



LET'S GO FOR A WALK!

PLANNING GUIDE FOR A WALKABLE COMMUNITY, 2nd EDITION



Introduction

Walking is a great way to get around your neighborhood and be healthy at the same time! The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) uses the term “walking” to include all the ways that people move at a human speed, including all forms of mobility devices, such as a wheelchair, cane, or walker. Walking trips can be long or short distances and include walking to/from public transit or a parked car.



Some neighborhoods are currently better designed for walking than others. If you want to walk for short trips or for fun, but are not comfortable doing it in your neighborhood, this planning guide will help you improve conditions for walking by going on a “walk audit.” A **walk audit** is a group or solo activity in which participants evaluate the walking environment and identify issues that impact their comfort and safety.

This guide includes:

- Information about how streets and communities are planned
- Steps to plan a walk audit
- A fillable walk audit form

Getting Started

1. Review this planning guide for tips that make a walkable community.
2. Go for a walk in your neighborhood and fill out the “Walk Audit Form.” Use the sample form at the end of this document for ideas.
3. Take the action steps to make your community more walkable.

Tools for Creating Walkable Communities

The following tools make it easier and more pleasant to **walk along a roadway**:

Pedestrian-only Street / "Shared Street"

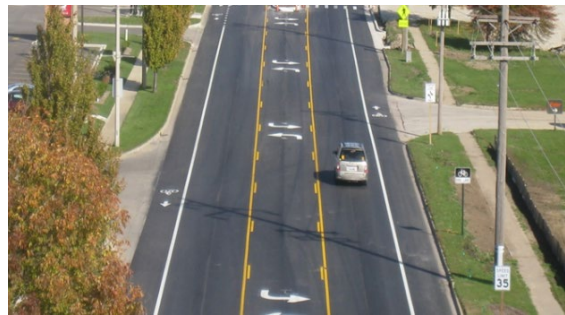


The following tools make it easier and more pleasant to **walk across a roadway**:

Curb ramp



Curb extension



Pedestrian crossing beacon



How to Create More Walkable Neighborhoods

The streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails that we see in neighborhoods across Minnesota were planned by people working in local and state government. These transportation features are often planned and built over many years of development. Knowing more about this process will help you create more walkable neighborhoods.

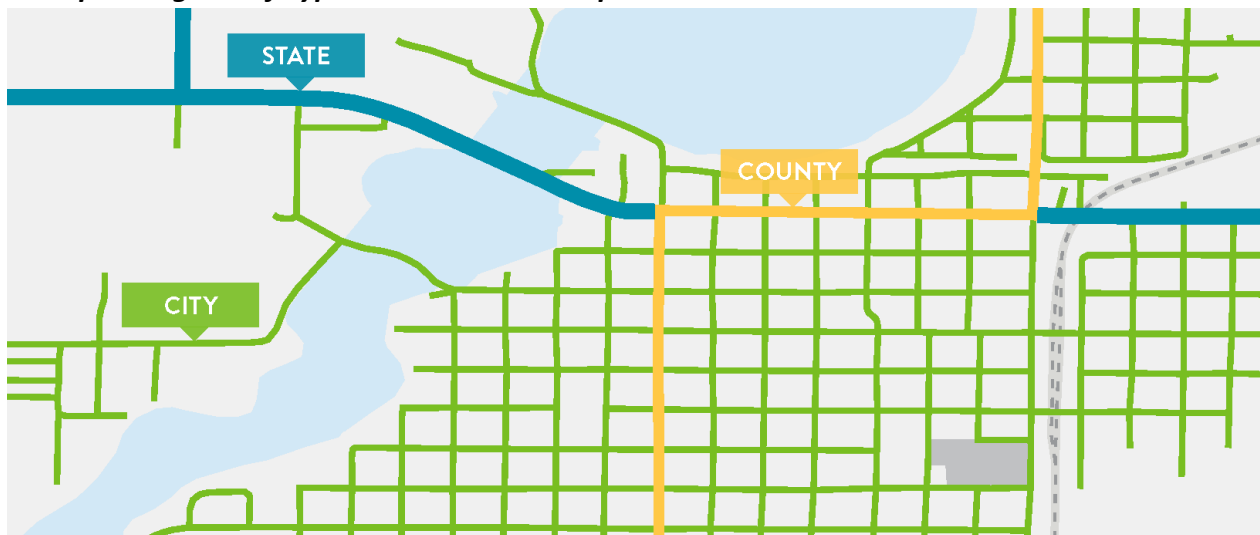
Who makes decisions?

Many government agencies are involved with transportation planning because streets are owned by different levels of government. For example, the street outside your home might be owned by the city. The busy “main street” that goes through your town center might be owned by the county where you live or the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT).

Various departments within each public agency have different responsibilities for providing safe and convenient walking infrastructure. Your city or county’s Public Works Department is likely the most relevant office to discuss improvements to streets and sidewalks.

Knowing which level of government owns the streets along your walk audit route will help you know who to work with to improve walkability. The MnDOT website has an online mapping tool called [Enterprise MnDOT Mapping Application](#) (EMMA). You can use this free online map to look up the ownership of streets near you.

Example Diagram of Typical Street Ownership



How are decisions made?

It's important to start advocating for improvements now because road projects require significant planning before construction begins. Projects vary in scale and include temporary demonstration projects, resurfacing, and reconstruction projects. Reconstruction projects are intended to last for decades. They typically involve large changes, such as excavating the street and sidewalk. These projects are planned years in advance and often offer the greatest opportunities for walkability improvements. Resurfacing projects are more limited in scope but can still impact walking. They can include road diets, curb extensions, and other changes. Projects that are not focused on walking impact walkability. For example, adding a new lane of traffic will increase the distance someone must walk to cross the street.

A temporary road project.



A road is resurfaced.



A road is reconstructed.



City / County or Tribal Government:

- **Capital Improvement Program (CIP):** Cities and counties create CIPs to plan transportation investments for the next 5-10 years (e.g., bridge projects, resurfacing, reconstruction). Looking ahead to future projects in the CIP can help advocate for walking improvements early in the planning process.
- **Active Transportation Plan, Comprehensive Plan, Corridor Study, Safe Routes to School Plan, or other planning process:** Plans consider what it is currently like to walk in a community and how infrastructure improvements, policy changes, and education programs could improve that experience. Planning processes are a good time to share specific ideas and feedback about streets that you think would benefit from walking improvements. Plans help communities identify and prioritize desired changes. Sometimes, changes to a street are tested as temporary demonstration projects. Instead of reconstruction or resurfacing, demonstration projects use low-cost materials to gain feedback about potential future changes to the street.
- **Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP):** HSIP uses federal funds to construct safety improvements from the Strategic Highway Safety Plan. The Federal government contributes between 90 – 100% for certain safety improvements. Understanding upcoming HSIP projects may be a chance to advocate for walking-centered improvements along and across the roadway.

Planning a Walk Audit

On a walk audit, community members and decision makers observe and identify opportunities to improve the comfort and safety of the surrounding environment. Because walking experiences can vary depending on the time of day and season, walk audits conducted while it is dark and during the winter can help to support walking in all conditions. Proactively including people with disabilities is important because they are more likely to rely on walking for daily trips and may be more aware of and impacted by problems in the transportation network. When a street is accessible for people with disabilities, it is accessible for all people.

Before the Walk:

Review the Minnesota Department of Health's [Inclusive Walk Audit Facilitator's Guide](#) for information about organizing walk audits that are inclusive of people with disabilities.

1-2 months before walk audit

- Connect with local disability organizations
- Select meeting location and date that works for organizers and key participants
- Plan for compensating attendees for their time and expertise
- Obtain disability simulation devices (if using)

1 month before walk audit

- Publicize walk audit and request RSVPs
- Directly invite people with disabilities
- Plan walk audit route(s) and develop virtual walk audit materials
- Develop meeting agenda

2 weeks before walk audit

- Post screen-reader accessible versions of materials online and/or share via email
- Share information on accessing the meeting location
- Ask participants about additional needed accommodations

1 week before walk audit

- Remind participants of the meeting time and location, and what materials are available for them to review in advance
- Obtain/prepare compensation for confirmed attendees

On the Walk:

- Walk the route and complete the walk audit form
- Discuss answers as a group or reflect individually

After the Walk:

- Follow up with the people and agencies who can help make improvements

Walk Audit Form

Date: Click or tap here to enter text. **Walking Route Location:** Click or tap here to enter text.

Walking Route Stops: Click or tap here to enter text.

Upcoming projects or planning processes (if known):

Instructions: Write down what you notice as you walk. Note ideas for improvements, and identify action steps and individuals or organizations who might be able to help take action.

Considerations	Observations	Ideas for Improvements
Do you have room to walk?		
Is it easy to cross streets?		
Do drivers behave safely?		
Is the route pleasant?		
How comfortable would you feel walking here with a child? With someone who has low vision? With someone using a wheelchair?		

Walk Audit Form

Date: September 27th **Walking Route Location:** City Hall to Central Park via Main Street

Walking Route Stops: Bank, Bus Stop, Library

Upcoming projects or planning processes (if known): Main Street (County road) to be reconstructed in 2-3 years; downtown parking study in progress; bicycle and pedestrian plan update next year

Instructions: Write down what you notice as you walk. Note ideas for improvements, and identify action steps and individuals or organizations who might be able to help take action.

Considerations	Observations	Ideas for Improvements
Do you have room to walk?	Utility poles blocking path and overgrown bushes near bus stop. Wide sidewalk near library.	Trim vegetation- could city remind property owners? Move utility poles and build wider sidewalks when the street is reconstructed- talk to County staff
Is it easy to cross streets?	Long distances between intersections with traffic lights. Had to wait a long time for the walk sign. Drivers didn't stop at mid-block crossing near the bank.	The mid-block crossing could be more visible. Is there something the County could do now to help with that?
Do drivers behave safely?	Drivers were swerving around another car waiting to turn.	If this road had a center turn lane, it would be easier to turn. Can this street change from 4 lanes to 2 lanes with a center turn lane? Could we test it out temporarily to see how it would work?
Is the route pleasant?	Area near the library had benches and shade trees- very comfortable. Near the bus stop there was no buffer from traffic.	When the street is reconstructed, we should make room for trees between the sidewalk and the road. Ask city staff about making sure the bicycle and pedestrian plan talks about trees and buffer space.
How comfortable would you feel walking here with a child? With someone who has low vision? With someone using a wheelchair?	Someone using a wheelchair would have a hard time on the narrow sidewalk by the bus stop. Lack of an audible signal to walk at the traffic light would make it hard for someone with low vision to cross. I'd never let my kids cross this street alone!	Find out if city or county has control over adding an audible signal. Talk with neighbors about what would make street safer for kids.