

Chapter 1 ~ Introduction

Background

Walking is our oldest and most basic form of transportation – one that is essential not only to our individual health, but also to the overall livability of our cities. Modernization for many cities has meant replacing walking with motorized travel as a primary form of transportation. Few sidewalks were built along roads that did not directly connect to destinations such as schools, work and shopping. Designed out of the road network, pedestrians walked less and drove more.

Louisville’s highly walkable and historically rich downtown sets a tone for the rest of the city. Its work, cultural and retail destinations are walkable because of a grid street pattern. The city is less walkable as one travels away from downtown, with fewer sidewalks in portions of Jefferson County.¹ Louisville area parks and trails provide scenic opportunities for recreation and fitness. However, there are still many untapped opportunities to facilitate comfortable and desirable walking options in the neighborhoods and areas located just outside downtown. Connecting the parks and existing trails to downtown will make Louisville an easier city for walkers to reach their destinations.

The Community Pedestrian Plan and Summit comes at a pivotal time for the Louisville area. Through a number of community-based initiatives, more and more citizens and elected officials have become interested in walking. Residents want better connections to the places they want to go, with safer sidewalks and intersections. Citizens and elected officials are also understand there are health issues related to sedentary lifestyles that are prevalent among children and adults who live in Louisville. Finally, current concerns about energy and global climate change make this plan especially timely.

Benefits of Walking

A growing body of evidence points to connections between physical and mental health and the built environment. Emerging trends point to a more comprehensive approach to our built environment that emphasizes pedestrian-friendly communities with a strong sense of place:

“Those pushing for more walkable communities in the U.S. say the trend is leaning in that direction, after years of building spread-out suburbs. Cities are reclaiming their waterfronts and creating more walkable downtown areas. Even some suburban areas are developing town centers as places to walk, shop, and gather together. Walkable communities are becoming more appealing to retired people, as well as young families. Both groups

Quick facts:

- ✓ Louisville Government has approved more than five miles of sidewalk in existing neighborhoods in the past three years at a cost of \$822,183.
- ✓ A 2003 study from Washington County, Oregon found that homebuyers are willing to pay more – an average of \$24,255 more – for design elements that make walking easier.
- ✓ 63% of Americans would like to run errands on foot and walk to stores.

¹ The Louisville City and Jefferson County governments were unified in 2003.

like the convenience of having stores, entertainment, and services all within walking distance.”²

Pedestrians are one of the cornerstones of the community’s viability, and there are numerous opportunities to apply solutions that will benefit many aspects of their lives. From a health perspective, moderate physical activity through walking can lead to such health benefits as reduced risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and other chronic diseases, improving the quality of life for people of all ages. As an approach to transportation, walking can contribute to reduced traffic congestion. Additionally, well-designed, walkable neighborhoods improve pedestrian safety. In turn, these transportation benefits result in multiple environmental benefits including reduced land needed for roads and parking facilities, open space preservation, reduced energy consumption and pollution emissions, improved aesthetics, reduced water pollution from non-point sources, and reduced “heat island” effects. Individual citizens would spend less to maintain their cars and benefit from increased property values resulting from pedestrian-friendly development. Finally, walkable communities contribute to a more equitable society by providing greater transportation options for all citizens. Over time, the plan should result in more people walking with greater enjoyment and safety and improvements to community health and quality of life.

Louisville Government is committed to developing a walkable city through its Complete Streets Policy, partnerships with organizations like Active Louisville, and efforts through the Mayor’s Healthy Hometown Movement (including the Pedestrian Summit and Community Walkability Plan). The American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) and Prevention magazine’s ranking of walkable cities in the nation, placed Louisville 126th. When the Brookings Institute ranked the 30 most walkable large metropolitan areas in the United States, Louisville didn’t make the list. A Walkability Plan will help Louisville assess the walkability of its neighborhoods and develop a plan to encourage residents to enjoy the many benefits of this simple form of exercise and transportation.

Developing the Plan

The Plan is the result of much work through the Mayor’s Healthy Hometown Movement, consultant involvement, and significant public input during five community workshops, and technical meetings over a five-month period, culminating in a very successful Pedestrian Summit on May 10, 2008.



The Mayor’s Healthy Hometown Movement (MHHM) was the catalyst for the master plan. The purpose of the MHHM initiative is to “create a community-wide culture that encourages and supports healthy lifestyles by promoting increased physical activity, better nutrition, healthy public policy and access to needed resources.” Initially the target audience was public sector employees and has since grown to include every Louisville citizen. A major thrust of the program has been to improve Louisville’s walkability in order to create more opportunities for Louisville citizens to exercise and stay active. In turn, the Comprehensive Walkability Plan was initiated.

² <http://www.aarp.org/health/fitness/walking/a2005-01-19-walking.html>

Public input played a prominent role in developing the plan. Louisville posted an on-line survey to gather information and current walking habits and factors that will increase walking in Louisville. Citizens, community groups and developers, the business community and appointed officials participated in four community workshops and a pedestrian summit. Detailed information on public input is provided in the “Public Involvement and Stakeholder Input” section later in this chapter.

Louisville staff also contributed to the plan’s development. Staff provided research and feedback; many staff members also participated in the Pedestrian Summit alongside community members. They shared information on current practices. Senior managers worked directly on the plan as the Walkability Leadership Task Force, meeting the afternoon before the Pedestrian Summit to review outcomes from the four community workshops.³ Walkability Leadership Task Force members represented:

- Foundation for a Healthy KY
- Homebuilders of Louisville
- Private Developers
- Louisville Metro Planning & Design
- Louisville Metro Public Works & Assets
- Air Pollution Control District
- Jefferson County Public Schools
- Kentucky Department of Transportation
- Louisville Metro Economic Development
- Brightside
- Louisville Downtown Management District
- Louisville Metro Parks
- Metropolitan Sewer District
- Louisville Metro Health & Wellness
- City of Parks
- Transit Authority of the River City (TARC)
- Downtown Development Corporation
- Office of the Elderly and Disabled
- University of Louisville
- Louisville Metro Department of Neighborhood
- Kentuckiana Regional Planning & Development Agency (KIPDA)

³ This plan recommends that the Walkability Task Force continue to maintain the cooperative, working relationship between departments and agencies by meeting regularly and discussing projects and policies that impact the pedestrian environment. See Action 2.1.1.a.

Public Involvement and Stakeholder Input

Public input and participation has been a key component of the planning process. Louisville citizens shared information about their current walking habits and factors that would convince them to walk more. Over 1,000 responses were collected from an online survey made available in the spring. Stakeholders and other members of the general public attended four community workshops held throughout the Louisville region to discuss effective public outreach techniques. Outcomes of the online survey and community workshops informed the discussion at the May, 2008 Pedestrian Summit. Summit participants offered suggestions on not only what specific necessary improvements but also where those improvements should start.

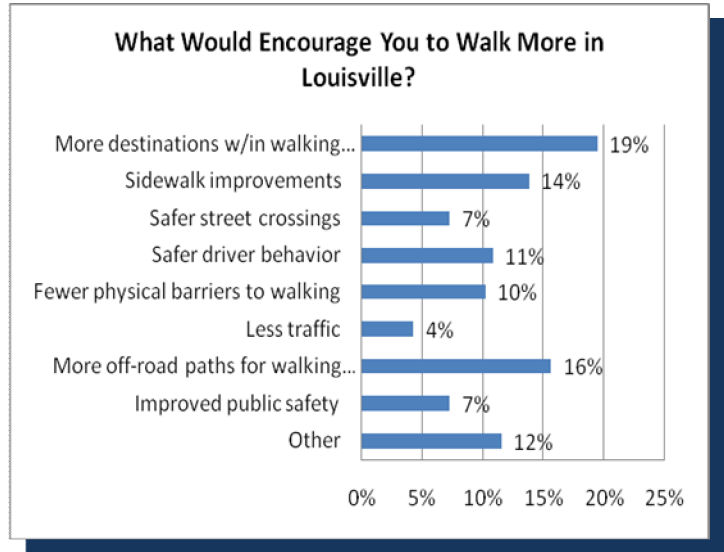


Figure 1.1- Graph of Online Survey Results

Facilitators at the community workshops and Summit used maps and group discussions to record detailed suggestions for the final draft of the Master Plan. This Plan represents the collective effort of over 200 people including Louisville staff, consultants, stakeholders, citizens and visitors.

ON LINE SURVEY. An online survey was available from March 26 through May 12, 2008 to gather insight on walking conditions throughout Louisville.⁴ This type of survey is an effective tool for expanding public input. Over 1,000 responses to the online survey were received. Response showed that participants would be more encouraged to walk if more destinations within walking distance; there were more off-road paths for walking or bicycling; sidewalks were improved, and drivers were more aware of pedestrians. (See Figure 1.1)

While respondents to this survey were self-selected and the results are not statistically representative of all residents' views, their concerns are typical. A 1995 study of the impact of neighborhood design on people's walking habits found that those living in pedestrian-friendly community walked, bicycled, or rode transit for 49% of work trips and 15% of their non-work trips, 18- and 11-percentage points more than residents in comparable automobile oriented communities.⁵ Contributing elements of high quality pedestrian environments include the condition and completeness of the sidewalk network, real or perceived safety of street crossings, and presence of obstacles to movement along the path of travel. Construction detours, vehicle loading or unloading, or other obstacles may also deter pedestrians from traveling to and from transit on foot.

⁴ Complete survey responses and results are located in Appendix A

⁵ Cervero and Radisch, 1995.

TRAVELING MAPS. Maps of the city were on display at the April community workshops and the May 10 Pedestrian Summit for addition public input. Participants identified places where walking was easy, and places needed improvements. Over two hundred comments were recorded on these “traveling maps” representing topics:

<p><u>Easy Walking</u> Walkability Trail/Loop/Path Good sidewalk Good sign</p>	<p><u>Needs Improvements</u> Maintenance/Accessibility Barrier Crossing Signs Transit service Connectivity Traffic behavior Sidewalk needed</p>
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The map and comments are located in Appendix B.⁶

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS. Four workshops were conducted over three days, April 16, 17 and 19, 2008. The outcome of these workshops informed the structure and content for the public Pedestrian Summit. Each workshop was focused on one of the following four themes: Safe Routes to School & Parks, Disabilities and Older Adults, Building Walkable Communities, Recreational Walking and Running. During each workshop, participants were asked to make commitments to improve walkability in Louisville. Commitments ranged from organizing neighborhood walking groups to volunteering at the Summit. These personal commitments underscore the realization that success of this Plan is dependent on long-term momentum. Even short-term solutions require a sustained drive to achieve success. Information on each workshop is below:

	Background	Workshop Focus
<i>Safe Routes to School</i>	<p>Neighborhoods and schools now look much different than they did 50 years ago. Disconnected cul-de-sacs and traffic-laden five lane roads are causing many communities to become increasingly isolated. As the population grows, communities are building bigger schools on cheaper land further away from population centers. Parks and open space are fewer and further between, and are mostly occupied by baseball diamonds and playgrounds with little natural setting. Without safe environments for walking and bicycling, children are shuttled to activities by car or bus, or resort to increased “screen time” — time spent in front of TVs, computers, video games or movies — instead of playing outdoors.</p>	<p>Participants learned how to identify walkability issues for Louisville schools, and strategic to make improvements.</p>

⁶ Comments on the maps are not representative of the entire City, as only those who attended the workshop and summit contributed to it.

<i>Disabilities and Older Adults</i>	<p>With nearly a quarter of Louisville’s population having some form of disability and nearly a fifth of the population being 65 years or older, it is imperative to address the pedestrian needs of this vulnerable population. Many Louisville streets are not walkable for older adults and others with limited mobility or physical challenges. Infrastructure challenges such as uneven or narrow sidewalks, inadequate curb cuts, and unsafe intersections prevent safe and accessible environments for these pedestrians.</p>	<p>The focus of this workshop was to identify the challenges and barriers that seniors and those with disabilities encounter in Louisville. Participants identified locations where these barriers are especially difficult.</p>
<i>Building Walkable Communities</i>	<p>Louisville’s built environment does not always accommodate pedestrians. Until the last decade, developers and local government considered sidewalks to be too costly with no real long-term benefits. Some residents even resisted new sidewalks because of concerns about safety, tree loss or other factors.</p>	<p>Participants discussed opportunities to improve the walking environment through standards in future development and redevelopment.</p>
<i>Recreational Walking and Running</i>	<p>With miles of parks, abundant fun runs, and neighborhood shopping districts, several marathons, and programs like the Norton Healthcare’s free Walking Club at the Louisville Zoo, Louisville is a great place to walk or run for fun and fitness. Despite the benefits of physical activity, only 35% of Kentuckians get the recommended 30 minutes a day of moderately intense activity 5 days a week.</p>	<p>Participants in this workshop discussed ways to encourage physical activity through walking and running. The group discussed worksite wellness programs and other incentives that organizations can create to share the responsibility of keeping Louisville an active and healthy city.</p>



Figure 2.1- Workshop participants during the pre-workshop walk

Hopefully, the community will have 'good' sidewalks throughout, as well as curb-cuts and traffic signals to allow everyone, regardless of disability, to enjoy the freedom of mobility.

Comment from Workshop on Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities.

THE PEDESTRIAN SUMMIT. The day-long Pedestrian Summit was held on Saturday May 10, 2008. About 100 people attended, representing Louisville neighborhoods, government, the business community and community groups. The Summit was organized around 4 themes that emerged from the on-line survey and community workshops. Led by Mark Fenton, a nationally recognized authority on walking for health and fitness and a walking advocate, participants discussed ways to improve walkability within the 4 themes:

Evaluating & planning for pedestrians
 Designing with the pedestrian in mind

Building, Funding and Implementing &
 building the pedestrian network
 Creating a pedestrian friendly community

These four themes, and the dialogue they created at the Pedestrian Summit, form the basis for the Community Walkability Plan. The Plan is a mix of enhancing work underway and new programs and projects. Nearly 20 objectives set against a 3-tiered timeframe (one year; three years and five years) are included. Forty specific actions flesh out the objectives, with a dozen “quick action” items highlighted to keep momentum for the push towards increased walkability. The detailed Community Walkability Plan is Chapter 4.

As the process for developing the plan demonstrates, success draws on an alliance of sources -- local community members, interest groups/organizations, the business community, elected officials and governmental agencies at all levels.



Figure 3.1- Summit participants with Mark Fenton

We must remove barriers – real and perceived – to create a more walkable Louisville.

Walkability Leadership Task Force member

