

About WalkBoston

WalkBoston is a non-profit membership organization that encourages walking throughout Massachusetts for transportation, health and vibrant communities. Our education and advocacy programs give voice to citizens to make their communities walkable.

WalkBoston's advocacy on behalf of pedestrians began in 1990 when a handful of like-minded citizens decided they would be more effective speaking out collectively than as individuals. Sixteen years later, WalkBoston has grown to more than 600 members in 65 cities and towns, supported by some 73 corporate/organizational members.

Most impressive is WalkBoston's lengthy record of getting cities and towns, state agencies, developers, institutions, and elected officials to recognize and accommodate the needs of walkers.

Every additional voice helps WalkBoston's message to be heard. **We welcome your advocacy efforts and your individual and corporate memberships.** To become a member or get more information about WalkBoston and pedestrian advocacy, visit www.walkboston.org.

How we can help

- Advise on improvements for your community.
- Provide guidance, moral support and technical assistance.
- Present a speakers program on pedestrian design and advocacy.
- Help set up advocacy groups and make them stronger.

Visit walkboston.org for tools, publications and other resources on how to be an effective walking advocate.

2/07



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WalkBoston

making
a more
walkable
community



CURB EXTENSION
6 FEET MAX.

FURNISHING ZONE
3-5 FEET

SHY ZONE
2 FEET

COMMERCIAL WALKING ZONE
8-12 FEET

Citizen Advocacy: A crucial step toward a better walking environment

Walkability has long been a cornerstone of a livable community. The traditional New England town, built around a town square, is the quintessential walkable community. Homes, shops, businesses and public transit, all within walking distance of one another, help to make a place desirable to live, work, visit and play.

Many U.S. cities and early suburbs also have these advantages, but in the latter half of the 20th century, they became less common as population spread out and Americans relied mostly on cars for transportation. Moreover, transportation budgets, planning and policies largely favor the movement of traffic over that of pedestrians.

But, walkability is re-emerging as a key ingredient desired in communities. People value its benefits of lower transportation costs, greater social interaction, improved personal and environmental health, and expanded consumer choice.

Yet walkability cannot be taken for granted, and poorly designed places can be unsafe and even deter walking. That's where you—an active citizen—can play a vital role in making sure your community is walker-friendly.

How? It's easy. As you walk around your community, think about what changes would make your route more walkable. Then make them happen. Take your concerns to public officials and community leaders and insist that they take the necessary steps to provide a safe and pleasant walking environment.

This pamphlet contains some of the basics that have made WalkBoston the premier pedestrian advocacy organization in the country. Use them to improve the walkability of your community.

NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD; INDEED IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS. —Margaret Mead

Where to start

You can improve your walking environment relatively quickly by requesting improvements from your local government that require minimal expense or rebuilding. Call or write in your request to the Transportation or Public Works Department. If you have a specific recommendation or problem, always give the exact address or intersection. It is helpful to include a photo of the site within your letter. Follow up with phone calls. Keep a written record of everyone you speak with. Here are some ideas.

Get crosswalks painted: Busy crosswalks may fade in one year or less. Public Works Departments develop lists for warm weather painting. Request that your crosswalks be on their list.

Get WALK lights, traffic signals & street lights repaired: Faulty traffic signals or street lights are hazardous. Often WALK lights are knocked over by turning trucks or have burned out. Request to have them repaired.

Re-time lights for longer WALK time: Time traffic signals so that pedestrians cross with, and for as long as, the motorists' green light in the same direction [concurrent WALK light]. This gives pedestrians more time to cross. Concurrent WALK also gives a shorter wait between WALK phases.

Ask for short light cycles: 60-90 second cycles are ideal. Walkers will wait about 30 seconds for a WALK light; longer waits lead to jaywalking and danger.

Request countdown signals and advance WALK: Countdown lights show how much crossing time remains. When installed at a high-accident intersection, pedestrian crashes drop by 50%. A WALK shown 4 seconds before the green light gives walkers a head start before cars begin to turn. Thus, walkers will be more visible to drivers.

Report hazards: Request that sidewalks with cracks and uneven bricks be repaired.

Advocate for clean streets: A pleasant place encourages walking. Pick up trash. Ask merchants, municipal officials and schools to set out and collect trash cans. Organize your neighbors to have a trash pickup day.

Enforcement: Ask public safety officials to enforce

laws: speed limits in school zones, engine idling bans, sidewalk and crosswalk snow removal, and yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks.

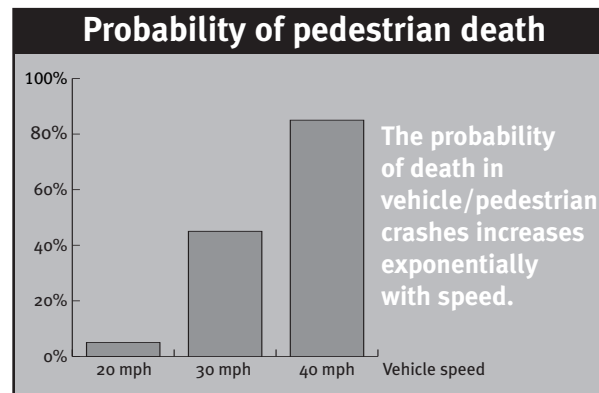
Education: Request that schools and community centers conduct walker safety training for children.

Larger advocacy objectives

GREAT SIDEWALKS

Sidewalks should be continuous, unobstructed, smooth, accessible and attractive.

- **Walking zone:** Minimum 5 feet in residential areas and 8-12 feet in commercial areas, based on volume.
- **Furnishing zone:** For mail boxes, trash cans, trees, benches, bus shelters, cafes, sign boards, signal/sign poles, etc. Buffered by a 2-foot shy zone on each side.
- **Surfaces:** Concrete or asphalt are smooth walking surfaces. Bricks and pavers can trip walkers [especially elders], cause vibrations for wheelchair users and are slippery when wet and hard to shovel in snow.
- **Surroundings:** Attractive and useful amenities, such as trees, benches and cafes, enhance walking pleasure.



SAFE STREETS

Well-designed neighborhood streets keep motorist speeds at 20 or 25 mph and provide on-street parking, sidewalks, shade, and street lamps.

- **Widths:** Lanes should be no wider than 11 feet on main streets, and preferably 10 feet. Narrowing a travel lane from 11 feet to 10 feet reduces speed by 7 mph.

- **Parking:** Parallel or angled, buffers walkers from traffic.
- **Vertical elements:** Trees, streetlights, etc., along a roadway narrow its perceived width and will naturally slow drivers.
- **Traffic-calming:** Break up long straightaways with mid-block crossings, curb extensions, alternate-side parking, crossing islands, chicanes and roundabouts.
- **Stop signs:** In neighborhoods, use 4-way stop signs — cars must stop but are not delayed by long lights.
- **Signal timing:** Time signals progressively — for 20 to 25 mph — so cars are slowed, but not delayed.

SAFE CROSSINGS/INTERSECTIONS

54% of pedestrian/vehicle crashes occur at intersections. Reshaping, repainting, retiming make a big improvement.

- **Curb extensions:** Make walkers more visible, shorten crossing distance, and provide larger waiting areas.
- **Tighter corners:** Slow turning vehicles and shorten crossing distances.
- **Crosswalks:** Wide, well-painted, and at frequent intervals. Raised crosswalks/intersections slow speeds and make crossing with wheelchairs and strollers easier.
- **Good lighting:** Crucial for safe crossings.
- **Right turn on red:** Forbid in high-pedestrian areas.

RECONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

It's most effective to get involved in projects early.

- Ask your city/town's Planning, Transportation or Public Works Department for a list of projects planned for your community.
- Call for a community meeting to learn more about which streets, sidewalks, parks and commercial developments will begin preliminary design in the next year and what is proposed.
- Watch for local newspaper notices of public meetings, such as the zoning board of appeals, community development board and traffic commission.
- If a project is large, a citizen task force may be set up to review its design. Ask that you [or someone you know] be appointed.
- If a project is small, ask for a copy of the design so you and others can review and comment to make it pedestrian-friendly. If you need more expertise, ask an engineer, architect or landscape architect to volunteer assistance.

For effective advocacy

Organize. Talk to others. Recruit a group. You will have more clout, more energy, more expertise. Get involved early in proposed projects.

Collect information. Traffic and pedestrian counts, speeds, auto-related pedestrian accidents, road and lane widths, and local opinions.

Provide alternatives. Better than just opposing a bad project, draw up a better solution. Get informed assistance from sympathetic traffic engineers, planners, landscape architects, lawyers, neighbors or WalkBoston.

Have an event. A street fair, demonstration, Walk to School or Walk to Work day. Meet with public officials.

Persist & respect. Try to understand other positions. Be courteous. Challenge ideas; but don't attack people. Never go away. If public officials know that you will never go away, they will eventually deal with you. "It can't be done" is not an acceptable answer.

Experiment. Press for easy changes now. Demonstrate simple, visible, temporary actions using planters, bollards, paint, etc., to narrow a street or improve sidewalks and intersections.

Have fun. Enjoy small victories. Meet neighbors. Laugh when things get ridiculous. If you don't have fun, you won't last.

And did you know . . .

- Massachusetts state law [Chapter 87] requires the Highway Department to "make all reasonable provisions for the accommodation of bicycle and pedestrian traffic in the planning, design, and construction, reconstruction, or maintenance of any project undertaken by the department."
- The cost of constructing sidewalks alone is relatively low, approximately \$11/square foot [Federal Highway Administration, 2002].
- Communities with sidewalks tend to have higher property values, and residents are willing to pay a premium to live in a pedestrian-friendly community.