



A new push for more walkable U.S. cities

By AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION NEWS

 0331-Feature-Walkable Cities_Blog

Forget the old way of thinking about dilapidated

downtowns versus drivable, sprawling suburbs. There's a new move afoot toward walkable cities.

As the American Heart Association today celebrates **National Walking Day** to promote physical activity to help reduce heart disease, stroke and other diseases, researchers are finding a rising demand for highly walkable urban areas. And organizations have sprouted up to help make the vision a reality.

A recent **study** suggests the beginning of the end of sprawl in America's 30 largest metro regions. The study, from the George Washington University School of Business and real estate development and investor advocacy group LOCUS, ranks the 30 areas based on the amount of commercial development in "walkable urban places" – or WalkUPs.

Washington, D.C., New York City, Boston, the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago and Seattle ranked among the top current areas for walkable urbanism, the report found, citing office and retail space in these WalkUPs ranging from 27 percent to 43 percent.

While a few major cities such as Miami, Atlanta, Los Angeles and Denver "are making some surprising and unexpected shifts toward walkable urban development, walkable urban development is not limited to the revitalization of center cities; it is also the urbanization of suburbs," the report said.

Areas of walkable urbanism are much denser and have a mix of commercial space, retail stores, housing and restaurants. You can get there by car, rail transit, buses and bikes. Once there, virtually everything is within walking distance.

"I think you are going to see this is, in fact, the way we're going to be building our country over the next generation," study co-author Chris Leinberger said when he **presented** the findings. Leinberger is president of LOCUS and chairman of the Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis at George Washington University.

Another recent **study** found that a large majority of millennials – people ages 18 to 34 – want access to better transit options and the ability to be less reliant on a car. The survey, from The Rockefeller Foundation and the advocacy group Transportation for America, looked at how millennials felt about public transportation in 10 major U.S. cities.

More than half said they would consider moving to another city if it had more and better options for getting around. Some two-thirds said access to high-quality transportation is one of their top three criteria in deciding where to live. Nearly half of millennials surveyed who own vehicles said they would seriously consider giving up their car if they could rely on public transportation.

“The talented young workforce that every region is trying to recruit expects to live in places where they can find walkable neighborhoods with convenient access to public transportation. Providing those travel and living options will be the key to future economic success,” James Corless, director of Transportation for America, said in a statement.

Organizations like [America Walks](#) and the [Walkable and Livable Communities Institute](#) are working to help make the nation’s cities more pedestrian-friendly.

“Prioritize people, not cars. Slow down traffic speeds, stripe crosswalks and enforce traffic violations,” said Scott Bricker, executive director of America Walks, a nonprofit that provides strategy support, training and technical help to statewide, regional and local organizations.

The WALC Institute provides technical support on programs such as Safe Routes to Schools and workshops that include walking audits and community-driven action planning.

“Walkable places meet the needs of all people, including those of us in cars, but with an emphasis on human-focused design,” said Kelly Morphy, the WALC Institute’s executive director. “This is important for communities that want to be vibrant and healthy, as well as towns that want to be age-friendly where someone can live there through all the stages of life.”

Last December, staff from the WALC Institute visited Fort Worth, Texas, and conducted a walking audit.

In the nearby suburb of North Richland Hills, Mike and Brenda Treder can be found most mornings walking their regular 3-mile route along neighborhood streets and a new park trail. Sometimes they extend their trek to a 7-mile route.

About three years ago, Mike, 64, weighed 300 pounds. With regular exercise and a wife who carefully prepares his meals, he is down to 190. His weight dropped as low as 160, and Mike said he is determined to get back down to that weight.

The friendly retirees try to encourage others to join them on their walks, much like the American Heart Association. For National Walking Day, the AHA encourages everyone to lace up their shoes for a 30-minute walk that could be the first steps toward a healthier life. People can [register](#) for a free toolkit of materials and how-to information for workplaces, schools, individuals and community organizations.

Research shows that walking at least a half-hour a day can help reduce your risk of [coronary heart disease](#) and [stroke](#); improve your [blood pressure](#), blood sugar levels and blood lipid profile; [maintain your body weight](#) and lower the risk of [obesity](#). It can also enhance your mental well-being, reduce your risk of osteoporosis, reduce your risk of breast cancer and colon cancer, and reduce the risk of non-insulin-dependent ([Type 2](#)) [diabetes](#).

“We don’t try to set any records. We try to do 14- to 15-minute miles,” said Mike. “Getting to 65, if you don’t start taking care of yourself, who is? It’s all up to you.”