

# Walking Matters



## **REGIONAL PEDESTRIAN PLAN**

*Capitol Region Council of Governments*

### ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

***Adopted May 25, 2005***

## Executive Summary

This Plan was developed under the guidance of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee of the Capitol Region Council of Governments' (CRCOG) Transportation Committee. The Subcommittee was formed in November 1998 to oversee the development of the region's Bicycle Plan (completed in 2000) and its membership included representatives from each CRCOG member town, the Connecticut Department of Transportation, as well as citizens at large, including, members of the Connecticut Bicycle Coalition. In 2003, the Subcommittee membership was expanded to insure representation from additional groups interested in pedestrian issues, including public health professionals, public safety officials, recreation organizations, Main Street programs, and the disabled community.

### Introduction

**WALKING MATTERS - WE ARE ALL PEDESTRIANS:** Walking, sometimes considered an "alternate" form of transportation, might better be considered the primary form of transportation. Most trips, regardless of length or mode of travel (personal vehicle or public transit) involve some element of walking, whether from the home to the car, from the home to the bus stop, or from the vehicle to the final destination. In spite of this, over the past several decades, scant attention has been paid to the pedestrian environment and to the needs of pedestrians. This lack of focus has been prevalent throughout the country and in our region and has led to a decrease in the number of trips that can be made via walking. Fortunately, in recent years there has been an awakening to the need to provide for pedestrian travel and there has been a growing understanding of the importance of the pedestrian network for healthy, livable communities.

**WALKING MATTERS – SOME ARE MORE DEPENDENT ON WALKING:** Even though everyone is a pedestrian some of the time, certain segments of the population are



more likely than others to depend upon walking for much of their travel. Children, too young to drive, or without access to a car, rely upon walking to independently get where they want to go. The elderly, who may no longer be able to drive, or who prefer not to drive, also rely on walking to maintain their independence. Many members of the disabled community meet more of their travel needs through walking than

does the general population. And finally, those who do not own cars, either by choice or financial necessity, are more dependent upon walking as a means to get around. When considering the need for safe pedestrian facilities, it is important to consider the everyday and special needs of these groups.

**WALKING MATTERS – WALKABLE COMMUNITIES ARE LIVABLE**

**COMMUNITIES:** Years ago towns and developments were built for all modes of transportation and it was assumed that walking would be a vital part of getting around in town. As development in the last 50 years focused more upon the needs of automobiles – how to get them to a development, how to park them once they were there - assumptions were made that people would not walk, and pedestrian facilities were not provided.



Recent surveys indicate that this was a mistake, that many people would like to be able to walk more.

A recent survey conducted by Smart Growth America and the National Association of Realtors indicates that for 72% of the population, having sidewalks and places to walk is an important factor when buying a home.

Trends in construction of new shopping centers, where life style centers try to recreate the feel of a traditional downtown, indicate that the public responds positively to

the provision of walkable places. A 2000 Regional Development Issues Survey, conducted for CROG by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut indicated that in all three communities surveyed (Hartford, West Hartford, and Suffield), strong majorities (86%, 81% and 65% respectively) agreed that more places where people can walk, rather than drive, from their home to shops, work, and recreation are needed. And simple observation of vibrant town and city centers shows us that walkability is a key component of vital centers. Further, recent safety studies have indicated that when more people are visible walking in a community, the environment actually becomes safer for walking, without any physical changes<sup>1</sup>.

**WALKING MATTERS – IT’S PART OF A BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM:**

A successful transportation system is one that accommodates a variety of modes of travel and does not require individuals to depend on one way of getting around. Census trends show that walking is becoming less common for work trips (mode share for bicycling and walking to work in the region declined from 10% to 6% from 1990 to 2000). In addition, nationwide, over the past 30 years the percent of children walking or biking to school has declined from 66% to 13%. Nationally, about 50% of all trips are less than 3 miles in length, and of those trips less than 0.5 mile in length, more than 50% are made in a vehicle. These trips could quite reasonably be converted to walking trips if sufficient, safe facilities are provided. Furthermore, work trips, which may be less amenable to walking, comprise less than 20% of total daily trips (2001 National Household Travel Survey), so there is quite a base of trips that might be suitable for walking.

<sup>1</sup> Jacobsen, P.L. Safety in Numbers: More Walkers and Bicyclists, Safer Walking and Bicycling, *Injury Prevention*, 2003; 9: 205-209

***WALKING MATTERS – WALKABILITY LEADS TO HEALTHY COMMUNITIES:***

In recent years, there has been growing concern with the prevalence of overweight and obesity in the adult population in the US. Currently, it is estimated that more than 30% of the nation's adult population is categorized as obese. Obesity increases the risk of developing many health conditions, including Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, and other cancers, gall bladder disease, osteoarthritis, and sleep apnea. It is estimated that poor diet and physical inactivity lead to 300,000 premature deaths each year, second only to deaths caused by tobacco. And these risks have a cost to the public: it is estimated that Medicaid and Medicare costs in the state of Connecticut attributable to overweight and obesity are in excess of \$650 million annually<sup>2</sup>. This includes only direct medical costs and not the costs of increased absenteeism and loss of productivity. Moderate physical activity, including walking, is one of the best antidotes to the obesity epidemic. Just ½ hour of walking, 5 times a week, can greatly change an individual's health status.

***WALKING MATTERS – PROVIDING PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE IS PART OF A POLICY OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:***

The federal government requires that all transportation projects be evaluated for "environmental justice," which means that the impact of a project upon low income and minority neighborhoods must not be disproportionate. Recently there has been greater awareness that transportation policies which favor infrastructure for automobiles over that for pedestrians have a negative effect on environmental justice. That is, use of transportation resources for motor vehicle facilities disproportionately benefits those who choose to drive over those for whom walking is a primary form of transportation and low income and minority neighborhoods tend to be more dependent upon walking for transportation than the average population.

***WALKING MATTERS – PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IS A PUBLIC SAFETY***

***RESPONSIBILITY:*** Providing a walkable infrastructure is an important public safety responsibility. Over the past decades, the transportation safety focus has been almost exclusively on automobiles. An unintended consequence of making streets safer for autos has been to make them less safe for the primary transportation mode, that of walking.

***WALKING MATTERS –*** Walking does matter and as a result, many communities are beginning to recognize that they need to **Complete the Streets**, providing a road system that accommodates all users, including pedestrians.

There is no question, ***Walking does matter***, it is our primary form of transportation. Even when we drive or take transit, walking is part of our journey. For some in our society, young, elderly, or disabled, walking is a means of maintaining independence. And for our towns and communities, pedestrian facilities and the presence of an active pedestrian culture help to create a livable community.

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<sup>2</sup> Finkelstein, EZ, Fiebelkorn, IC, Wang, G. State-level estimates of annual medical expenditures attributable to obesity. *Obesity Research* 2004; 12 (1):18-24



But in the past 50 years, development patterns have not reflected the importance of walking. New roads have been built without sidewalks, commercial developments have been designed for auto access with little thought given to pedestrians. Many new residential developments are distant from community activity centers – parks, schools, shops and offices.

Road and highway improvements have focused primarily on moving vehicles and scant attention and resources have been devoted to pedestrian facilities. In addition, some roadway improvements have inadvertently deteriorated pedestrian safety, only because pedestrian needs were not considered.

This Capitol Region Pedestrian Plan is designed to correct these trends, to insure that

our region provides for all forms of transportation, including walking. To change the habits of many decades will take persistence and will require that all involved in decisions regarding pedestrian facilities – planners, engineers, and local elected officials – be brought on board. Conventional wisdom regarding roadway design and development patterns will need to be questioned and redefined. New tools and techniques will have to be introduced. A **Complete the Streets** ethic, which recognizes the importance of the roadway system serving all users, including pedestrians, must emerge in the region. This plan includes a wide range of actions that can be taken at the regional level to move us toward these goals and to create a region that is truly livable for all its citizens.

The region can begin to transform itself if planners, engineers and decision makers shift their way of thinking to recognize that indeed, **Walking Matters**. If professionals and elected officials do, in fact, believe that walking matters, a true pedestrian friendly ethos will result. This will lead to a new way of approaching issues.

### ***WALKING MATTERS: A NEW PLANNING ETHIC FOR THE REGION***

- Inclusion of pedestrian considerations in all planning studies.
- Consideration of pedestrian needs in all land use decisions.
- Consideration of pedestrian needs in all transportation projects.
- Rethinking of funding priorities
- Consideration of pedestrian access when approving new developments
- Consideration of pedestrian access when locating government facilities (including schools.)

## ***Vision***

This plan is based upon a vision:

**In the future, residents and visitors of the region will be able to walk, bicycle, or take another type of non-motorized vehicle\* via roads and multi-use trails, safely and conveniently to employment centers, shopping areas, bus and train centers, recreation and cultural attractions, and schools. Residential and commercial land use planning and development incorporate walking and bicycling as transportation modes, providing people of all ages efficient and enjoyable transportation options within development clusters and to nearby destinations. It is our intent that such steps will also contribute to a greater sense of community and friendliness in our communities while enhancing our appreciation of the natural environment.**

Realizing this vision will require a variety of actions and the participation of all of the municipalities in the region. Change will not happen overnight, but continual focus on our vision and actions in accord with this plan will enable the region to move toward its goal of being a walkable, pedestrian friendly place.

## ***Learning from Others***

When it comes to pedestrian planning and design, there is no need to reinvent the wheel, a good deal of work has already been completed. But the latest information on pedestrian safety and design is not always readily available to the town planners and engineers who need it. A review of pedestrian safety literature and design guides provides the following guidance for enhancing pedestrian safety and improving pedestrian facilities.

### **Factors to Consider in Planning**

- Compact, mixed-use developments create more opportunities for walking.
- A fine grained (characterized by short blocks) and interconnected street system allows for human scaled streets that facilitate walking.
- Pedestrian connections to major generators (retail, schools, transit, major developments) insure that walking is an option.
- Careful location of developments that tend to produce more walking trips (schools, senior housing, retail) facilitates walking.
- Walking can be encouraged with attention to parking lot design and placement of parking. Pedestrians are discouraged when they need to walk across a sea of parking.
- Provision of appropriate bicycle facilities can improve pedestrian safety by keeping bikes off the sidewalks.

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\* Electric wheelchairs are not considered motorized vehicles.

## Features that Improve Pedestrian Safety

- Sidewalks and walkways enhance pedestrian safety and mobility.
- Improved nighttime lighting can improve pedestrian safety.
- Clear sight lines for pedestrians are vital. Pedestrians must be able to see the traffic and the traffic must be able to see the pedestrians.
- Marked crosswalks alone do not necessarily increase pedestrian safety. Other measures may be needed:
  - Medians to provide a pedestrian refuge. Raised medians are especially useful in reducing pedestrian-vehicular conflicts on multi lane roads.
  - Proper illumination of the crosswalk to insure the pedestrian is visible.
  - Signs, signals, and lights that alert motorists that pedestrians are crossing.
- Shorter crossing distances are safer. Shorter crossing distances can be achieved by:
  - Providing curb bumpouts
  - Reducing corner radii
  - Providing median refuge
- Raised crosswalks and raised intersections slow traffic enabling motorists more reaction time when they see pedestrians at the crosswalk.
- Traffic signals must be visible to pedestrians.
- Travelers on foot need convenience. Traffic signals should be designed to provide this:
  - Exclusive pedestrian signal phases (where all vehicular traffic is stopped and pedestrians can cross all legs of the intersection) can improve pedestrian safety, but such signals are only effective at locations with more than 1200 pedestrians per day. Careful consideration of all factors is needed before selecting exclusive pedestrian phases.
  - Short cycle lengths, of 90 seconds maximum ideally, are important to reduce pedestrian delay.
  - Where pedestrian traffic is regular and frequent, pedestrian phases should come up automatically. Actuation should only be used when pedestrian crossings are intermittent.



- Allowing right turn on red results in a small but clear safety problem for pedestrians.
- Safety of trips to and from school can be enhanced by sidewalks and proper signalization but also by well-trained adult crossing guards, selective enforcement, and warning signs and markings. Safe Routes to Schools programs can identify needed improvements in a comprehensive way.



- Traffic calming has a positive effect on pedestrian safety.
- The number of access points and curb cuts on a roadway has a large impact on pedestrian comfort and safety.
- All sidewalks and pedestrian facilities must be built in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. This includes providing:
  - Detectable (tactile) warnings at boundaries between streets and sidewalks
  - Curb ramps at all locations where a sidewalk accesses a street.
  - Clear pathways on sidewalks of at least 36 inches. Where sidewalk widths are less than 60 inches, passing areas 60 by 60 inches must be provided every 200 feet.

### ***Existing Conditions for Walking in the Region: Identified Needs***

In order to better understand the characteristics of the pedestrian environment in the region, CRCOG undertook a pedestrian safety study and also surveyed each town regarding pedestrian issues. While there are many pedestrian friendly enclaves in the region, every town, when asked, was able to identify pedestrian safety concerns within their borders. The CRCOG pedestrian safety study examined the characteristics of pedestrian accidents in the region in order to identify general areas for improvement.

Following is a summary of the needs identified by examining existing conditions:

- The statistics show a need for pedestrian safety improvements. Our regional study indicates that these improvements should be focused in the following areas:
  - The physical environment should enhance safety.
  - A sidewalk network is a vital component for pedestrian safety.



- Because 80% of all regional pedestrian accidents occur when the pedestrian is crossing the street, street crossings should be made safer and more convenient.
  - Safety improvements should be focused on commercial/retail areas, schools, and health care facilities.
  - Pedestrians need to be educated on how to cross streets, both signalized and unsignalized, safely and legally. A special emphasis should be placed upon education of children.
  - Motorists need to be educated as to the rights of pedestrians. Most motorists yield to pedestrians in cross walks only when a sign indicating they should do so is placed at the crosswalk.
  - Towns need to be careful with right turn on red permissions so as not to compromise pedestrian safety.
  - Pedestrian laws need to be enforced.
- There is a need to create a sense of the “value” of sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities.
  - Ordinances dealing with sidewalk requirements are not rigorously enforced currently.
  - There appears to be an overuse of exclusive pedestrian signal phases in the region.
  - A more systematic approach is needed for providing pedestrian facilities.

**80% of regional pedestrian accidents occur when the pedestrian is crossing the street.**

## ***Plan to Reach Our Vision***

Our Plan to improve pedestrian safety and to achieve our vision of a pedestrian friendly region is contained in four major recommendations:

- 1. Provide an accessible, integrated and safe regional transportation system in which bicycling, walking and transit are prioritized.**
- 2. Promote the increased use of non-motorized travel**
- 3. Decrease the number of pedestrians and bicyclists killed and injured**
- 4. Improve funding opportunities for the construction, maintenance and operation of bicycle and pedestrian facilities**

Recommended actions are listed below, not in priority order.

**1. Provide an accessible, integrated and safe regional transportation system in which bicycling, walking and transit are prioritized.**

**1.1 *Put the proper regulations into place***

To enable the development of an integrated and region wide pedestrian network, it is important to have in place regulations that support such development.

**1.1.1 Advocate for the State Traffic Commission to give consideration to bicycle and pedestrian needs during their permitting process.**

**1.1.2 Advocate for the Connecticut Department of Transportation to revise their current policy regarding funding of sidewalks.**

**1.1.3 Advocate for Connecticut DOT and the region's towns to adopt the USDOT Policy on Integrating Biking and Walking into the Transportation Infrastructure.**

**1.2 *Provide education and outreach***

Many of the improvements that are needed to improve pedestrian safety are under the purview of the region's towns and CRCOG cannot directly cause them to be implemented. But CRCOG can play a large role in insuring that the towns are aware of best practices in pedestrian design. Areas to be focused upon include traffic signal timing, emerging techniques, model ordinances, traffic calming, and community design.

**1.2.1 Provide resources to towns as they design bicycle/pedestrian facilities.** This will include a number of different activities:

**1.2.1.1 Develop a Bike/Pedestrian/Traffic Calming Newsletter.**

**1.2.1.2 Sponsor annual design workshops on bike and pedestrian issues.**

**1.2.1.3 Develop and disseminate to the towns model ordinances for sidewalk installation and maintenance.**

**1.2.1.4 Provide model language for local Plans of Conservation and Development.**

**1.2.1.5 Provide model details for pedestrian accommodations.**

**1.2.1.6 Develop educational materials that towns can use with developers.**

**1.2.1.7 Plan an annual walking audit with town officials and staff.**

**1.2.2 Work with towns to test promising strategies.**

**1.2.3 Encourage towns to learn from each other.**

### **1.3 Provide the right transportation system for Biking and Walking**

In order to increase pedestrian activity within the region, it is important that the transportation system encourage walking by providing safe and convenient facilities. Pedestrian and bike advocates have called for a campaign to **complete the streets** throughout the country. The goal of the complete the streets movement is to insure that all streets meet the needs of all users: motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Most of the following recommendations that can help complete the streets require town action to be implemented, but CRCOG can play an important role in encouraging the towns to act.

#### **1.3.1 Encourage towns to develop a street grid network in areas of development.**

#### **1.3.2 Encourage towns to assess pedestrian facility needs.**

#### **1.3.3 Encourage towns to adopt design standards for sidewalk and pedestrian facilities.**

#### **1.3.4 Facilitate efforts to provide pedestrian access to other modes.**

#### **1.3.5 Work with the towns to continue to develop the regional multi use trail system.**

#### **1.3.6 Operate a pedestrian road problem reporting system.**

#### **1.3.7 Insure that transportation planning and traffic studies done in the region include an assessment of pedestrian needs.**

## **2. Promote the increased use of non-motorized travel.**

At the same time that pedestrian facilities are enhanced, it is important to encourage the public to consider walking for regular transportation needs. Currently, walking is seen as somewhat of an extraordinary effort, except for very short trips within urban or town center environments. The following tasks are designed to change the culture in the region to one that accepts and encourages walking as an important part of the transportation mix.

### **2.1 Safe Routes to School**

The Safe Routes to Schools program is designed to assess why children do not walk to school and then to identify how to improve conditions so that children will walk to school in greater numbers. These programs can lead to reduced traffic in the vicinity of schools, with concomitant reductions in pollution and improvements in children's health.

**2.1.1 Offer training to regional professionals, parents, school staff, and other stakeholders.**

**2.1.2 Run one or more pilot Safe Routes program.**

## **2.2 Promotional Activities**

The following actions are designed to increase the numbers of people walking and to indicate the region's commitment to walking as a viable mode.

**2.2.1 Walk to Work Promotion.**

**2.2.2 Walking Clubs.**

**2.2.3 Walk/Health Information.**

## **3. Decrease the number of pedestrians and bicyclists killed and injured**

Provision of safe and convenient facilities will improve pedestrian safety, but education and enforcement efforts are also needed. Both motorists and pedestrians, and even some law enforcement officers, are confused about their rights and responsibilities with regard to pedestrian law. This is a sampling of items that do not seem clear to the average individual: Does a motorist only have to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks when a sign so directing is located adjacent to the crosswalk? Does a turning vehicle always need to scan for pedestrians in the crosswalk before turning? Can a pedestrian ever legally cross mid block? An education campaign aimed at providing universal understanding of the rights and responsibilities of pedestrians will provide more certainty to those walking and those driving. This will be most successful when backed up with an enforcement campaign that reinforces safe and legal behavior.

### **3.1 Education**

**3.1.1 Work with the state to conduct a statewide pedestrian safety campaign.**

**3.1.2 Develop a local consortium for a pedestrian safety education effort.**

**3.1.3 Integrate pedestrian education into the state and City of Hartford Police Academy curriculum.**

**3.1.4 Develop a model for in class education.**

### **3.2 Enforcement**

**3.2.1 Evaluate enforcement programs in use in the region and elsewhere.**

**3.2.2 Create targeted program for pedestrian law enforcement in the region.**

### **3.3 Safe Infrastructure Design**

Providing safe pedestrian infrastructure is a key component of improving pedestrian safety. Accomplishing the strategies noted above in Section 1.3, Provide the right transportation system for biking and walking, will create a safer pedestrian environment.

## **4. Improve funding opportunities for the construction, maintenance and operation of bicycle and pedestrian facilities**

Most of the above listed strategies are dependent upon funding availability for success. The following strategies are designed to insure that appropriate funding is available.

### **4.1 Encourage Capital Programming**

Annual set asides of funding provide certainty that enables long range planning for bike and pedestrian needs.

**4.1.1 Encourage Towns to program capital and maintenance dollars each year for bicycle and pedestrians facilities.**

**4.1.2 Encourage a greater emphasis upon bike and pedestrian projects in the selection of projects to be funded by STP Urban money.**

**4.1.3 Encourage CT DOT to program more funds for bicycle and pedestrian facilities.**

### **4.2 Grant funding**

CRCOG and the towns should aggressively pursue grant programs appropriate for bike and pedestrian projects.

**4.2.1 Notify Towns of grant programs to which they can apply.**

**4.2.2 Apply for those grants appropriate for a regional agency.**

## **Priorities and Next Steps**

While all of the recommendations listed above have merit, it is not possible to implement them all immediately, priorities must be set. For the implementation of the Pedestrian Plan to be balanced, each goal area should be addressed. Based upon input received from the public, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee, the CRCOG Transportation Committee, Policy Board and Regional Planning Commission, and an assessment of the difficulty involved with each recommendation, it is recommended that in the first year, the following be implemented:

### **1. Work with the state:**

- a. To change the state sidewalk policy (Recommendation 1.1.2).
- b. To program more dollars for bike and pedestrian projects (Recommendation 4.1.3).
- c. To have the State Traffic Commission consider bike and pedestrian needs (Recommendation 1.1.1).

After initial discussions of these items with the state, select the one that is most likely to move forward and concentrate efforts there.

### **2. Provide Resources to Towns:**

- a. Model ordinances (Recommendation 1.2.1.3)
- b. Model language for Plans of Conservation and Development (Recommendation 1.2.1.4)
- c. Sponsor at least one design workshop. Additional workshops may be sponsored if they do not involve a lot of planning and setup. (Recommendation 1.2.1.2)
- d. Safe routes to school training, in the City of Hartford (Recommendation 2.1.1).
- e. Encourage the development of pedestrian facility master plans (Recommendation 1.3.2)

For successful implementation of these recommendations, it will be very important to work with town Planning and Zoning commissions along with town elected officials and town staff.

### **3. Pedestrian Safety Campaign**

Work to have this adopted as a statewide effort (Recommendation 3.1.1). If not successful, run a local program.

### **4. Trail System**

Work with the towns to continue to develop the trail system (Recommendation 1.3.5). Focus first on planned trails and then take a look at where trails are needed but no plans have been developed yet.

Realizing our vision of a pedestrian friendly region will require action on the part of the towns with support and resources provided by CRCOG. Upon adoption of the plan, CRCOG will schedule quarterly meetings of the region's Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee to discuss progress. Regular reports on progress will be made to the

Transportation Committee, and as deemed necessary, reports will be made to the Policy Board. In addition, as appropriate, meetings will be scheduled with town planners, engineers, and or Planning and Zoning Commissions. These meetings will provide opportunities for redirecting efforts and resolving issues that might arise. **Persistence, vigilance, and dedication to our vision will bring success.**