http://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/staying-fit/>)

Many articles about walking to help you stay the course and keep walking.