

Thank you for printing content from www.citylab.com. If you enjoy this piece, then please check back soon for our latest in urban-centric journalism.



America's walkable neighborhoods are both wealthier and more highly educated.

Urbanist scholars as far back as Jane Jacobs have extolled the benefits of walkable neighborhoods, though they have been notoriously hard to quantify. Now, a [new report](#) by Christopher Leinberger and Michael Rodriguez at The George Washington University School of Business takes a close look at the effects of walkable places on the wealth and equity of metros.

To do so, the report ranks walkability for America's 30 largest metros using data on 619 walkable urban neighborhoods (based on their high [walk scores](#) and large concentrations of office and/or retail space). It then examines the connection between metro walkability and factors like economic development (based on GDP per capita), educational attainment (the share of adults with college degrees), and social equity (based on housing and transportation costs, as well as the number of jobs near a given residence).

Related Story



How Much Does Sprawl Cost U.S. Commuters?

More than \$107 billion annually, or about \$1,400 per commuter, a new analysis finds.

While walkable neighborhoods occupy only one percent of land mass across the 30 largest metros, they account for the majority of office and multi-family rental development, the report finds. Between 2010 and 2015, the market shares of walkable urban places increased in all 30 metros, with 27 metros seeing their growth double since 2010.

Unsurprisingly, New York tops the list of walkable places on the table below. In total, 38 percent of New York's office, retail, and multi-family rented space is located in walkable neighborhoods—and 80 percent of its walkable places are located in Manhattan alone. Washington, D.C., is second on the list with 33 percent, followed by Boston (32 percent), Chicago (30 percent), San Francisco (25 percent), and Seattle (22 percent). All told, these six metros account for nearly half of walkable places among the 30 U.S. metros examined in the report.

U.S. Metros with the Highest Levels of Walkable Urbanism

Metro	Number of Walkable Urban Places	Share of Office, Retail, and Multi-Family Rental Space Located in Walkable Urban Places
New York	67	38%
Washington, D.C	44	33%
Boston	54	32%
Chicago	38	30%
San Francisco	56	25%
Seattle	25	22%

Also unsurprisingly, the metros with the lowest levels of walkable urbanism are all located in the Sunbelt, as the table below shows. Orlando, Phoenix, and San Antonio have the smallest shares of walkable neighborhoods (with just 3 percent of their office, retail, and multi-family rented space in walkable places). Tampa has 4 percent, Las Vegas has 5 percent, and Dallas and San Diego have 7 percent each. The report notes that walkability has grown even in these lagging metros in recent years.

U.S. Metros with the Lowest Levels of Walkable Urbanism

Metro	Number of Walkable Urban Places	Share of Office, Retail, and Multi-Family Rental Space Located in Walkable Urban Places
Orlando	3	3%
Phoenix	4	3%
San Antonio	2	3%
Tampa	6	4%
Las Vegas	2	5%
Dallas	18	7%
San Diego	14	7%

According to the report's "Development Momentum Ranking"—based on factors such as rent premiums, market shares, and the share of urban vs. suburban space—walkable urbanism is likely to expand the most in metros like New York, Boston, Seattle, and D.C., which already have the highest shares of walkable neighborhoods. But walkability is also projected to rise considerably in Detroit, Phoenix, and L.A.

The most interesting part of the report examines the connections between walkability and economic development, education, and social equity.

Walkable metros are more affluent, as the chart below (which plots the connection between walkability and GDP per capita) shows. In fact, the correlation between the two is substantial (.49). Here, the top metros are driven by large superstar cities and tech hubs like New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, and D.C. These places are not only more affluent, but also denser, with more extensive transit systems. The two exceptions are Dallas and Houston, which have relatively low shares of walkable urbanism but higher GDPs per capita (as highlighted on the chart).

(Leinberger and Rodriguez)

Walkable metros are also more highly educated, the report finds. The following chart plots the connection between walkable urbanism and education (measured as the share of college graduates aged 25 and over). This time, the correlation is even higher than the one for GDP (.55), and the top metros are again driven by denser knowledge hubs and superstar cities.

(Leinberger and Rodriguez)

More interestingly, walkable metros have higher levels of social equity, according to the report. This stands in some contrast to other studies, which have found superstar cities like New York and knowledge hubs like San Francisco, Boston, and D.C. to have high levels of gentrification, housing unaffordability, and inequality. Here, the report measures social equity based on housing costs, transportation costs, and the number of jobs near a given residence, which reflects compact development more than socio-economic inequality.

The chart below shows the relationship between walkable metros and this measure of social equity. The correlation here is the highest of any of the relationships studied (.60). Even with their high housing costs, walkable metros can offer better lives for their residents, as their proximity to employment, density, and transit systems reduce transportation costs in ways that offset their steeper housing prices.

(Leinberger and Rodriguez)

The report optimistically notes that metros across the country are trending toward increased walkability and takes the view that “the end of sprawl is in sight.” That said, it is also true that the average size of American homes is once again increasing, far-flung suburbs continue to grow even faster than reviving urban areas, and the Sunbelt remains the nation’s fastest-growing region. At the end of the day, walkability remains a premium good—one that is far more prevalent in America’s most advantaged, affluent, and educated metros. Indeed, walkability is yet another dimension of the greater socioeconomic divide separating the winners and losers of the knowledge economy.

Terms of Service [Do Not Sell My Info \(California\)](#) Trademarks Privacy Policy

©2020 Bloomberg L.P. All Rights Reserved

[Careers](#) [Made in NYC](#) [Advertise](#) [Ad Choices](#) [Contact Us](#) [Help](#)