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601 E Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20049

Web: [AARP.org](https://www.aarp.org)

Toll-Free English: 1-888-OUR-AARP (1-888-687-2277)

Toll-Free Spanish: 1-877-342-2277

International: 1-202-434-3525

TTY Users, Dial 711: English: 1-877-434-7598 | Spanish: 1-866-238-9488

AARP Livable Communities

The AARP Livable Communities initiative supports the efforts of local leaders and residents throughout the nation to make their communities more livable and age-friendly.

Web: [AARP.org/Livable](https://www.aarp.org/Livable) and [AARP.org/WalkAudit](https://www.aarp.org/WalkAudit)

Newsletter: [AARP.org/LivableSubscribe](https://www.aarp.org/LivableSubscribe)

Email: Livable@AARP.org

Twitter: [@AARPLivable](https://twitter.com/AARPLivable)

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HOW TO USE THE AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** has been created for use by individuals, local leaders, large groups and teams of just two people. In other words, the information in it can be used by anyone who is concerned about the safety and walkability of a street, neighborhood or community.

This walk audit booklet is organized into three parts, and the print edition contains a back cover pocket for storing the tool kit's worksheets, which are listed below and can be viewed and downloaded for printing at AARP.org/WalkAudit. (Photocopying the worksheets for sharing is encouraged!)

As new materials — such as additional worksheets or translations into other languages — are added to the tool kit, we'll spread the news through the free, weekly **AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter**. Sign up at AARP.org/LivableSubscribe.

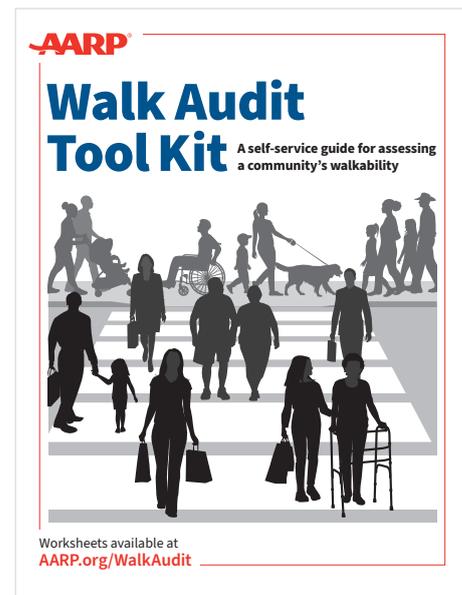


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Walk Audit Worksheets

- 1. Make a Map**
- 2. Who’s Using the Street — and Why?**
- 3. Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings**
(Single-Location Audit)
- 4. Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings**
(Walking Audit)
- 5. Sidewalks**
- 6. Streets and Crossings**
- 7. Street Safety and Appeal**
- 8. Public Transit Access**
- 9. Build a Better Block**
- 10. Winter Weather**
- 11. Summary**

Visit AARP.org/WalkAudit to download or order this publication and access its worksheets.

Introduction

THE PROBLEM

Too many communities in the United States are designed exclusively or almost exclusively for automobile travel, with very little consideration given to the needs of pedestrians.

Among the factors that discourage or outright prevent people from walking: multilane roadways, high-speed corridors that are unsafe to cross, a lack of street maintenance, a scarcity of sidewalks.

According to Smart Growth America's 2021 *Dangerous by Design* report, from 2010 to 2019, drivers in the U.S. struck and killed 53,435 pedestrians — an average of more than 14 people each day.

In 2017, an estimated 137,000 pedestrians were treated in emergency rooms for nonfatal crash-related injuries, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

To ensure that walking is a safe, accessible and convenient alternative for people who cannot or choose not to drive — and to reverse the trends in pedestrian fatalities and injuries — it is critical for communities to become more pedestrian-friendly.

A SOLUTION

Local leaders and residents can help make the nation's neighborhoods more walkable by conducting a "walk audit" to identify the roads and intersections that should be walkable and crossable but are instead dangerous (by design) for pedestrians.

A walk audit can help inform local decision-making by prioritizing areas in need of improvement and educating community members about the importance of street and sidewalk design. Participating in a walk audit can help people become better champions for local change.

THE TIME COMMITMENT

It can take less than an hour to complete a targeted, single-location walk audit. Or an audit can become a multi-hour event. The amount of time involved is entirely up to the "auditor" or audit team. ■



▲ Multilane, two-way roadways are common throughout the United States. Unlike most, this thoroughfare actually has pedestrian-supportive features, including sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic lights and pedestrian-controlled Walk/Don't Walk signals. But is this a nice place to walk? Is it even possible to cross the entire expanse at once?

A WALK AUDIT IS ... an activity in which participants observe and evaluate the walkability of a location to identify and document if and how pedestrians can safely travel along a street, navigate an intersection and get from Point A to B and C and so on.

A WALK AUDIT CAN ...

- Gather input about community infrastructure needs and investments
- Educate residents about design elements that support safety
- Empower community members and local leaders to become agents of change

A WALK AUDIT CAN LEAD TO ...

- Reduced traffic congestion and pollution
- Healthier, more active lifestyles
- Increased property values
- Safer streets for people of all ages

WHO CAN DO A WALK AUDIT?

- *Everyone and anyone!*

AARP and Walkability

In a livable community, people of *all* ages can safely walk for fitness and to get where they need or want to go. However:

- A community without sidewalks — or with sidewalks that suddenly end — is not walkable
- Streets that are too wide, have multiple lanes or lack traffic lights are uncrossable
- Public transit stops that pedestrians can't safely access are essentially useless

Because the vast majority of the nation's roadways were designed to move cars *fast*, far too many streets are simply unwalkable.

Walkability is an important issue to AARP because older adults — along with people of color and residents of low-income communities — are disproportionately the victims of fatal motor vehicle crashes involving pedestrians.

In fact, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the rates of pedestrian deaths in vehicle crashes per 100,000 people are highest for those age 70 or older.

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** provides community leaders and residents with a way to identify unsafe streets, gather and document needed information and observations, and then advocate for solutions to make streets safer for all users. ■

Walk This Way — or Any Which Way

The words “walking” and “pedestrians” are used in this tool kit as inclusive terms.

To quote the *Inclusive Walk Audit Facilitator's Guide*, published in 2020 by the Minnesota Department of Health, walking “includes both ambulatory and non-ambulatory modes. Walking encompasses all forms of mobility devices, including using a wheelchair, cane, walker or other mobility device that allows the user to travel at human speed.”

Inclusivity is important to the walk audit process since streets should be usable by people of all ages, experiences and abilities.

For that reason, walk audits done by groups or teams are best when they include auditors who walk at different speeds, who “roll” rather than walk, who have vision or hearing impairments, or other differences that impact them as pedestrians.

After all, when a street is safe and accessible for someone with a disability or mobility difference, it is safe and accessible for everyone.



Frederick, Maryland

Creative Solutions

◀ There are two ways to reach the pedestrian bridge that crosses a small canal in the center of town. Option 1: Take the stairs. Option 2: Use the ramp.

▶ A portable beach access mat makes the shore accessible — and walking or rolling on the sand easier — for all visitors.



Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

GETTING STARTED

Step 1: Get *READY*

1 WHERE IDENTIFY THE WALK AUDIT LOCATION

Visit and map an area where people need or want to walk. The audit location can cover just one spot — such as an intersection or block — or it can take place along an entire route covering several streets and intersections.

Keep in mind:

- The smaller the area, the easier it is to conduct an audit, identify problems and advocate for solutions to get results.
- The larger the audit area, the larger the potential impact.

WALK AUDIT TYPE:

Single-Location Audit

▼ A person on foot usually can't cover the full expanse of this multilane, two-way roadway all at once. (Look closely. A pedestrian is waiting on the small median until the light changes and it's possible to cross.) This intersection is adjacent to apartments, medical offices, restaurants and several shops, but because walking is both unpleasant and unsafe, people generally drive to destinations in the area.



2 WHAT DECIDE ON A TYPE OF WALK AUDIT

Will the walk audit take place in one location? Or will the audit occur along a route?

This tool kit contains worksheets suitable for an observational single-location audit or a walking audit in which the participants experience an area's walkability (or, more likely, nonwalkability).

Keep in mind:

- A single-location audit allows for observing a specific area at different times of the day. It's also a good activity for people who are unable to remain on their feet for long stretches of time.
- A single-location audit is also a great way to include very young and much older participants in the activity since the auditors can sit in a safe and comfortable spot (such as on a building patio or beneath the shade of a nearby tree) while counting people or cars or whatever their assigned task might be.
- A walking audit assesses the walkability of a larger area, such as between key destinations, and is a useful activity for people who can and want to walk longer distances and can be active for longer amounts of time.

Learn the Lingo

Study up by examining the illustrations and vocabulary words on page 10. Knowing the elements of a streetscape will be very helpful when you write a report (see page 16) and describe to local leaders or transportation officials what's wrong and what needs to be fixed.

3 WHO INVITE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE

Will the walk audit be conducted by one person or several? If several, how will people of different abilities, ages and life experiences be included?

The tool kit contains worksheets suitable for a solo auditor or a team made up of neighbors, colleagues, community members and, ideally, elected officials or others with influence.

(Having local leaders see and experience the location and pedestrian safety problems firsthand can be a fast track to achieving needed change.)

Keep in mind:

- If the walk audit is conducted by one person, multiple visits might be needed in order to perform all of the desired observations (or to evaluate the street activity at various times of the day) and document them accordingly.
- If the audit is done by two or more people, individual assignments can be made. Train the auditors ahead of time so everyone counts and documents their observations in the same way.
- After a team audit, someone will need to gather and tally the collective results.

4 WHEN CHOOSE A DATE AND TIME

The volume and type of traffic (cars, buses, bikes, pedestrians) will likely vary depending on the day of the week or time of day.

Is the walk audit being done because of concerns about the safety of particular pedestrians, such as schoolchildren, workers, shoppers or retirees? If so, conduct the audit when those people will be present.

If observations are needed during multiple times of the day (including after dark), schedule auditors to work in shifts.

Keep in mind:

- Check the weather forecast! There's no need for walk auditors to endure extreme temperatures, precipitation or wind.
- To be more comprehensive in the audit and secure about the observations, consider repeating the audit in the same spot, in the same way but on a different day.
- Once the audit is done, start preparing the report. (See page 16.) The findings can be shared with the community and presented to local leaders who may be able to solve or help solve the documented problems. ■

WALK AUDIT TYPE:

Walking Audit

► The young people in this photograph are walking home from school along a 1½-mile route dotted with houses, stores, eateries and other businesses — but no sidewalks, crosswalks or mid-block crossings. Due to early school starting times and late-ending extracurricular activities, teenagers often walk to or from school in the dark.



GETTING STARTED

Step 2: Get *SET* ...**1 PRINT THE WALK AUDIT WORKSHEETS**

The *AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit*'s worksheets can be downloaded at [AARP.org/WalkAudit](https://www.aarp.org/WalkAudit) for printing, photocopying and sharing. Some of the worksheets are suitable for a solo auditor. Others are helpful for group efforts. There are options for observational audits that take place in one location, as well as for audits that document the walkability between destinations.

The collection is listed on page 1, and the printed edition of this guide contains a pocket for storing the worksheets.

2 GATHER THE WALK AUDIT SUPPLIES

In addition to the selected worksheets, each walk auditor will need a:

- clipboard
- notebook, pen or pencil, tape measure
- digital or smartphone camera
- printed or online street map

It can also be important to have:

- comfortable footwear
- weather-suitable clothing
- insect repellent
- portable seating
- a beverage and snack
- a hat, sunscreen and sunglasses
- a flashlight or headlamp
- a brightly colored shirt, jacket or safety vest for visibility (preferably one with pockets for holding supplies)



A. Children can't safely cross this street to travel between their homes (in a development on the left) and the elementary school (seen on the right).



B. The street lacks sidewalks and crosswalks.



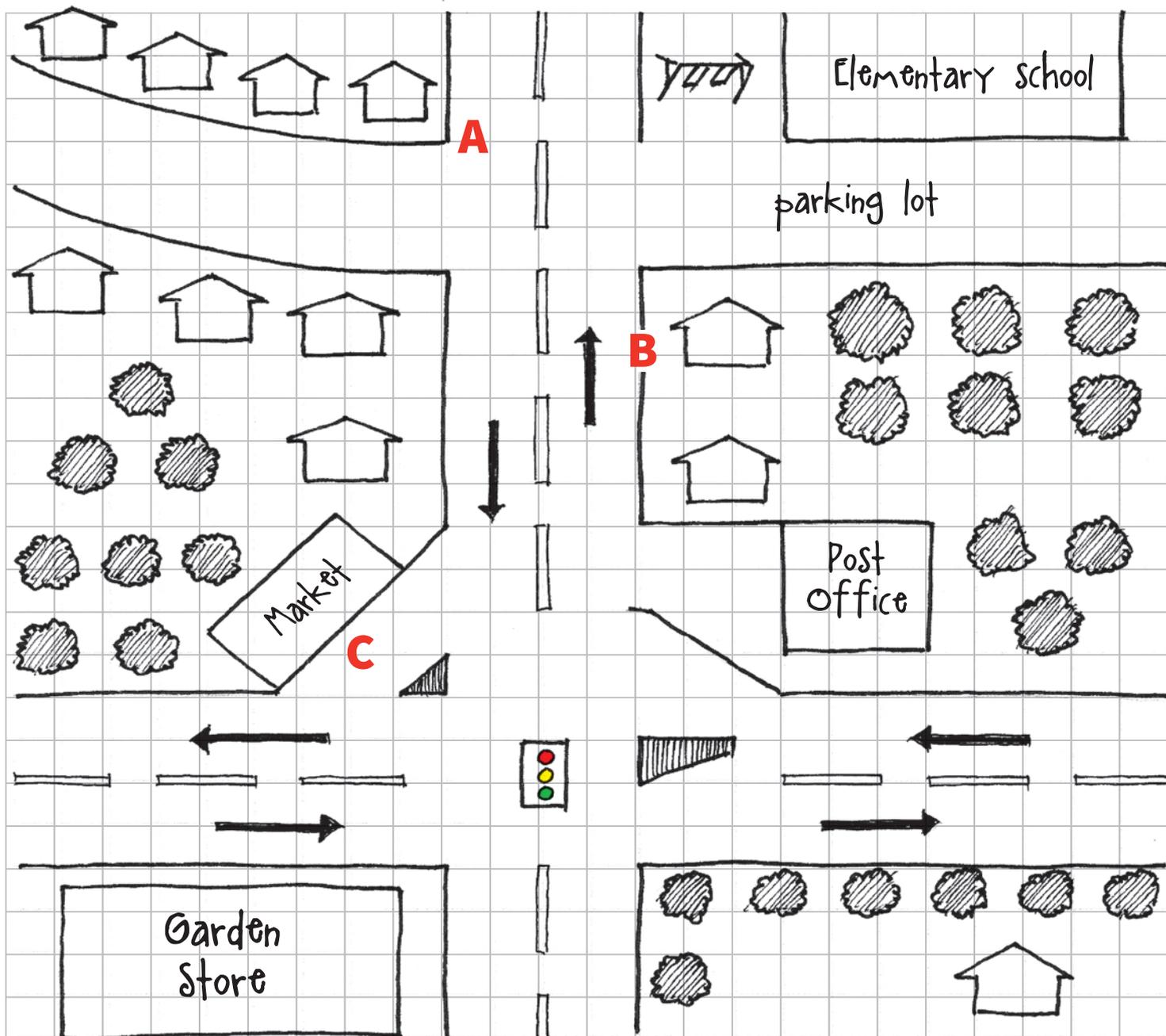
C. With such a large intersection and no crosswalks or pedestrian beacons (described on page 11), walking to the market is difficult and dangerous.

Sample

3 MAKE A MAP

Use a mapping website to capture and print a bird's-eye-view image of the walk audit area, or use our Make a Map worksheet (which can be downloaded and printed from AARP.org/WalkAudit) to draw a simple map.

- Label the streets and make note of any key features, such as stores, schools and (if they exist) sidewalks.
- Take photographs and/or video of the area so others can see the challenges and strengths.
- Match and mark the photographs and/or video location(s) on the map.
- Indicate any other problem spots or areas of opportunity (e.g., a bus stop with no seating or shelter). ■



STEP 3: GO do the Walk Audit!

1 LOOK AND LEARN

With clipboards and worksheets in hand, go to the audit site. When a walk audit is staffed by many workers or volunteers, the tasks can be divvied up among them.

Audit activities can include:

- Counting cars that pass the location
- Counting pedestrians who walk along and/or cross the street
- Noting demographic characteristics of the pedestrians (e.g., age, physical ability)
- Timing how long the traffic light stops vehicles so pedestrians can cross
- Assessing why people are walking in the location (exercising, commuting, shopping, dog walking, etc.)

Creative Solutions



Washington, D.C.



Lewes, Delaware

Bicycles shouldn't be used on sidewalks, and bikes and stairs are not a good mix. But cyclists sometimes do need to navigate one or both.

▲ A narrow, metal ramp helps cyclists move bikes along steps. ◀ A message stenciled on a sidewalk serves as a safety reminder.

Understanding the “Why”

Although a walk audit needn't involve stopping pedestrians for interviews, it's important to have a sense of why people are walking in a particular area. Doing so can help pinpoint problems and solutions.

Look for clues:

- Pedestrian traffic that picks up around lunchtime might indicate nearby workers are traveling from their jobs to area shops and restaurants. (If so, can they move about safely? Are there crosswalks? Do the traffic lights allow pedestrians enough time to cross the street?)
- Are people driving to eateries, shops and businesses near their homes or workplaces because there's no safe way for them to walk?
- The lack of pedestrians can also provide clues. What could be done to encourage more walking and less driving?

A true example:

A housing development is located next to a public library and a community center.

The residents routinely drive to both destinations. Why?

Conversations with some of the neighbors reveal the (fixable) reason: The sidewalk connecting the neighborhood to the community buildings ends abruptly, forcing pedestrians to either walk in the roadway or follow an uneven dirt path through a wooded area.

Get Inspired!

The AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit gets results!

- Jermaine Mitchell, an assistant professor of exercise and nutrition science at the University of Montevallo in **Montevallo, Alabama**, has his students use the *AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit* to assess the walkability of local neighborhoods. Sidewalks have been fixed and crosswalks added as a result of their work.
- Working with AARP, older residents in **South Austin, Texas**, conducted a walk audit to document the dangers of crossing a busy four-lane roadway that separated a bus stop and the local senior center. With their observations in hand (documented by a video and a detailed report about the results), the auditors delivered their findings to their city council member. A pedestrian hybrid beacon (see page 11 to learn what that is) was installed.
- In **Edgewater, Maryland**, a retirement community was built just three-tenths of a mile from two shopping centers. To get to the retail areas by foot, however, residents needed to cross four lanes of traffic with cars often coming, sometimes dangerously fast, from both directions. Two neighbors joined forces to lobby the county transportation department for a safer street. The result: A pedestrian island (pictured) was installed to provide walkers with a safe place to stand when they can't cross all four lanes at once. In addition, a sensor-operated beacon with flashing lights alerts drivers when a pedestrian enters the crosswalk.



Edgewater, Maryland

▲ This walk audit duo succeeded in getting their county's transportation department to install a pedestrian island.

2 PRODUCE THE PROOF

Although a summary report will be created based on the information in the worksheets, taking photographs and video of the audit location will help clarify what's working and what isn't.

Use the photographs and video (along with the audio if traffic noise is among the concerns) to document and show the overall area as well as the problem spots.

Since many walk audits reveal both bad features and good ones, be sure to photograph the location's positive attributes as well. ■

Details to focus on include:

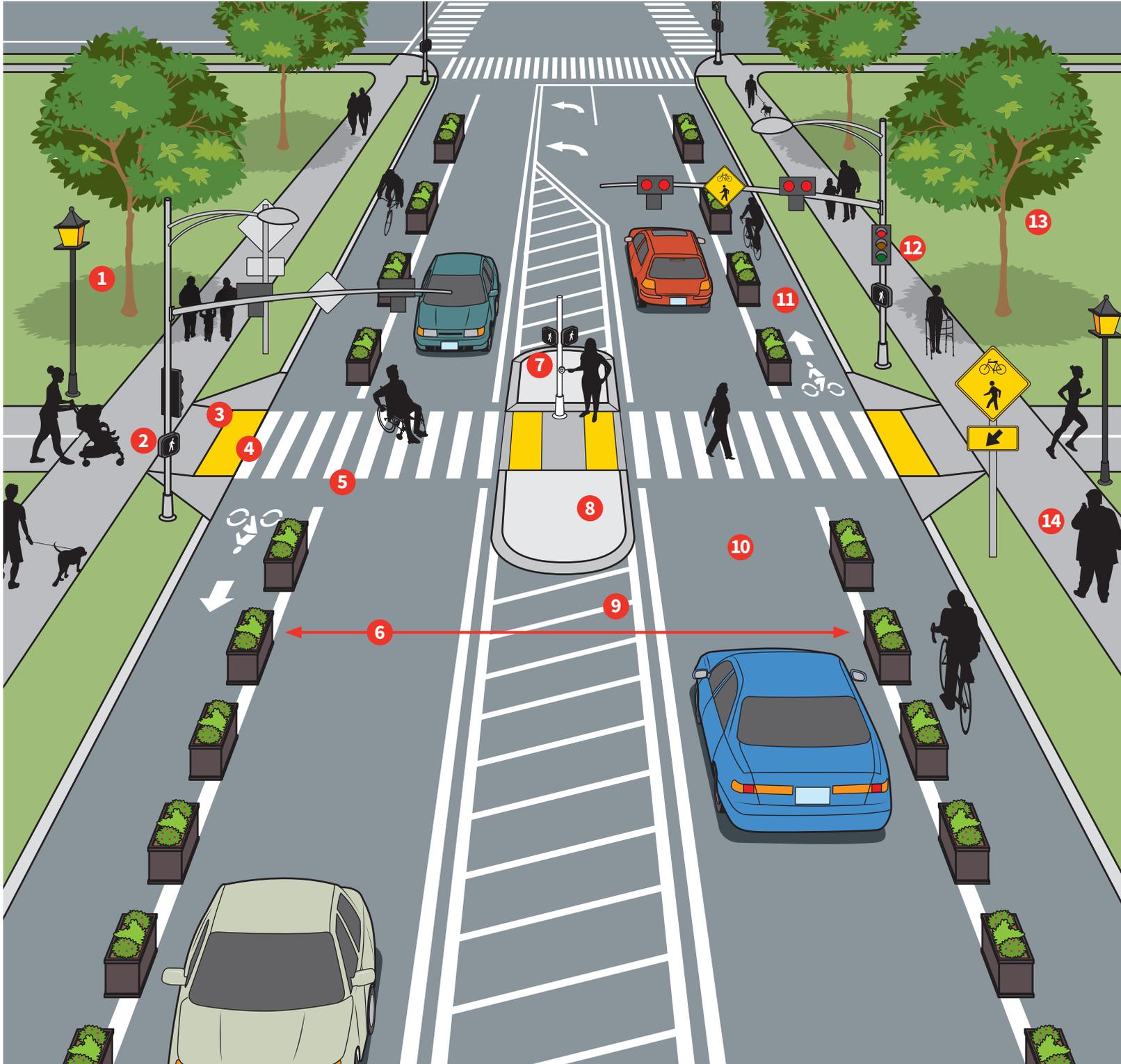
- crossing signals
- overhead traffic lights
- turning lanes
- curb cuts
- sidewalks
- crosswalks and vehicle stop lines
- lighting

Photographs can be taken to show where such safety and pedestrian-friendly features *should* exist.

INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

A Streetscape Vocabulary List

Transportation planners, engineers and advocates speak in a language that is sometimes incomprehensible to the average reader or resident. Employing terminology used by these professionals in the walk audit report will show that the auditor or auditors have done the necessary homework. Herewith some words and terms for talking the talk.



1 Pedestrian-Scaled Lighting

These light fixtures are positioned lower (about 12 to 14 feet above the sidewalk) than typical roadway or highway lights, are placed more closely together and are directed toward where people walk or bicycle.

2 Signalized Pedestrian Crossing

Properly timed Walk/Don't Walk devices enable pedestrians to complete a crossing before the signal changes and the vehicles move again.

3 Curb Cut (or Curb Ramp)

A solid ramp graded down from the top of a sidewalk to the surface of an adjoining street allows smooth passage for wheelchairs, bicycles and baby strollers.

4 Tactile Ground Surface Indicators

Installed in sidewalks, roadways and other surfaces, the indicators are raised stubs or bumps that warn pedestrians who are blind or have impaired vision that they're about to step into a street.

5 Crosswalk

Marked crosswalks show pedestrians where to cross and signify to motorists that they must yield. Crosswalks are usually indicated by white or yellow painted lines that are about 12 inches wide and extend from curb to curb.

6 Lane Width

When vehicle lanes or roadways are overly wide, pedestrians are forced to walk farther to cross streets. Highways generally have 12-foot-wide lanes. Streets in city and suburban neighborhoods can range from 9 to 15 feet wide.

7 Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon

Unlike a pretimed traffic signal or Walk/Don't Walk sign, this device is activated by pedestrians when needed. (Note: A real streetscape like the one at left likely wouldn't need this type of beacon since the traffic lights and walk signs would be synchronized to enable the crossings.)

8 Pedestrian Island

Also referred to as a crossing island or refuge island, a pedestrian island protects people who are crossing a multilane roadway. An island allows pedestrians to focus on one direction of traffic at a time as they cross, and it provides a place to wait for a gap in oncoming traffic. Another benefit: drivers typically slow down due to a narrowing of the vehicle lanes.

9 Median Strip

A portion of the roadway that separates opposing traffic. The area may be paved, planted, painted (as shown) or raised.

10 Travel Lane

The dedicated space on the roadbed for motorized vehicles to drive on.

11 Bicycle Lane

A designated (ideally barrier-protected) bike lane is safest for cyclists, drivers and pedestrians. On very wide streets, a dedicated bicycle lane can be created by placing an ancillary lane for parked cars directly next to the roadway, and then using the space between the parked cars and the sidewalk as a bike lane. See an example on page 13.

12 Signal Timing

Traffic signal (aka traffic light) timing involves assigning "green time" to the vehicles and pedestrians entering an intersection.

13 Tree Canopy

Street trees provide shade and cooling — and safer streets! In a 2018 study, University of Colorado Denver researchers found that "increased tree canopy coverage was significantly associated with fewer crashes."

14 Sidewalk

If set back from the curb, a sidewalk needs to be at least 5 feet wide — or 6 feet if extended to the curb. For two people to walk together, 5 feet is the minimum suitable width. ■

INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

What Is a ‘Complete Street’?

A “Complete Street” is designed for all roadway users, whether they’re driving, riding, walking, bicycling or rolling (e.g., pushing a baby stroller, using a wheelchair).

Since not every street can or should be “complete,” Complete Streets policies simply require that the needs of all users be *considered* and, when appropriate, met.

During a demonstration project in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the urban planners of the firm Team Better Block worked with AARP to complete an existing street with a temporary makeover that transformed it from a street for cars into (as seen at right) one for all users.

Designing streets for pedestrians isn’t a new concept. In fact, until the 20th century, people walked *in* the street. Once automobiles arrived en masse, speed and efficiency became the point of street design and transportation planning.

When congestion slowed traffic, roads were widened, traffic signals and stop signs were removed, crosswalks faded away. In many places, being able to safely cross a street on foot or by bicycle is the exception rather than the rule.

Complete Streets policies — also referred to as Safe Streets policies — are being implemented by city, county and state governments nationwide. (See page 23 to learn more.) ■

Streets, Roads and ‘Stroads’

As explained by Charles L. Marohn, Jr., a transportation engineer and founder of the nonprofit organization Strong Towns, “Roads connect places, streets are the framework for building a place.”

According to Marohn, streets support *destinations* — homes, businesses, shops, attractions.

Roads create “the greatest value by providing the *fastest connection*” between two places where people want to be.

The problem, he says, is that too many communities are filled with “stroads,” which are multilane roadways designed to move cars quickly — yet they are populated with businesses, shops, attractions and even homes.

“Stroads are the most dangerous environment we routinely build in our cities,” Marohn declares in his 2021 book *Confessions of a Recovering Engineer*. “A person on a sidewalk has no defense at all if a vehicle leaves the roadway at stroad speeds. The person crossing the stroad is even more exposed and vulnerable. That is true even when they cross at designated places and at specified times.”

A stroad, Marohn emphasizes, “contains the elements of both [a] road and street but fails to provide the benefits of either.”



Fort Wayne, Indiana

- 1 This residential block's Complete Streets demonstration created a one-way roadway with on-street curb parking.
- 2 Landscaping (represented here by potted plants) serves as a "swale," or pervious surface for capturing stormwater.
- 3 A floating parking lane located away from the curb becomes a safety buffer for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 4 A "limitless lane," which is wider and slower than a traditional bike lane, is a shared-use path for bicyclists, people in wheelchairs, joggers and others.
- 5 Pedestrians are provided a very visible crosswalk.
- 6 An existing sidewalk is safely away from the vehicle and bicycle lanes.

INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

The Scorecard

Walk auditors can use whichever worksheets, measurements or rating system they want — so long as an explanation of the chosen method is provided. Letter grades, numerical rankings or words can be used to score the audited streets and spaces.

It's not unusual for an audit location to have a mix of positive and negative features. For example, the sidewalks might be perfect for walking, but the intersections are difficult to cross. If an overall rating is desired, one can be provided that encompasses the observations as a whole.

Several worksheets in the *AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit* ask the auditor to select an adjective that best describes the street or location's safe walkability. The following words and definitions are provided as an example.

Great: The area is very pedestrian-friendly and safe

Acceptable: The area is mostly pedestrian-friendly and safe

Mixed: The area is somewhat pedestrian-friendly and safe

Poor: The area is absolutely not pedestrian-friendly or safe

Included among our worksheets is a summary sheet (opposite) for tallying, calculating and listing the scores of different audit observations. ■

Creative Solutions

▼ A pedestrian island, bold crosswalk, landscaped median and raised brick-curbs (to prevent cars from parking and impeding visibility near the crosswalk) help make San Pablo Avenue safer for people walking between the small city's schools, senior center and community center.



Emeryville, California

▼ Guardrails and planting strips between a sidewalk and street help protect pedestrians. The pictured location has both as well as a visible crosswalk, school crossing signage, arrows and a flashing pedestrian-activated beacon that provide a collective alert to drivers.



Severna Park, Maryland

Summary

Sample

Record the score totals for each observation type

- Record the total number of yes responses for the category
- Record the total number of no responses for the category
- Record the one-word rating for the category

This information — as well as all notes, photographs, videos and observation discussions — will be helpful for writing a short report and/or preparing a PowerPoint presentation.

Community Name: Anytown

Street/Intersection Observed: Main between Elm Street and Walnut Street

Audit Date: September 23

WORKSHEET	YES RESPONSES	NO RESPONSES	RATING
			Great Acceptable Mixed Poor
Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings (Single-Location Audit)	9	0	Great
Sidewalks, Streets and Crossings (Walking Audit)	9	2	Acceptable
Sidewalks	10	9	Mixed
Streets and Crossings	2	8	Poor
Street Safety and Appeal	8	8	Mixed
Public Transit Access	2	4	Mixed

NOTES OR OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

Also see the "Who's Using the Street - and Why?"
and "Build a Better Block" worksheets.

TAKING ACTION

Reporting Results, Proposing Solutions

It's not easy to persuade local leaders to make transportation and roadway improvements. Obstacles abound: politics, costs, past practices and, very often, overlapping jurisdictions, such as when a road is managed by the state rather than the county or municipality that it passes through. But individuals and community groups can get the ball rolling — and inspire and achieve needed change — by identifying problems and calling attention to them. Some next steps:

1 PREPARE A REPORT

Summarize the walk audit's findings in a short, easy-to-read and easy-to-share report, handout, PowerPoint presentation and/or video.

As tempting as it may be to share every observation from the audit, elected officials, other local leaders and municipal staff might be put off and overwhelmed by a dense and lengthy document.

Share the most compelling highlights in the summary report. The deep details can be provided later if needed or requested.

A suggested outline of what to include:

- 1. Opener:** This top sheet or introductory slide or video clip should attract the attention of the intended recipient(s), so include a photograph or other visuals that show the location; the name of the community, street(s), route and/or destinations; and a brief statement describing the auditing group or participants.
- 2. Explanation of the Problem:** Provide information about the location, such as why it was chosen. If crash data exists for the location (from, perhaps, the local police, a government agency or advocacy group) include those details, including the time of day, speeds involved, likely causes and outcomes.
- 3. Map:** Download a map from the internet or use our map worksheet to draw one. Add labels and street names as needed.
- 4. Observations and Findings:** Provide a list or short narrative detailing what was observed.

5. The Need: Answer the potential question “Why does this street or location even *need* to be walkable?”

6. Proposed Solutions: No one wants to be handed a problem and simply told to fix it. Share ideas and suggestions for how the observed problems can be solved.

7. Contact Information: The recipients or target audience should know how to reach the audit team to ask questions, collaborate or, ideally, share news that the problems are being addressed and how.

2 SHARE THE RESULTS

If no local leader with the power to pursue a solution participated in the audit, send the report to those who *can* implement the desired changes or advocate for them. Consider sharing the report with local media as well.

- Research the submission options before starting the report — or even better, before the walk audit. That way the information can be gathered and provided in a format that will be the most useful. (Also, many government offices and community groups have an email address, online form or phone number for reporting street and sidewalk problems.)
- Keep a record of who the report was sent to, how and when. If there's no response, follow up.
- Talk to neighbors, friends and family about the results. Encourage them to do their own walk audit or join the continuing advocacy work.

Continued on page 18 ►

Sample Report

The following example slides show how a presentation can be organized and what it could look like

1

Community Walk Audit of Center Street



Between The Villas and The Towne Shopping Center

Conducted by residents of The Villas and several surrounding neighborhoods

5

Why the Street Should Be Pedestrian-Friendly

- People of all ages are getting too little exercise and are spending too much time driving or being driven in cars
- Residents who don't drive and/or don't have access to a car should be able to safely walk to the stores and businesses near their homes
- If residents can safely walk to the shopping center — and in doing so walk to the post office, library, grocery store, bank, hair salon, restaurants and medical offices located within it — the community will have fewer cars on the road, which will mean less vehicle traffic and less pollution
- If residents can safely and easily walk to the shopping center, they will be more likely to frequent the local businesses

2

The Problem

In The Villas, a community for older adults, residents can't safely walk to or from The Towne Shopping Center, located across Center Street.

- There's no traffic light or even a stop sign
- Pedestrians need to cross four lanes of fast-moving traffic
- The street has two lanes of traffic moving in each direction but no median
- There's no pedestrian island
- The painted crosswalk isn't readily visible to drivers
- The area isn't lit at night

6

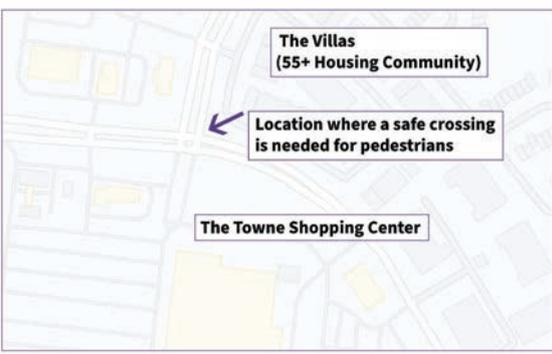
Possible Solutions

The crossing location on Center Street can and should be made safer. Ways this can be achieved include:

- Adding a pedestrian-controlled traffic signal
- Timing the traffic light and Walk/Don't Walk signs so slower pedestrians have enough time to cross
- Painting a crosswalk that is more visible to drivers
- Narrowing the roadway to one lane in each direction at the spot pedestrians will cross
- Placing a pedestrian island between the lanes of opposite-moving traffic
- Installing pedestrian-scaled lighting

3

The Location Map



The Villas (55+ Housing Community)

Location where a safe crossing is needed for pedestrians

The Towne Shopping Center

7

Contact Us

We want to work with the local government to make Center Street safer.



Reach us by:

- Email: pedestrians@email
- Telephone: 555-555-5555

4

Our Observations

Residents of The Villas and several surrounding neighborhoods audited the street and crossing location.

- Pedestrians had to wait up to 7 minutes to cross all four lanes of traffic
- Pedestrians needed 20 to 40 seconds to cross all four lanes
- Several pedestrians had to wait in the middle of the street to complete their crossing
- Nearly all the pedestrians we observed appeared to be in their 20s or 30s
- The older adults and parents with children we saw drove from the residential areas to the shopping center, even when their destination was the closest business

A report can also include:

- Testimonials (or quotes) from walk audit participants and area residents
- A brief history of the location, if known and if useful in explaining the problems
- A summary of the worksheet results
- Lots of photographs — of both the problems and examples of potential solutions (see page 20)

TAKING ACTION

Reporting Results, Proposing Solutions

3 ASK FOR A MEETING — AND ASK QUESTIONS

If distributing the report doesn't result in the desired action, seek a meeting with local leaders and organizations. In preparation for a scheduled meeting:

- Determine the preferred format for presenting the walk audit findings. For instance, does the local leader want a PowerPoint presentation, a single-page handout, a written report? Should the materials be provided before the meeting or during it?
- Meeting durations are often limited and may be cut short, so be ready to address the top priorities or most egregious problems first.
- Visit Smart Growth America's *Complete Streets Policy Atlas* to identify whether the community already has a Complete Streets policy. If a policy doesn't exist, encourage local leaders to adopt one.
- First implemented in Sweden in the 1990s, "Vision Zero" is a multi-national strategy to, as stated by the Vision Zero Network, "eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries among all road users, and to ensure safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all." Check out the network's *Vision Zero Communities Map*. If your community isn't on the list, encourage local leaders to set Vision Zero goals.
- Learn whether the community has attained certification as a *Walk Friendly Community* (from Walk Friendly Communities) and/or a *Bicycle Friendly Community* (from The League of American Bicyclists).
- If the town, city or county is enrolled in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, examine its age-friendly action plan to see if walkability is among its age-friendly goals.

4 TESTIFY!

Another way to pursue solutions — especially if distributing the report doesn't result in the desired outcome or if local officials are unwilling to meet — is to testify in person at a public meeting or hearing.

Unlike courtroom testimony, testifying at a public meeting of a city, town or county council usually occurs during a portion of the meeting when members of the public are invited to speak about a topic of concern.

Testimony rules vary greatly by community and organization. Some meetings require speakers to register and submit materials in advance. Many have time limits (2 minutes, 3 minutes, 4 minutes) per speaker.

A TIP: If more time is needed for explaining and presenting the walk audit findings, bring along others to testify about the topic. Each person can handle a portion of the report or presentation, so instead of a 2-minute airing, the walk audit can be discussed and more comprehensively explained over several minutes from several speakers.

5 PROPOSE SOLUTIONS

Elected officials constantly hear about problems. What isn't as common is for them to hear about a problem *and* a solution.

Strategies, plans and proposals can come from the community. In fact, the chances of achieving positive change increase when knowledgeable community members inform, work with and assist the local leaders and transportation officials who will need to implement solutions. ■

Seeking Solutions

The Types of Elected Officials Who May Be of Help

Outreach should begin at the local level. State representatives can be contacted later if needed or if the roadway in question is within their jurisdiction.

- **Local:** Mayor, County Executive, City Council Member, County Council Member, Town Council Member, Alderperson, District or Ward Liaison, Homeowner Association Board Members
- **State:** Delegate, Senator, Assembly Member, Governor

The Types of Government Departments That Might Have Jurisdiction

- **Local:** Department of Public Works, Department of Streets and Sidewalks, Department of Transportation, Regional Planning Commission
- **State:** Department of Transportation
- **Federal:** Department of Transportation

The Types of Organizations That Can Help Advocate for Change

- Area Agencies on Aging
- Businesses and business advocacy groups
- Civic associations
- Homeowner associations
- Local advocacy organizations (e.g., AARP)
- Local media (newspapers, websites, TV)
- Schools
- Nonprofits
- Walking and bicycling groups

An Aside About Sidewalks

Getting a sidewalk added can be complicated. Among the challenges and considerations:

- Unless the land where a sidewalk will be placed is owned by the municipality, or is an easement area that allows the local government to use of a strip of private property for public use, access for adding a sidewalk could require negotiating with the respective property owners. That might involve buying or taking (through eminent domain) land from a homeowner or business.
- Installing a sidewalk where one doesn't already exist is easier if the work involves filling a gap in an otherwise continuous sidewalk.
- In many areas, the local department of public works or transportation will need to be involved in any decisions about the placement and width of sidewalks.
- Although the responsibility for maintaining publicly owned sidewalks officially falls to the local government, homeowner association or public works department, maintenance of many if not most sidewalks is the property owner's responsibility. (That includes the need to shovel snow and salt or chip away ice.) Some owners fulfill that responsibility, some don't.
- Caring for trees and bushes that intrude upon a sidewalk is usually the responsibility of the property's owner. A local government or homeowner association can send a notice asking the owner to perform the maintenance. If the property owner does not comply, a public works or contracted landscape crew might trim the greenery and bill the property owner.
- Some communities or neighborhoods have ordinances restricting the installation of sidewalks or curbs for aesthetic reasons. Advocating for sidewalks in these areas can be challenging. If adding sidewalks is not possible, the local government can still make the streets safer for pedestrians by employing traffic-calming measures (such as those described in the next section).

TAKING ACTION

Strategies for Safer Streets

Elected officials and other local leaders don't know everything about every aspect of managing or planning for a community's needs. After all, in many communities, local government is a part-time — and unpaid — job. The daily life grind of immediate needs often prevent community leaders from addressing complicated or long-term problems, learning about new and improved best practices, or staying updated about innovative ideas and solutions.

Following are some traffic-calming methods that make streets safer for all roadway users, especially pedestrians. Many local leaders aren't even aware of these terms, definitions and solutions.



Fargo, North Dakota



Bath, Maine



Edgewater, Maryland



Wayne, Maine

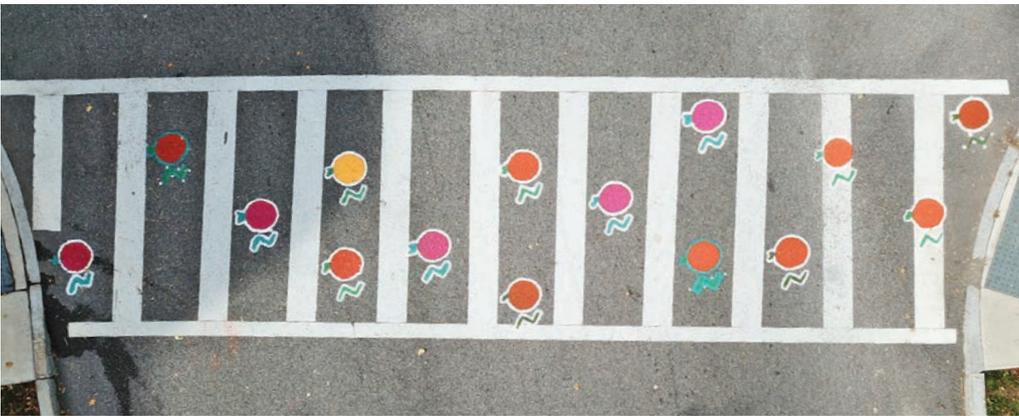
◀ Unlike the towering, “high-mast” lighting used on highways, **PEDESTRIAN-SCALED LIGHTING** brightens sidewalks, crosswalks and any dark spots where people might walk at night. Street lamps also enhance a location's appeal, help pedestrians see potential hazards and make them visible to drivers.

◀ A **PEDESTRIAN ISLAND** provides a safe place for pedestrians to stop and stand at a wide roadway's mid-point. **FLASHING TRAFFIC SIGNS** can (among other benefits) alert drivers to congested areas or to pedestrians crossing the roadway.



Arlington, Virginia

- ◀ By extending the sidewalk, a **CURB EXTENSION** or **BULB-OUT** narrows a roadway to reduce pedestrian crossing distances as well as driving speeds.



Buffalo, New York

- ◀ Artistic **CROSSWALKS** are fun and attractive and draw the attention of pedestrians *and* drivers. Another option (not shown) is a **RAISED CROSSWALK**, which, by being flush with the height of the sidewalk, increases the visibility of pedestrians and serves as a speed hump for vehicles.



Hilton Head, South Carolina

- ◀ When temperatures rise, the shade provided by a **TREE CANOPY** helps cool down streets, sidewalks and entire neighborhoods. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, a dense tree canopy can provide a cooling temperature difference of up to 45 degrees Fahrenheit.



Charlotte, North Carolina

- ◀ A **ROAD DIET** is a solution that reduces the number of lanes and/or the width of a street to help control traffic speeds. (In this example, the road was narrowed by turning the center lanes into a landscaped median.)

Continued ▶



New York, New York

◀ **PROTECTED BICYCLE LANES** and **SIDEWALKS** help organize street traffic and enhance the safety of all users by providing designated travel lanes for vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians.



Washington, D.C.

◀ Another way to make a street more people-friendly is to convert parking spots into **PARKLETS**, which are essentially custom-designed on-street patios that provide parking for people rather than cars. Parklets became a very popular public-spaces solution for restaurants and other businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Chino Valley, Arizona

▲ Outdoor, street-level furnishings are usable and needed by people of all ages. For locations with bus stops or other public transit waiting areas, **SEATING** and **SHELTER** from the elements (rain, snow, a blazing sun) are important — in fact, essential — streetscape features. ■

More Strategies

- If a traffic signal already exists, ask that the **TRAFFIC-SIGNAL TIMING** be adjusted to accommodate slower moving pedestrians, such as children, older adults and people with disabilities.
- A **NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH** group can keep an eye out for speeders, criminal activity and other conditions or activities that prevent people from being able to safely walk.
- The tactics in this section can be introduced to a community through a **POP-UP DEMONSTRATION**, which is a temporary installation (lasting for a few hours, days or weeks) that allows a solution to be tested and tweaked before making a permanent change.

TAKING ACTION

Learn More

ONCE ALL THAT'S DONE, DO IT AGAIN!

- Invite local leaders and decision-makers to join the next walk audit!
- Choose a different street, or several, to learn whether conditions similar to those in the first walk audit exist.
- Get involved to help address the barriers that are keeping the community's streets and sidewalks from being safe and welcoming for all users.
- Download and print the needed worksheets at AARP.org/WalkAudit. If you have the printed edition of the tool kit, store them in the back cover pocket. ■

The Walking College

Established in 2015, the Walking College is a competitive, six-month, remote-learning fellowship offered by America Walks, with support from AARP and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Participants complete a series of modules covering topics including the basics of walkable design, navigating the public policy process, effectively engaging decision-makers and fostering a local advocacy movement.

By the end of the program, fellows develop a walking action plan that lays out a series of short- and long-term strategies for tackling an identified problem in their communities.

WAYS TO LEARN MORE

The following organizations are advocates for walkability and safer streets for all users. Each has useful resources. Search online for their websites.

Active People, Healthy Nation

America Walks

How I Walk: A Campaign to Rebrand Walking

Institute of Transportation Engineers

National Association of City Transportation Officials

National Complete Streets Coalition

Smart Growth America's Complete Streets Policy Atlas

The League of American Bicyclists

Vision Zero Network's Vision Zero Communities Map

Walk Friendly Communities Recognition Program

Creative Solutions



Bucksport, Maine

▲ Bucksport's Golden Shovel Award is given to the business that does the best job of keeping its sidewalks free of snow. The winner's name is written on the shovel. Much like Miss America's tiara, the prize is handed down to the next champion. BookStacks owner Andy Lacher (shown in 2015) is a repeat winner.

AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit

A SELF-SERVICE GUIDE FOR ASSESSING A COMMUNITY'S WALKABILITY

WRITER/EDITOR: Melissa Stanton, AARP Livable Communities

ART DIRECTOR: Mimi Park, Design Park, Inc.

ILLUSTRATOR: Colin Hayes | COPY EDITOR: Don Armstrong | ART PRODUCTION: Steve Walkowiak

PROJECT ADVISORS: Danielle Arigoni (AARP Government Affairs) | Anne Hails (AARP Alabama)

Coralette Hannon (AARP Government Affairs) | Sheila Holm (AARP Missouri)

Mike Kulick (AARP Community Engagement) | Jana Lynott (AARP Public Policy Institute)

Addison B. Pollock (AARP Indiana) | Kelly Stoddard Poor (AARP Vermont) | Ian Thomas (America Walks)

Darrin Wasniewski (AARP Wisconsin) | Mike Watson (AARP Livable Communities) | Shondra E. Wygal (AARP Texas)

PHOTO CREDITS:

Pages 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 Melissa Stanton, AARP

Page 13: Team Better Block

Page 14: Melissa Stanton, AARP (Emeryville, California) | Olde Severna Park Improvement Association (Severna Park, Maryland)

Page 20: Melissa Stanton, AARP (Fargo, North Dakota | Bath, Maine | Edgewater, Maryland) | Aging-at-Home Wayne (Wayne, Maine)

Page 21: David Goodman (Arlington, Virginia) | Melissa Stanton, AARP (Hilton Head, South Carolina) | Team Better Block (Buffalo, New York)
City of Charlotte (Charlotte, North Carolina)

Page 22: Melissa Stanton, AARP (New York, New York | Washington, D.C.) | Yavapai Regional Transit (Chino Valley, Arizona)

Page 23: Charles Eichacker, *The Ellsworth American* (Bucksport, Maine)

Back Cover: Melissa Stanton, AARP

Download the worksheets at
[AARP.org/WalkAudit](https://www.aarp.org/WalkAudit)
and store them in this pocket.

Get In Touch!

We want to hear about your walk audit. What worked? What didn't? Do you have suggestions for how to improve this tool kit? If the *AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit* helped achieve needed change, please tell us about your success! Email: Livable@AARP.org | Twitter: [@AARPLivable](https://twitter.com/AARPLivable)

Walk Audit Tool Kit

A self-service guide for assessing a community's walkability



Pedestrian and Cyclist Crosswalks
Washington, D.C.



Road Diet, Bulb-Outs, Curb Ramps and more
Cape May, New Jersey



Dedicated Bike Lane
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

In too many communities, people can't safely walk to where they need or want to go due to a lack sidewalks, crosswalks or other safety features that make streets safe for pedestrians *and* drivers.

A walk audit is a simple activity in which an individual or a team observes and evaluates the walkability of a location to document how and if pedestrians can safely travel along a street, navigate an intersection and get from point A to B, C and so on.

Who can conduct a walk audit? Anyone!

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** can be used by local leaders, advocates, community organizations and residents to ...

- enable people to get around without having to drive
- help reduce traffic congestion and pollution
- inspire the development of pedestrian-friendly streets
- increase exercise opportunities for people of all ages
- gather input about community infrastructure needs
- educate residents about street design elements that support safety
- encourage social interactions among neighbors
- give a boost to property values
- empower community leaders and residents to be the agents of needed change

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** is free and available for download or order.

Visit [AARP.org/WalkAudit](https://www.aarp.org/WalkAudit).