



March/April 2015

LOCUS

The WalkUP Wake-Up Call: Boston

Media Clip Book

BOSTON PRINT/ONLINE MEDIA COVERAGE

Boston: America's Most Walkable City?

By Kevin Hartnett

Boston Globe (print edition)

March 22, 2015

Boston is on track to becoming the most walkable city in America

By Kevin Hartnett

Boston Globe (online)

March 19, 2015

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2015/03/19/boston-track-become-most-walkable-city-america/HzMRdbm6fWjEwcaNcblfSO/story.html>

ViewPoint: Walkable urbanism: We must always make strides

Co-authored by Don Briggs, Federal Realty Investment Trust and Rob Griffin, Cushman & Wakefield

Boston Business Journal

April 3, 2015

<http://www.bizjournals.com/boston/print-edition/2015/04/03/viewpoint-walkable-urbanism-we-must-always-make.html>

*Ran in both print and online editions

Boston and the End of Urban Sprawl

WBUR's "Radio Boston" show

March 11, 2015

<http://radioboston.wbur.org/2015/03/11/boston-and-the-end-of-urban-sprawl>

Report: Greater Boston Needs More 'Walkable Urban Places'

By Zeninor Enwemeka

WBUR.org

March 11, 2015

<http://www.wbur.org/2015/03/11/walkable-urban-places-boston-report>

Radio Interview

With Anthony Silva

WBZ (CBS Radio in Boston)

March 11, 2015, aired at 5:27AM, 6:27AM and 8:26AM

C&W Research Key to Ground-Breaking WalkUP Analysis of Boston Land Use

CityBizList.com

March 11, 2015

<http://boston.citybizlist.com/article/251385/cw-research-key-to-ground-breaking-walkup-analysis-of-boston-land-use>

Boston is made for walking, study finds

By Joe O'Connell

News@Northeastern

March 11, 2015

<http://www.northeastern.edu/news/2015/03/boston-is-made-for-walking-study-finds/>

A new study deep-dives into the walkability of the Boston region

By Tom Acitelli

Curbed Boston

March 12, 2015

http://boston.curbed.com/archives/2015/03/the-way-we-live-30.php#reader_comments

TRADE PRINT/ONLINE MEDIA COVERAGE

Boston Neighborhoods Ranked by Walkability

By Marielle Mondon

Next City

March 11, 2015

<http://nextcity.org/daily/entry/boston-walkable-neighborhoods>

Better metro shifting toward walkable urban

By Robert Steuteville

Better Cities and Towns

March 11, 2015

<http://bettercities.net/article/boston-metro-shifting-toward-walkable-urban-21479>

This Boston Trait Could Lead to Better Values in Real Estate

By Dees Stribling

Multi Housing News

March 12, 2015

<http://www.multiphousingnews.com/news/this-boston-trait-could-lead-to-better-values-in-real-estate/1004116725.html>

Here's Why "Walkable" Isn't A Term To Ignore

Susan Diesenhouse

Bisnow

March 12, 2015

<https://www.bisnow.com/boston/news/commercial-real-estate/heres-why-walkable-isnt-a-term-to-ignore-43848>

Urbanism Moves Into High Gear

By William F. Lyons, Jr.

Banker & Tradesman

March 20, 2015

<http://www.bankerandtradesman.com.php53-8.dfw1-2.websitetestlink.com/2015/03/urbanism-moves-into-high-gear/>

OTHER PRINT/ONLINE COVERAGE

What Will Be America's First Car-Free City?

By Sarah Leskow

New York Magazine

March 19, 2015

<http://nymag.com/next/2015/03/what-will-be-americas-first-car-free-city.html>

LOCAL PRINT/ONLINE MEDIA COVERAGE

Attleboro cited for downtown in study of urban areas

By Rick Foster

The Sun Chronicle (Attleboro, MA)

March 11, 2015

http://www.thesunchronicle.com/news/local_news/attleboro-cited-for-downtown-in-study-of-urban-areas/article_75118120-c798-11e4-b605-83efbd118f37.html

Business Digest for March 11, 2015

By Wicked Local Staff

Wicked Local Milford

March 12, 2015

<http://milford.wickedlocal.com/article/20150311/NEWS/150319303/-1/business/?Start=2>

'Walkable' cities are on the rise

By Lauren DiTullio

The Eagle Tribune (Lawrence & Haverhill, MA)

March 15, 2015

http://www.eagletribune.com/news/haverhill/walkable-cities-are-on-the-rise/article_e0f99b93-2e62-5246-8377-492069e8e371.html?mode=print

Rankings reveal city's bright future

The Sun Chronicle (Attleboro, MA)

March 21, 2015

http://www.thesunchronicle.com/vip/opinion/rankings-reveal-city-s-bright-future/article_0bf2d794-1c40-590a-803f-1b4ab50fecfd.html

Boston Sunday Globe

MARCH 22, 2015

Ideas & Opinion

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE MARCH 22, 2015 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/IDEAS

BRAINIAC

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS FROM BOSTONGLOBE.COM/IDEAS

By Kevin Hartnett

BOSTON AMERICA'S MOST WALKABLE CITY?

IT'S BEEN A season of bad transportation news for Boston, but last week a new report delivered this superlative: Boston is on its way to becoming the most walkable metropolitan area in the country.

The report was written by Christopher Leinberger at George Washington University in collaboration with researchers at the Dukakis Center at Northeastern Uni-

versity. It identified 57 "walkable urban places," or "WalkUPs," in and around Boston. These range from neighborhoods in the heart of the city, such as the Back Bay and the West End, to Assembly Row in nearby Somerville to as far away as downtown Fall River. These places are all easy to navigate on foot and contribute significantly to the region's economy. Most importantly,

though, they make the Boston area attractive to the kinds of highly skilled workers every American city is trying to attract.

Boston is currently the third most walkable metro region in the country, behind Washington, D.C., and New York, as measured by the percentage of real estate located in walkable areas. It's beating both those cities, though, in the percentage of new construction in walkable places. Twenty years ago, 27 percent of new construction in the Boston area took place in walkable urban areas. Today it's 46 percent, which puts Boston on pace to surpass Washington and New York in walkability in the next few years. (Though we think of New York as exceptionally walkable, 92 percent of its walkable urbanism is located on Manhattan, which has just 1 percent of the region's land area.)

This trend has big economic implications. "Walkable urban places have among the highest GDP per capita in the country," says Leinberger. The difference in GDP between walkable cities such as Boston and more car-based cities such as Orlando, he notes, is similar to the economic disparity between Germany and Romania.



BOSTON GLOBE FILE PHOTO

The Boston Globe

Boston is on track to becoming the most walkable city in America

By Kevin Hartnett

[Boston Globe \(online\)](#)

March 19, 2015



Pedestrians walked across the BU bridge.

It's been a season of bad transportation news for Boston, but last week a new report delivered this superlative: Boston is on its way to becoming the most walkable metropolitan area in the country.

The report was written by Christopher Leinberger at George Washington University in collaboration with researchers at the Dukakis Center at Northeastern University. It identified 57 "walkable urban places," or "WalkUPs," in and around Boston. These range from neighborhoods in the heart of the city, such as Back Bay and the West End, to Assembly Row in nearby Somerville to as far away as downtown Fall River. These places are all easy to navigate on foot and contribute significantly to the region's economy. Most importantly, though, they make the Boston area attractive to the kinds of highly skilled workers every American city is trying to attract.

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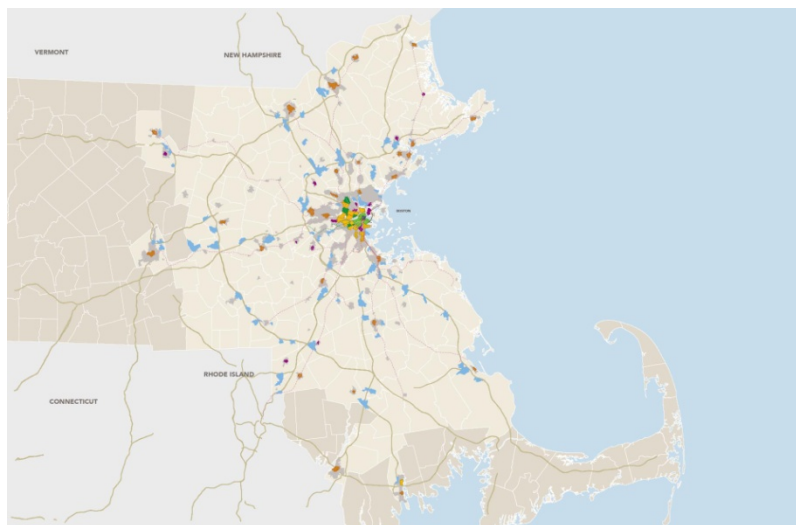
This trend has big economic implications. "Walkable urban places have among the highest GDP per capita in the country," says Leinberger. The difference in GDP between walkable cities such as Boston and more car-based cities such as Orlando, he notes, is similar to the economic disparity

between Germany and Romania. Walkable urban real estate generates 12 times more property tax revenue and costs on average 34 percent more than drivable suburban real estate.

Boston is doing well at developing walkable urban areas, but not well enough. The soaring real estate market is evidence of the imbalance between supply and demand in the region's most desirable, walkable neighborhoods. There were only about 5,000 new housing units built in the entire metro area last year. To meet demand, Leinberger estimates that number should have been closer to 40,000, and he says the gap owes largely to zoning laws. "It really comes down to a combination of NIMBY opposition and the fact that it's illegal in most parts of the region to build high density walkable urban product," he says.

For now, Boston's economy is growing even if it's housing stock is not. But Leinberger warns that eventually the city's tight real estate market will become a drag.

"The creative class, young millennials, the highly educated, they're demanding walkable urban places," he says. "If you don't give it to them, they're going someplace else."



<http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2015/03/19/boston-track-become-most-walkable-city-america/HzMRdbm6fWjEwcaNcblfSO/story.html>

April 3, 2015

VIEWPOINT

DON BRIGGS & ROB GRIFFIN

Walkable urbanism: We must always make strides

Boston has a rich history of firsts: We boast the first-ever public park (Boston Common), public library, and of course, the recently much-maligned T, the first underground public railroad in America, whose age is beginning to show. So it is perhaps fitting that our city is now on pace to become a national leader in a new arena: walkable urbanism in both the city and suburbs.

New research unveiled at the recent LOCUS Developers' New England Leadership Summit, a gathering of responsible regional real estate developers and city and town officials, revealed that metropolitan Boston is one of the top walkable metro areas in the country. It's a structural shift from predominantly building drivable-only development as we have done for the past 60 years to walkable and transit-served places.

Starting in the 2000s real estate cycle and accelerating in the most recent cycle (from 2009 until now), we've seen substantial and growing real estate valuation premiums across all real estate product type, a sign of pent-up demand for walkable urban neighborhoods in the Boston area – especially in areas served by transit. Assembly Row in Somerville, with its offering of retail, rental apartments and accessibility to transit via a new T stop – all sprouting up in a once industrial part of the city – is a perfect example of this booming "WalkUP" development trend.

For the first time in over half a century, walkable urbanism is reversing its loss of market share that took

development to drivable-only locations since the 1950s. Part of the good news is that people living and working in walkable urban places spend less on transportation than those in drivable locations. On average, a four-person family earning the median income and living in a walkable urban place spends 43 percent of their income on housing and transportation versus the 48 percent in drivable areas in the suburbs.

The long-term solution to affordability is building more walkable urban places; today's lack of affordability of these places is primarily due to high land prices. The study shows only 6 percent of the region's land mass is walkable. This 6 percent houses 37 percent of the region's real estate square footage, 40 percent of its population, and 42 percent of employment. Just moving the percentage of metro landmass to 8 or 10 percent will drive these land premiums down.

Policymakers must take advantage of this shift in market demand towards walkable urbanism and learn how to best position their communities for it. Boston has a rich history of national leadership, and is making its mark yet again in the field of urban development. But we must seize the moment and double-down on our transit investment now, in order to help secure our city's walkable future.

Don Briggs is executive vice president of development at Federal Realty Investment Trust. Rob Griffin is president of the New England area for Cushman & Wakefield.

RADIO BOSTON

90.9wbur

Boston and the End of Urban Sprawl

WBUR's "Radio Boston" show

March 11, 2015



Radio Boston

Embed

Report: Boston On The Cutting Edge Of 'Urban Renaissance'

0:00 / 21:00



Over the past 65 years, the country has focused heavily on building suburbs — for example, the communities around Boston, inside routes 495 or 128. But now, we've reached the point of "peak sprawl."

That's the conclusion of a [new report](#), which finds that Boston is on the cutting edge of an urban renaissance, which puts a premium on walkable, urban places.

This trend has big implications — not just for downtown, but for suburbs, too. Over the next generation, researchers say, the development of urban spaces could be an engine of economic growth on-par with the boom that came with suburbanization.

Guests

Christopher Leinberger, director of the Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis at the George Washington University. He's author of the new report, "The WalkUP Wake-up Call: Boston." He tweets@ChrisLeinberger.

Marc Draisen, executive director of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. They helped compile the report.

More

WBUR: Report: Greater Boston Needs More 'Walkable Urban Places'

- "Boston often ranks as one of the most walkable big cities in the country. And the convenience and ease of being able to walk to work or school or get to shops or restaurants by foot is something that attracts many people, particularly millennials, to the metro area."

<http://radioboston.wbur.org/2015/03/11/boston-and-the-end-of-urban-sprawl>

Report: Greater Boston Needs More 'Walkable Urban Places'

By Zeninor Enwemeka

WBUR.org

March 11, 2015



Boston often ranks as one of the most walkable big cities in the country. And the convenience and ease of being able to walk to work or school or get to shops or restaurants by foot is something that attracts many people, particularly millennials, to the metro area.

But a new report finds these types of “walkable urban places” make up only 5.6 percent of land in a broadly defined Greater Boston — and there is a growing demand for more.

In a report released Wednesday, researchers at The George Washington University found real estate development in Greater Boston is becoming increasingly geared toward walkable urban areas instead of driving-focused areas typically found in suburbs. These walkable urban places, or “walkUPs,” are areas where almost everything is within walking distance. They are often high-density areas with mixed-use development, as well as easy access to multiple modes of public transit.

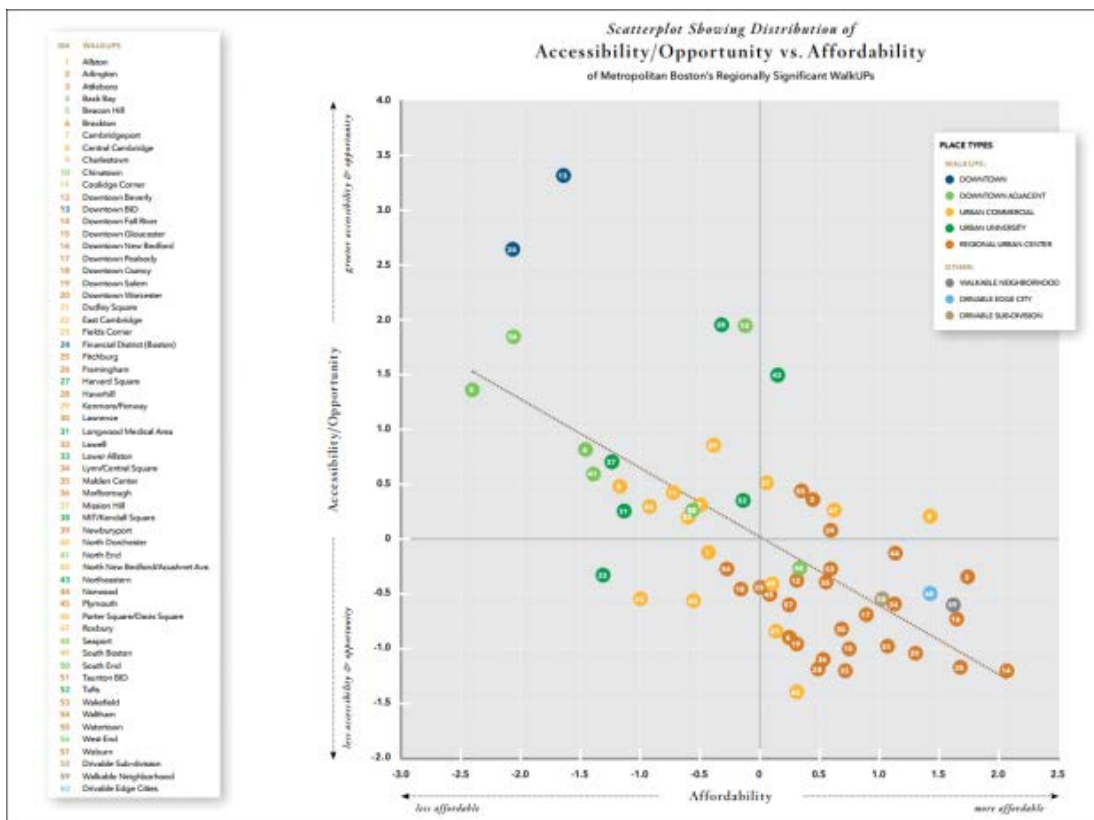
The small percentage of these “walkUPs” creates a premium on the land, which means higher rents and housing costs, according to the report.

“It’s time to get rid of the city versus suburb,” GW professor and report co-author Chris Leinberger said in a phone interview. “Yes, a lot of your walkable urban places are in the city of Boston, but the

future growth of these places are going to be in the suburbs as we urbanize the suburbs — and not just Cambridge and not just Somerville.”

The report was done in collaboration with Northeastern University’s Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and LOCUS, a coalition of real estate developers.

The report identified 57 walkable urban places around Boston stretching out to I-495 and looked at how the land is being used — whether for offices, retail space, hotels, rental apartments or for-sale housing. The report then ranked these “walkUPs” based on economic performance (GDP per capita) and social equity (housing affordability, public transit and access to jobs). Researchers used a variety of data sources, including the census, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Walk Score and the Massachusetts Land Parcel Database.



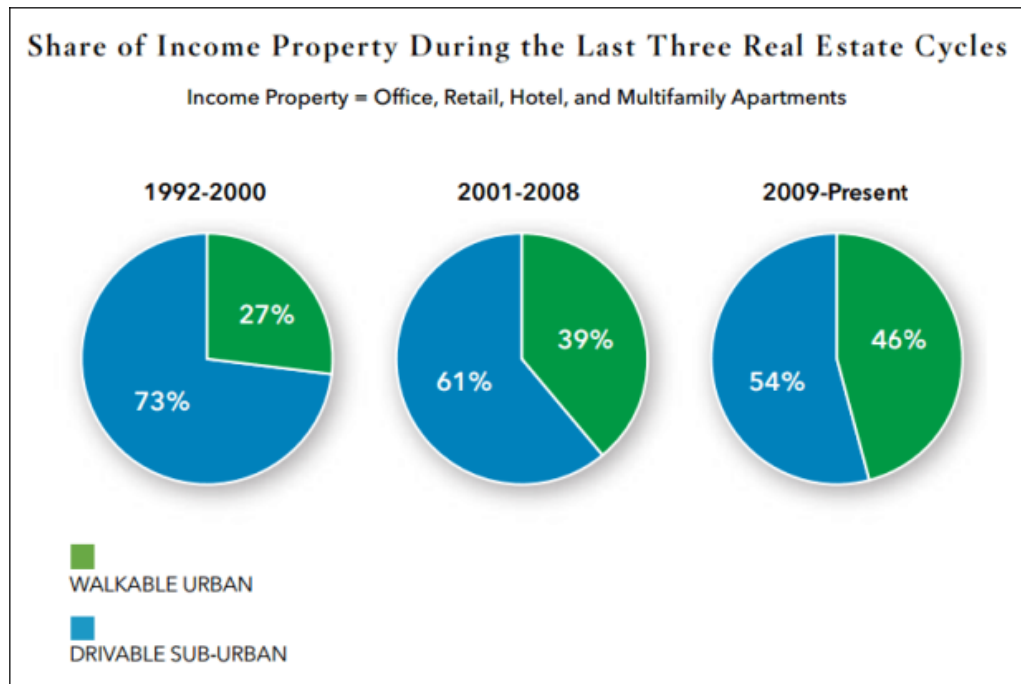
57 walkable urban places around Greater Boston (Courtesy of The George Washington University “The WalkUP Wake-Up Call: Boston” report)

Areas that ranked high on economic performance included Boston’s Back Bay, Beacon Hill, the Financial District and Cambridge’s Kendall Square. Areas that ranked low on economic measures included Lowell, Fitchburg, Haverhill and Lawrence.

High ranking areas for social equity included Boston’s Chinatown, Mission Hill, Roxbury and Charlestown, and low ranking areas included Brockton, Boston’s Dudley Square and Lower Allston and Marlborough. The report called for greater investment in lower ranking areas.

The report also noted several areas deemed emerging “walkUPs,” such as the recently developed Assembly Row in Somerville as well as Widett Circle, an area in South Boston that’s slated as one of Boston 2024’s major development locations for the city’s Olympic bid.

Overall, the study found a higher percentage of development over the last 30 years — especially offices and hotels and more recently rental apartments — is geared toward walkable urban places.



Charts show how market share of walkable urban developments grew over time compared to drivable suburban developments. (The George Washington University “The WalkUP Wake-Up Call: Boston” report)

This shift, the report argues, is good news for people looking to move to the area since those living in walkable urban places spend less money on transportation and are closer to jobs — savings that could perhaps defray higher costs associated with urban housing (more on this below).

The report also found “walkUPs” generate six to 12 times more property tax revenue per acre than driveable suburbs and have 37 percent higher real estate values.

Researchers also noted a strong nationwide correlation — but not causation — between walkable urban areas and economic growth.

“The gap between the GDP per capita of the Bostons of this country and the Orlandos or Tampas of this country — Boston has a 38 percent higher GDP per capita,” said report co-author Leinberger. “That’s the difference between Germany and Romania, that’s the difference between a first-world and second-world nation.”

Leinberger said the demand for “walkUPs” is primarily being driven by millennials.

“Over the last 15 years, you’ve had a tremendous growth in the millennials — highly educated millennials coming to metropolitan Boston,” Leinberger said. “Seventy percent of those highly educated millennials that you’ve seen come through Boston are located in walkable urban places. If you didn’t have these walkable urban places, they may not have come.”

Highly educated households and empty nesters are also contributing to the demand for walkable urban places, according to Leinberger. Older populations used to associate urban areas with crime, poverty and low property values, but now see these areas more favorably, Leinberger said.

“The market is saying build more walkable urban,” he said.

While the report calls for more “walkUPs” in Greater Boston, it also recommends more affordable housing in these areas, since new urban development often displaces low income communities. The report calls for strategies, such as expanding tax credit programs and low income housing, to make highly desired walkable urban areas more inclusive.

“The affordable housing strategy of the last 50 years has been drive until you qualify — just keep on driving well past [Route] 128 and you’ll find the house that you can afford,” Leinberger said.

“Today, in a market that is demanding walkable urbanism, that’s not something you can really put up with. You need more conscious social equity programs and affordable housing programs in the Kendall Squares, in the financial districts, in the Seaport.”

Researchers also call public transit a vital part of these walkable urban areas. Noting the recent MBTA troubles this winter, the report argues for increased investment in public transportation infrastructure, especially rail and bus transit, as well as bike and walking pathways.

<http://www.wbur.org/2015/03/11/walkable-urban-places-boston-report>



C&W Research Key to Ground-Breaking WalkUP Analysis of Boston Land Use

CityBizList.com

March 11, 2015

A think tank of leading commercial real estate influencers released the results of its first-ever analysis of 100% of Boston metro's land use on Wednesday.

The initiative leveraged Cushman & Wakefield's proprietary market data to help inform public policy for sustainable investment in WalkUPs — small amounts of walkable, urbanized land near housing, productive farms and public transit — home to the region's most dynamic industries and crucial for Boston's economy.

The study yields key insights about Boston's pent-up demand for WalkUPs, which on a per acre basis generate 12 times the tax revenues as drivable suburban land; and cements a reversal of real estate development that has long followed the drivable suburban model.

"We already knew that Boston is America's Walking City. What this research makes clear is that the market for walkable real estate in Boston is growing and offers value premiums over drivable suburban development," said Robert Griffin, President US Capital Markets for Cushman & Wakefield

The report was produced by the Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis at George Washington University School of Business; the Northeastern University Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy; and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, in conjunction with Cushman & Wakefield Americas Research and LOCUS: Responsible Real Estate Developers and Investors, a program of Smart Growth America.

Other key findings include:

- Metropolitan Boston's 57 WalkUPs were ranked as platinum, gold, silver or copper, according to transit-based, economic and social equity metrics. Platinum level WalkUPs include Back Bay, MIT/Kendall Square, Beacon Hill and Downtown. Copper level WalkUPs include Downtown Beverly, Framingham, Haverhill and Norwood.

- Real estate values in WalkUPs are 37% higher across all product types than drivable sub-urban development.

- Walkable urban office and hotel have 134% and 120% valuation premiums, respectively, over drivable sub-urban development.

- Walkable urban office absorption has over a 50% market share in this cycle and over 80% of new hotel absorption has been in walkable urban places in this cycle.

- Walkable urban net revenues (tax revenues minus costs) per square foot of development are four times that of drivable development.

To see the full list of land use types, as well as the list of WalkUP economic and social equity rankings, download the report at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/walkup-boston.

<http://boston.citybizlist.com/article/251385/cw-research-key-to-ground-breaking-walkup-analysis-of-boston-land-use#sthash.h6xePZ9a.9mFM8qQd.dpuf>

Boston is made for walking, study finds

By Joe O'Connell

News@Northeastern

March 11, 2015

Metro Boston is on the leading edge of a national shift away from drivable suburban living and toward walkable urbanism, according to a report released Wednesday and co-written by researchers at Northeastern's Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy.

The report found that average premiums for walkable urban real estate in 2014 were 37 percent more than premiums for drivable suburban real estate. And from 2009 to 2014, 36 percent of the region's income property development occurred in walkable urban places, or WalkUPs.

The researchers noted that this shift toward walkable urbanism has major implications for real estate investors and policymakers, and that if the trend continues, drivable suburban real estate values are at risk of continued stagnation while values in walkable urban neighborhoods will likely continue to rise. They noted the findings can inform public policy and development plans moving forward as zoning and building regulations evolve to meet the walkable urbanism demand.



A map of established and emerging WalkUPs in the Metro Boston area, as identified by the report. *Contributed photo*

“The findings from this report allow us to be more systematic and intentional about guiding upcoming development and policy,” said Anna Gartsman, a research associate at the Dukakis Center who worked extensively on the report. “We’ve identified the locations where market forces are

pushing development; now we need to make sure that we both encourage this development, by maintaining existing infrastructure such as the MBTA, and that we support current residents by instituting proactive housing policies to prevent further displacement.”

While investments in walkable urban infrastructure and public transit are expensive, the researchers stressed that they pay off, noting that their findings indicate walkable urban development generates higher economic development and fiscal returns than drivable suburban development. They said the investments must be coupled with a plan to achieve social equity, using tools such as expanding the current tax credit programs for rehabilitation, inclusionary zoning, and community benefit agreements.

“We know that these places are economically prosperous,” Gartsman said. “We wanted to determine their strengths and weaknesses based on accessibility, housing affordability, economic opportunity, and schools.”

The Dukakis Center released the report in partnership with the Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis at the George Washington University School of Business and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The report will be released at the New England Leadership Summit today in Boston.

For their part, the Northeastern researchers created a performance metric to determine the social equity of the 57 WalkUPs in the Greater Boston region to ensure economic opportunities grow for disadvantaged residents, as the popularity of walkable urbanism increases.

The metric ranks the WalkUPs from best to worst—platinum, gold, silver, and copper—based on affordability, accessibility, and opportunities. The researchers studied data including the proportion of the region’s working-age population that can access the WalkUP by transit within 45 minutes, job density, and school reading proficiency.

Boston neighborhoods such as Roxbury, Chinatown, and Mission Hill earned platinum rankings because of their proximity to job centers and to retain traditionally affordable units.

Of the 57 WalkUPs, ones that earned the lowest ranking included Brockton, Marlborough, and Lower Allston. Many of those communities are only served by the MBTA commuter rail or regional transit, have fewer job opportunities, and high unemployment, according to the report.

“WalkUP communities that aren’t in the Metropolitan Boston ‘core’ near Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville have an access problem,” Gartsman said. “You can afford to live there, but you really can’t get to and from there easily. And for places that are serviced by the commuter rail, the schedule is not conducive to shift work like a chef in a restaurant or a nurse.”

Boston is the third pilot city in this study of walkable urban places, along with Atlanta and Washington, D.C. The plan is to expand the study to dozens of other cities, which will be analyzed in part by Northeastern’s social equity metrics.

This report is part of a larger initiative at the Dukakis Center to bring its housing development and transportation teams closer together like never before and make Northeastern University a central

hub for future housing development, according to Barry Bluestone, founding director of the Dukakis Center and the Stearns Trustee Professor of Political Economy.

“What makes Northeastern and the Dukakis Center special is that our focus is on the local and regional level, and that gives us a base to build on,” Bluestone noted.

<http://www.northeastern.edu/news/2015/03/boston-is-made-for-walking-study-finds/>



A new study deep-dives into the walkability of the Boston region

By Tom Acitelli

Curbed Boston

March 12, 2015

THE WAY WE LIVE – A new study deep-dives into the walkability of the Boston region and comes up with nuggets like this: "On average, all of the product types studied, including office, retail, hotel, rental apartments, and for-sale housing, have higher values per square foot in walkable urban places than in low-density drivable locations. These price premiums of 20 to 134 percent per square foot are strong indicators of pent-up demand for walkable urbanism." [Smart Growth America]

http://boston.curbed.com/archives/2015/03/the-way-we-live-30.php#reader_comments



Boston Neighborhoods Ranked by Walkability

By Marielle Mondon

Next City

March 11, 2015

Bikes might be hogging the trend spotlight these days, but cities are smart to cater to those who move by shoe.

And Boston is one place that's set to be a leader in that regard, according to the people behind last year's ranking of walkability in the 30 largest metros in the U.S.

The region is home to 57 key "walkable urban places" that make up only 6 percent of the metro's land area. The rest of the region misses out not only on walkability, but a majority of commercial real estate development, according to "The WalkUP Wake-Up Call: Boston," which was released today. The authors, Chris Leinberger and Patrick Lynch of the George Washington University School of Business, say that walkable urban places (what they call WalkUPs) attracted the majority of real estate development in the last cycle and concluded that pedestrian-oriented living is in high demand in Boston:

Metro Boston is on the leading edge of the national structural shift towards walkable urbanism. The weighted-average valuation for walkable urban real estate is 37 percent higher than drivable suburban real estate in the region.

Previous research has demonstrated the correlation between walkable urban places and both the education of the metropolitan work force and the GDP per capita. The current research confirms this finding: For example, since 2000, 70 percent of the population growth of young, educated workers has occurred in the walkable urban places of the Boston region.

The report makes the case that walkable communities make good sense by ranking the city's neighborhoods for walkability, and measuring economic performance by real estate valuations, fiscal revenues generated for local government and social equity performance.

"This analysis validates the shift towards walkable urban development that we've seen across the country," said Leinberger, who has contributed to Next City. "This change will reshape the way we approach urban design and planning, regulation, financing and construction nationwide. The findings will play a critical role in the guessing game of where developers and investors should be looking in the future."

Leinberger's a dedicated proponent of walkable urbanism and transit-oriented development, and is involved in real estate too.

The highest-ranking WalkUPs receiving the report's "platinum" designation in the economic category included Back Bay, Beacon Hill and MIT/Kendall Square. All are located in or near downtown, with rents averaging 9 percent above the second tier of WalkUPs that got a "gold" label.

Walkable urban places in Boston that received the report's "platinum" designation in the economic category

The "copper" WalkUPs are largely outside of Boston's core metropolitan area, such as downtown Gloucester and Lowell.

"Many of the copper-ranked WalkUPs have inherited a street network devised before the rise of the automobile, meaning they have the appropriate 'bones' for future walkable urban development," the study notes. "Unfortunately, some of these WalkUPs do not have appropriate zoning for what the market wants, generally not allowing sufficient density for new development and economic growth to emerge."

For those connecting the dots between gentrification and transit-oriented development, the study's authors suggest that the cure for rising rents in desirable, walker-friendly neighborhoods is to build more desirable, walker-friendly neighborhoods. Noting that reliable public transit is key to walkability, they also fire a warning about MBTA, which struggled mightily this winter with keeping public transit running during major snowfall.

"It's clear from this research that reliable and efficient transit service is vital to the success of walkable urban places, which are largely clustered around MBTA stations both in the rapid-transit served core and on the outer reaches of the commuter rail," said Barry Bluestone, director of the Dukakis Center at Northeastern University, which is also behind the report. "In order to realize the private market investment in these walkable urban places, we are going to have to improve capacity and resiliency of the MBTA."

Walkable urban places in Boston that received the report's "platinum" designation in the social equity category

Accessibility, affordability and opportunity dominate the report's social equity rankings. The number of platinum-ranked WalkUPs doubles, with 10 neighborhoods remaining "somewhat affordable" and in close proximity to public transit and job centers. Nine of the 10 copper-ranked social equity WalkUPs overlap with the lowest economic ranking of WalkUPs.

The study also pinpoints 14 emerging (East Boston, Ipswich, Needham are a few) and eight potential WalkUPs (includes Everett, Natick, Stoughton) and concludes that a push toward walkable urbanism could have better long-term effects on real estate pricing and have major implications for policymaking:

Policymakers must understand how to position their communities to take advantage of this shift in market demand. At a minimum, the government must not discourage walkable urban development with outdated, auto-oriented zoning codes and parking regulations, or long public approval processes.

For all the neighborhood rankings, read “The WalkUP Wake-Up Call: Boston” here.

<http://nextcity.org/daily/entry/boston-walkable-neighborhoods>

Better Cities & Towns

Better *places*, stronger communities.

Better metro shifting toward walkable urban

By Robert Steuteville

Better Cities and Towns

March 11, 2015

Metropolitan Boston is poised to be one of the most walkable metro areas in the US, according to a new study by the Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis at the George Washington University and the Northeastern University Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy.



Demand for walkable urban neighborhoods is strong and growing, the report found. [The WalkUP Wake-Up Call: Boston](#) found value premiums in all real estate types (office, hotel, rental apartment, retail, and for-sale residential) in regionally significant walkable urban places (WalkUPs).

The study identifies 57 regionally significant WalkUPs in metro Boston, plus 14 "emerging" and 31 "potential" WalkUPs (many of these are adjacent to existing WalkUPS). Much of the commercial real estate development in the recent real estate cycle is built in these areas, which account for just 1.2 percent of the total metro land area. "Non-regionally significant" walkable neighborhoods account for an additional 4.4 percent of the region.

Therefore in one of the nation's more walkable regions, only 5.6 percent of the land is devoted to walkable neighborhoods and centers. These are compact, mixed-use areas with high intersection density (at least 100 intersections per square mile). These places have a Walk Score of at least 65.

"This small supply of walkable urban land is the major reason for the price premiums. Increasing the density of the existing walkable urban land and adding more walkable urban places, both WalkUPs and Walkable Neighborhoods, will fuel that upward spiral and increase the quality of life while improving the social equity of the metropolitan area."

Metropolitan Land Use Options in the United States

	REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT	LOCAL SERVING
 WALKABLE URBAN	WALKUP (Walkable Urban Place) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office Space ≥ 1.4M sq ft -OR- Retail Space ≥ 340,000 sq ft WalkScore ≥ 70.5 Avg intersection density ≥ 100 per sq mile 	WALKABLE NEIGHBORHOOD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WalkScore ≥ 65 Avg intersection density ≥ 100 per sq mile
 DRIVABLE SUB-URBAN	DRIVABLE EDGE CITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office Space ≥ 1.4M sq ft -OR- Retail Space ≥ 340,000 sq ft 	DRIVABLE SUB-DIVISION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All land not allocated to other categories

The report ranks WalkUPs by economic performance, measured by the real estate values for each product type and the revenues generated for local governments, and by social equity, measured by accessibility, opportunity, and affordability. Lastly, the report identifies emerging and potential WalkUPs where new development could go.

Christopher Leinberger, report co-author, will talk about the national trend toward walkable urban places at [CNU 23](#) in Dallas April 29-May2.

"This analysis validates the shift towards walkable urban development that we've seen across the country," said Christopher Leinberger, president of LOCUS and chair of the Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis at GW, and a co-author of the report. "This change will reshape the way we approach urban design and planning, regulation, financing and construction nationwide. The findings will play a critical role in the guessing game of where developers and investors should be looking in the future."

Rail transit in particular facilitates walkable urbanism. Three quarters of the existing Boston WalkUPs have rail transit.

"Expensive as investments in rail transit and walkable urban infrastructure may be, there are growing indications, as this research indicates, that walkable urban development generates higher economic development and fiscal returns than drivable sub-urban development. Educated people are the foundation of the modern knowledge economy, and they seem to be drawn to metro areas with walkable urbanism," the authors state.

"It's clear from this research that reliable and efficient transit service is vital to the success of walkable urban places, which are largely clustered around MBTA stations both in the rapid-transit served core and on the outer reaches of the commuter rail," said Barry Bluestone, Director of the Dukakis Center at Northeastern University. "In order to realize the private market investment in these walkable urban places, we are going to have to improve capacity and resiliency of the MBTA."

About 80 percent of hotel development, 52 percent of office space, and half of rental apartments are being built in WalkUPs. For-sale residential is lagging behind at only 12 percent being built in WalkUPs. This may account for lagging single-family construction, the report says. "In the most recent cycle, single-family units have accounted for a minority of housing permits, 47 percent, versus 53 percent for multifamily," the report states. "Compare that to 1992-2000, when single-family units accounted for 84 percent of permits."

Real estate values in WalkUPs are 37 percent higher across all product types than "drivable sub-urban development," which accounts for the vast majority of land in the region. Walkable urban office and hotel have 134 percent and 120 percent valuation premiums, respectively, over drivable sub-urban development. Walkable urban office absorption has higher than a 50 percent market share and more than 80 percent of new hotel absorption has been in walkable urban places in this real estate cycle.

Public revenues from walkable urban development are substantially higher than drivable sub-urban development. On a per-acre basis, walkable urban development generates 12 times the tax revenues as drivable sub-urban.

The report calls for a conscious social equity/affordable housing strategy for WalkUPs to address the short and mid-term issue of displacement and need for mixed-income neighborhoods. In the long-term, increased supply of walkable urban development, especially housing, is required to address the large price premiums of walkable urban places.

High rankings on the social equity scale were found to be areas that offer high levels of accessibility, lower transportation costs and great opportunities in terms of proximity to employment. Places such as Arlington, Charlestown and Northeastern/Huntington, rose to the top with platinum social equity ratings. Areas such as Downtown Gloucester, Dudley Square, Brockton, and Lowell received copper rankings.

This research was done in conjunction with LOCUS: Responsible Real Estate Developers and Investors, a program of Smart Growth America, and Cushman and Wakefield, a Leading Global Real Estate Advisor— and with the assistance of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC).

Robert Steuteville is editor and executive director of Better Cities & Towns.

<http://bettercities.net/article/boston-metro-shifting-toward-walkable-urban-21479>



This Boston Trait Could Lead to Better Values in Real Estate

By Dees Stribling

Multi Housing News

March 12, 2015

Boston—Metro Boston is on its way to being one of the most walkable metro areas in the country, according to a new report, which is a positive trend on the whole. As shown by increasing real estate valuation in all real estate product types (rental apartment, for-sale residential, office, hotel and retail), the report finds strong and growing signs of pent-up demand for walkable urban neighborhoods in the Boston area. This marks a reversal in real estate development for the region, which has long followed the drivable suburban model, and bodes well for further multifamily development in the walkable areas.

The report, “Metro Boston: WalkUP Wake-Up Call” was undertaken by the Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis at the George Washington University School of Business, and the Northeastern University Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, with the assistance of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). Research for it was done in conjunction with LOCUS: Responsible Real Estate Developers and Investors (a program of Smart Growth America) and Cushman and Wakefield.

The study identifies 57 regionally significant walkable urban places (or “WalkUPs”) in metro Boston. Much development in the recent real estate cycle has been built in these WalkUPs, which account for just 6 percent of the total land area in the Boston metro region. The report ranks WalkUPs by economic performance, measured by the real estate

Valuations for each product type and the fiscal revenues generated for local governments, and by social equity performance, measured by accessibility, opportunity, and affordability for residents. Lastly, the report identifies emerging and potential WalkUPs where new development could go.

The 57 WalkUPs are also ranked with platinum, gold, silver or copper ratings by the report, on both economic and social equity metrics. On the economic side, high-ranking places were found to be mostly located inside Route 128 and have access to rail transit service, while low-ranking WalkUPs are located in outlying areas. Platinum level WalkUPs include Back Bay, MIT/Kendall Square, Beacon Hill and Downtown Boston. At the other end of the spectrum, on the copper level, are Downtown Beverly, Framingham, Haverhill and Norwood.

Real estate values in WalkUPs are 37 percent higher across all product types than drivable suburban development. Further, public revenues from walkable urban development are substantially higher than drivable suburban development. On a per acre basis, walkable urban development generates 12 times the tax revenues as drivable suburban.

The WalkUPs are also ranked on a unique social equity performance metric, measured by accessibility/opportunity and affordability. Places such as Arlington, Charlestown and Northeastern/Huntington rose to the top, with platinum ratings indicating a mix of both moderately priced housing and easy access to employment and labor. Areas such as

Downtown Gloucester, Dudley Square, Brockton, and Lowell received copper rankings. High rankings on the social equity scale means high levels of accessibility, lower transportation costs, and proximity to employment.

Finally, the report calls for a conscious social equity/affordable housing strategy for WalkUPs to address the short- and mid-term issue of displacement and need for mixed-income neighborhoods. In the long-term, increased supply of walkable urban development, especially housing, is required to address the large price premiums of walkable urban spaces.

<http://www.multihousingnews.com/news/this-boston-trait-could-lead-to-better-values-in-real-estate/1004116725.html>



Here's Why "Walkable" Isn't A Term To Ignore

Susan Diesenhouse

Bisnow

March 12, 2015

It's time to focus on walkable urban places. They'll bring developers more profit and public policymakers more tax revenue, says the first in-depth study to analyze all land use in a metro area. (Walking is walking, but money does the talking.)



Dividing Boston metro communities between walkable (aka Walk Ups) or drivable communities, the study released yesterday found developers can expect to realize a value premium of 134% on office properties, 120% on hotels, 54% on multifamily and 41% on retail properties in Walk-Ups like Boston or Cambridge compared to nearby drivable locations like Burlington. The report authors are Christopher Leinberger and Patrick Lynch of The George Washington University Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis.



No doubt, that's why since 2009, 46% of the income property developed in the Boston region is in Walk Ups, versus only 27% in 2000, according to the report produced in collaboration with Cushman & Wakefield Massachusetts (president Rob Griffin, center), Locus (a developer trade group), the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and Northeastern University's Dukakis Center for Urban & Regional Planning (former researcher, now state Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Pollack above).



Any public entity that wants to follow the money should focus on adopting policies that provide zoning, regulations and mass transit that help communities respond to commercial property and capital markets that favor Walk Ups. One key feature of Walk Ups is efficient mass rail transit, which we ignore at our peril. Boston metro homeowners also benefit from improving and developing commercial real estate in Walk Ups. Since '04, the value of their property rose 31%, while homeowners in drivable locales have seen values bounce back from the recession but not rise above that level.

<https://www.bisnow.com/boston/news/commercial-real-estate/heres-why-walkable-isnt-a-term-to-ignore-43848>

Urbanism Moves Into High Gear

By William F. Lyons, Jr.

Banker & Tradesman

March 20, 2015

New research conducted by George Washington University, in conjunction with LOCUS/Smart Growth America, Boston's Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and Northeastern University, has confirmed what advocacy groups in Boston have been telling us for years: walkable places are so desirable that the real estate is worth more.

This really should not be a surprise to anyone in the real estate industry, but there are many lessons to be learned from this study.

According to the study, all land uses have higher values per square foot in walkable urban settings than their counterparts in auto centric locations, like suburbs. The study concludes that premiums of 20 percent to 134 percent per square foot were found for urban walkable neighborhoods. For real estate developers and investors, this is an important trend that must be heeded in order to stay competitive in the marketplace.

Finally, Government As A Winner

Government at all levels should take notice of this trend, especially local government. Increased property values means increased property taxes. For municipalities, property taxes provide funds for municipal services, such as schools, police, fire, public works and social services. With ever-escalating fixed costs (health insurance and pensions, in particular), our municipalities are more and more dependent on growing their tax base.

According to this study, promoting urban, walkable development (described as "WalkUps") provides our cities and towns with an opportunity for growth in the tax base without increasing urban sprawl. Sprawl, the predominant development pattern of the last half century, requires municipalities to spend more on infrastructure (roads, sewers, water, etc.) and other services (school buses, senior shuttles, etc.). On the other hand, WalkUps generate 12 times more property tax revenue per acre than suburban development. The promise of WalkUps is more tax receipts and less expenses. Municipalities, take heed: this is what's called a "win-win."

Municipalities that stick to suburban sprawl risk the serious possibility of disinvestment and a corresponding reduction in tax receipts. According to the study, walkable urban places are gaining market share over drivable locations for the first time in 50 years. This is a market driven phenomenon: people want to live in WalkUps. If fewer people want to live in suburbs, property

values will stagnate – or worse, decrease, resulting in a reduction in the tax base. This is a stark reality that many municipalities have not yet come to terms with.

It is important to note that developers will not invest to create WalkUps without a robust transit system to support an urban lifestyle. With real estate developers investing billions of dollars in development near transit systems, state and local government are poised to realize many of the benefits of transit oriented development. However, investments in infrastructure and new zoning are necessary to spur this development. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts and its cities must make investments to attract these higher value land uses and realize the benefits of WalkUps.

A Healthier Lifestyle

Higher property values also means good news for residents. Residents who move to walkable, urban locations realize the benefit of a healthier lifestyle, with walking the predominant mode of travel. More walking means less hypertension, diabetes, and obesity. The emergence of WalkUps holds great promise to reverse the trends caused by a sedentary, auto-centric lifestyle.

However, there are some caution signs associated with WalkUps. Gentrification poses a significant risk of producing social inequities. These inequities must be addressed through deliberate, thoughtful planning to ensure that we have neighborhoods of mixed incomes, ethnic backgrounds and social strata. It is absolutely essential that we balance access to jobs and healthy lifestyles for all of our residents.

One fact pointed out in the study is that, while housing costs will go up in a walkable, urban neighborhood, transportation costs will go down. Therefore, it is important to view housing costs in conjunction with transportation costs. WalkUps trade higher affordability for access to employment. Suburban development is less accessible and has high transportation costs, due to car ownership and the costs associated with operating a car (insurance, fuel, maintenance, etc.).

According to the study, the average four-person family earning the median income will spend 43 percent of their income on housing and transportation in a WalkUp, while their counterparts in the suburbs will spend 48 percent of their income on housing and transportation. This is a significant benefit of an urban lifestyle.

WalkUps present many opportunities for Greater Boston. Communities that embrace them will realize increased tax revenue, healthier lifestyles, and reduced dependence on automobiles. Communities that don't may be left in the dust!

<http://www.bankerandtradesman.com.php53-8.dfw1-2.websitetestlink.com/2015/03/urbanism-moves-into-high-gear/>

NEW YORK

What Will Be America's First Car-Free City?

By Sarah Leskow

New York Magazine

March 19, 2015

New Yorkers have been plotting to kick cars out of the city almost since they took over. All the way back in 1961, *Dissent* magazine argued that the motor vehicles should be banned from Manhattan, with the exception of buses, small taxis, and essential police and medical vehicles. For decades, car owners won out, but that might finally be changing: New York has the highest percentage of car-free households in America; the mayor's Vision Zero plan is slowing down traffic; and Gridlock Sam's Move New York plans has given at least a little bit more political life to congestion pricing.

The idea of having a car-free city isn't impossible, either: Hamburg, Germany, has pledged to eliminate cars in the next couple of decades; Abu Dhabi's trying to build a (mostly) car-free city from scratch; and in October, Johannesburg's kicking cars out of parts of a central business district for the whole month.

But the realistic chance of an outright ban on cars in any large section of Gotham is basically nil. The same is true most places in America. The most notable exception — that is, the major U.S. city that has the clearest route to going car-free — is Boston.

Boston's already the third most walkable city in America, and a new report from George Washington University makes the argument that it's only going to become more so. Before 2000, about 27 percent of new development was in walkable places; now 46 percent is. And 40 percent of the city's population already lives in extremely walkable areas. Plus, Boston has an unusually high percentage of households already living without cars — 37 percent, which puts it behind only New York and D.C.

Walkable doesn't immediately translate into "car-free." Driving in Boston might be a terrible experience, but the city's public transit system can't be relied on, either (as this winter amply demonstrated). But, recently, Anthony Townsend, the senior research scientist at NYU's Rudin Center for Transportation Policy, imagined how Boston could transform into "a place where mobility has changed profoundly."

The short version of the vision for Boston is this: Starting around 2020, Boston's taken over by micro-apartments, filled with young, connected people who aren't particularly attached to their homes — they might move every few months, just to stay within walking distance of work, school, or friends. At the same time, cognitive science advances our understanding of how people react to "walking environments," and yields streets and sidewalks that make people more likely to move about. Soon, enough people are walking that the city commits to going car-free — in central Boston, at least—by 2034. Cars are replaced by a network of shared electric bikes and self-stabilizing skateboards; the city upgrades the T, and by 2032, cars are relegated to "a niche role for inter-city travel."

Townsend's report, though rooted in deep research, was speculative. And, in reality, the only way that Boston could eliminate cars would be if it could make the T system work for more people. "That's a big if," says land use strategist Christopher Leinberger, the author of the GWU report. "They've got the oldest transit system in the country, and it looks it." (His vote for first American car-free city goes to Washington, D.C., where not only is the district itself walkable, but, increasingly, the suburbs are, too.)

Of course, not every city is full of people who want to live without cars: One of Townsend's other future scenarios focused on Atlanta, and imagined that driverless cars would shuttle workers from home to office — then go park themselves in huge parking lots on the edge of the city. Sounds pretty pleasant, in its own way.

<http://nymag.com/next/2015/03/what-will-be-americas-first-car-free-city.html>



Attleboro cited for downtown in study of urban areas

By Rick Foster

[The Sun Chronicle \(Attleboro, MA\)](#)

March 11, 2015

ATTLEBORO — A new study gives Attleboro’s city center high marks for affordability and accessibility at a time when investment is shifting toward walkable urban environments.

“Metro Boston: Walk-Up Wake-Up Call,” a study of 57 walkable centers throughout Eastern Massachusetts, gave the city a “gold rating” for affordability and accessibility.

Meanwhile, Attleboro was one of several cities that received the lowest, “copper,” rating for economic performance based on lower property tax assessments and rent levels.

Each urban center in the survey received either a platinum, gold, silver or copper rating based on a variety of criteria.

Attleboro was classified as a “regional urban center” with a walkable urban core and access to public transportation in the study published by the Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis at the George Washington University School of Business and the Northeastern University Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, with the assistance of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

Like many such urban centers, the study said, Attleboro has benefited from a recent shift in construction and investment from suburban towns to urban areas.

“Over the past three real estate cycles, we’ve seen a shift in terms of development,” said Patrick Lynch, one of the authors of the report who said that cities are beginning to capture a much larger share of commercial construction. “We’ve definitely seen that happen in Boston and as costs continue to rise in that area, we’ve begun to see that spread out into other walkable urban areas that have access to rail transportation.”

Attleboro earned its gold rating based on relatively low housing costs compared with other urban areas, accessibility to transit and good school performance. The copper rating for economic performance was based on lower rents and property tax assessments than in some other areas.

However, Lynch said Attleboro faces challenges in the future, particularly in providing jobs and economic opportunities for its residents.

City Planning and Development Director Gary Ayrassian said the assessment reflects a city whose urban core is attracting new investment and energy, but where rents remain affordable in comparison with other downtowns in the Boston area.

Ayrassian said privately funded, new apartment and commercial complexes on Wall and South Main streets — coupled with grant-driven streetscape, urban park and road projects — are reshaping the downtown area. But, he said, the city is taking a measured approach to redevelopment that seeks to capitalize with the central core's walkable environment without driving out its traditional residents.

"We're not trying to be anybody but Attleboro," he said. "We want to be who we are. We're not trying to be someplace with \$3,000 rents."

The new study looked at land use across 3,119 square miles in the metropolitan Boston area and ranked urban centers based on economic and "social equity" criteria.

According to the study, suburban development based on shopping and commuting by car has been dominant throughout much of the 20th century. However, that trend is swinging back in the direction of more urban areas.

From 1992-2000, according to the study, only 27 percent of commercial development was built in walkable urban areas. But in 2001-2008, the urban share increased to 39 percent. From 2009 to the present, 46 percent of the new construction has been in urban areas.

"This research demonstrates there is growing interest in the type of walkable, mixed-use development called for in our regional plan Metro Future" said Marc Draisen, executive director of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, "but as property values increase, we face the critical challenge of preserving and expanding the supply of housing affordable to working-class households, so that they, too, can benefit from all the amenities and opportunities these neighborhoods have to offer."

The close correlation the authors found between urban development and access to mass transit also means that the state will have to find answers to the many problems the MBTA faced this winter.

"It's clear from this research that reliable and efficient transit service is vital to the success of walkable urban places, which are largely clustered around MBTA stations both in the rapid-transit served core and on the outer reaches of the commuter rail," said Barry Bluestone, director of the Dukakis Center at Northeastern University in Boston. "In order to realize the private market investment in these walkable urban places, we are going to have to improve capacity and resiliency of the MBTA."

http://www.thesunchronicle.com/news/local_news/attleboro-cited-for-downtown-in-study-of-urban-areas/article_75118120-c798-11e4-b605-83efbd118f37.html



Business Digest for March 11, 2015

By Wicked Local Staff

Wicked Local Milford

March 12, 2015

Report looks at walkable places in Metro Boston

A new report, "Metro Boston: The WalkUP Wake-Up Call," analyzes the different forms and economic use of all land use across Metro Boston and ranks 57 walkable urban places ("WalkUPs") in Metro Boston, including Framingham, based on economic and social equity metrics. Released this week, the report is the first of its kind. To download, go to locusdevelopers.org/walkup-boston.

<http://milford.wickedlocal.com/article/20150311/NEWS/150319303/-1/business/?Start=2>



'Walkable' cities are on the rise

By Lauren DiTullio

The Eagle Tribune (Lawrence & Haverhill, MA)

March 15, 2015

Traffic and congestion. Delayed trains and crowded platforms. Merrimack Valley commuters face a series of obstacles during their trip to Boston, though many of them can walk to their jobs once they finally arrive.

Walkable Urban Places, or "WalkUPs," are the blueprint for the future of American cities, according to a report released by the George Washington University School of Business.

Patrick Lynch, author of the report, said two Merrimack Valley cities analyzed in the report — Lawrence and Haverhill — have "great bones" for the kind of walkable urban development that drives up property values and tax revenue.

But there's a lot of ground to cover before Haverhill and Lawrence can compete against other walkable cities in Massachusetts, Lynch said.

The ranking system devised by Lynch and co-author Christopher Leinberger placed the two Merrimack Valley cities in the bottom 10 out of the 57 urban areas assessed, when it comes to "social equity." The cities are affordable, but access via public transportation and employment opportunities are lacking, according to the report.

Lawrence's mayor said the city needs better commuter train transportation. Haverhill leaders, however, have said their downtown train station and its new parking garage give the community a solid downtown transportation system. They also said Haverhill is on the right track to becoming a walkable city.

In the last several years, developers have built hundreds of apartments and condos in old shoe factories, attracting a new inner-city population that can easily walk from home to restaurants, bars and other businesses in the western part of downtown. Residents of the area can also walk to the train station for their commute to Boston for work or weekend trips.

The same changes are starting to happen in the eastern end of downtown Haverhill, where several old buildings are being demolished to make room for Harbor Place — a development to include a UMass Lowell satellite campus, businesses, housing and a boardwalk along the Merrimack River. State economic officials are calling the project a model of what public and private investment can accomplish together.

Time will tell

Whatever Lawrence and Haverhill need to become walkable communities will be solved, in part, by letting time pass, Lynch said. The study found that only in the last 50 years have walkable urban areas experienced more economic growth than their driveable counterparts. In Massachusetts, the trend has taken hold in cities inside of Route 128, he said.

“That has generated all of these price premiums,” Lynch said. “At some point, it’s going to become too expensive, and I think that some of these areas (such as Lawrence and Haverhill) will get some of this development because it will be a much more affordable place to do it than off of 128,” Lynch said.

For state and local leaders, it’s not all about playing the waiting game. Jay Ash, state secretary of housing and economic development, said the approval process used by cities should be designed to encourage economically stimulating development projects, not quash them.

“A lot of developers relish the opportunity to take blight and turn it into something really special, but fighting city hall ... can be a major issue for developers that can take their time and their money elsewhere,” Ash said.

Ash, who has visited the Merrimack Valley several times since his appointment by Gov. Charlie Baker, said having cooperative and enthusiastic partners in municipal government will draw developers.

“When we talk about preparing for success ... that means having parcels that are available to redevelop, that are clean, that are pretty permanent, that have clear processes for developers and investors to move swiftly through a permitting process,” he said. “Those types of things are critical.”

When visiting Haverhill two weeks ago, Ash praised the city for making permitting easy for downtown developers, such as those building the new Harbor Place.

Mayor: Compact Lawrence has promise

The George Washington University report was presented at a summit in Boston by a Washington, D.C.-based organization called LOCUS. The goal of the summit was to bring municipal governments and developers together to encourage walkable urban development.

“Local leadership and having a vision and being able to articulate that vision is as important as having a site and being able to point to that site and say, ‘Wow, that looks like a clean site. That’d be a good place for this kind of development,’” Ash said.

Lawrence Mayor Daniel Rivera said he used the summit as a chance to approach Ash and state Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Pollack about bringing improvements to the city.

“To me, it’s right in Lawrence’s wheelhouse,” Rivera said. “Being a 6.7-square-mile city, you can basically walk right across it. I think the report shows some of the stuff we knew already, but it was important to know that there’s a trend toward communities like ours.”

Rivera said better commuter rail service is crucial to make Lawrence more attractive to investors and prospective residents, and provide current residents with more opportunities. Rivera was one of four officials from communities across the state to make a pitch directly to developers at the summit.

“I focused on things that are important to the bottom line for businesses,” such as low rent and a large work force, Rivera said.

Andre Leroux, executive director of the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance, said traits such as affordable rents in a dense urban area will help Lawrence benefit from the market’s favorable swing toward walkable urban areas. The George Washington study ranked cities in four categories — from copper, which is the lowest, to platinum, the highest. But Leroux said each community’s goal should be success — whatever that looks like.

“You don’t want every place to be a ‘platinum,’” he said. “It would be basically a playground for the wealthy. I think the ideal is to have mixed income communities that are really vibrant, where there is a chance for small businesses to start and have a chance to survive.”

Leroux, a former director of planning and policy for the non-profit Lawrence CommunityWorks, said Lawrence and Haverhill will be better off for having missed out on the “era of the Hummer and the McMansion.” With tightly packed downtown areas dotted with old industrial buildings, the two cities have a historic layout that lends itself well to contemporary, multi-use development.

“These places were built to be walkable,” he said. “They were built compact and high density. They’re well positioned in this new real estate market to do well if they can get the rest of the amenities in place that make a community very attractive.”

http://www.eagletribune.com/news/haverhill/walkable-cities-are-on-the-rise/article_e0f99b93-2e62-5246-8377-492069e8e371.html?mode=print

THE SUN CHRONICLE

Rankings reveal city's bright future

The Sun Chronicle (Attleboro, MA)

March 21, 2015



The city's new bus terminal is part of the reason Attleboro received a "gold rating" for affordability and accessibility among regional urban centers. (Staff file photo by Mark Stockwell)

Americans love rankings.

We rank movies, sports teams, colleges - heck, somewhere there's probably a website or magazine with a top 10 list of the best cemeteries in the U.S. of A.

"No. 2: Eternal Rest Meadows has lovely landscaping, beautiful pathways but just misses out on our number one spot for its lack of valet parking."

And Attleboro is no stranger to any number of lists of this sort. Not long ago, the Jewelry City was rated as the "second most boring" city in the commonwealth by a real estate group whose staff had way too much time on its hands.

But now the city's been ranked at the highest level in a couple of categories that recognize the fact that Attleboro's citizens can look to a promising future. The new study, "Metro Boston: Walk-Up Wake-Up Call," which looked at 57 walkable centers throughout Eastern Massachusetts, gave the city a "gold rating" in affordability and accessibility. Attleboro was classified as a "regional urban center" with a walkable urban core and access to public transportation in the study, which was published by the Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis at the George Washington University School of Business in Washington, D.C., and Boston's Northeastern University Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, with the assistance of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

Attleboro earned its gold rating based on relatively low housing costs compared with other urban areas, accessibility to transit and good school performance.

The study noted that Attleboro has benefited from a recent shift in construction and investment from suburban towns to urban areas.

The city center's new bus terminal, the Renaissance Station mixed use development and other elements of the downtown's revitalization, all were able to take advantage of that shift. And the city's administration, school department and Attleboro Redevelopment Authority can all claim part of the credit for the city's sterling - well, make that "golden" - ranking.

Somewhat unsettlingly, though, some of the elements that give the city its golden rating for affordability also knock it down to the less glittering "copper" rating in the survey's measure of economic performance. Attleboro's lower property tax assessments and more modest rental costs, while they may be off-putting for business interests, should properly, we think, be viewed as opportunities for investors who want to take advantage of low costs in a city that is on the verge of a new beginning.

After 100 years, the survey shows, Attleboro's best days are still ahead of it. And that's a ranking of which any city should be proud.

http://www.thesunchronicle.com/vip/opinion/rankings-reveal-city-s-bright-future/article_0bf2d794-1c40-590a-803f-1b4ab50fecfd.html