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Detroit

# Detroit jumps into top 3 for 'increasing walkability' in national ranking

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By [Benjamin Raven | braven@mlive.com](#)

DETROIT -- While Detroit still ranks in the 20s overall, the Motor City was recognized in a walkability study released last week as one of the top three cities "best-positioned"

for growth.

The report -- "[Foot Traffic Ahead 2016](#)" -- ranks America's 30 largest cities based on development of walkable, urban places and other accessibility metrics.

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Detroit ranks 21st overall, but came in third place for increasing walkability in the study published by George Washington University.

Christopher Leinberger, research professor and chair of the university's Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis, said Detroit's rise is a "big surprise."

The professor, a former University of Michigan staffer who co-authored the report, said half of new retail and real estate space in Detroit is taking place in Walkable Urban Places (WalkUPs).

"It looks so spectacular coming off of a low base, even so, the base is going to be growing," he said in a phone interview. "It's the highest (rise) I've ever seen. The denominator is only getting bigger.

"This will put a serious foundation under our regional economic growth."

While Detroit's walkable places only amount to around 25 to 33 percent of what cities like New York, Boston and Washington D.C. boast, new WalkUP space is growing five times faster than its current walkability rate would indicate, the professor said.

"A little more surprising, however, is that the metros of Detroit, Los Angeles, and Phoenix appear just as likely to experience a boom in walkable urbanism." the report

reads. "For decades, these three metros sprawled faster than most other metros.

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"While metro Detroit experienced the most substantial and well-publicized economic decline over the past decade, its future walkable urban growth is exceptionally promising. It has also experienced some of the fastest GDP and job growth of all 30 metros."

Foot Traffic Ahead revealed that the top 30 biggest metro areas in the country enjoyed overall market-share growth in walkable urban areas between 2010 and 2015.

This all happened while the other side of the study, drivable suburban areas, have lost market share.

"Only time we've seen these numbers was in the 80s when WalkUPs were getting creamed and drivable suburbs were up," said Leinberger. "Now, it's flipped.

"WalkUPs represent less than 1 percent of your land, but half of new real estate is going to WalkUps."

Detroit was grouped into what the report labeled "Level 3: Lower-Middle Walkable Urbanism," which put it on even ground with cities like Cleveland, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Miami and Sacramento.

The report states some of these cities have struggled to combine walkable urban

The report states some of these cities have struggled to combine walkable urban areas with metro areas, due to the absence of a "rail transit infrastructure."

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Leinberger said the under-construction M-1 (QLine) rail system in Downtown Detroit didn't play into the city's ranking.

"The real impact will come once it's up and running," he said. "There is so much in the pipeline, from what the Ilitch family is doing to everything being done by Bedrock and Quicken.

"Detroit is getting better, faster than everywhere else, but everyone else is also getting better and moving in the same direction."

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