



INTRODUCTION

Walkability is a term to describe how well a place, or environment, facilitates foot travel. It should be noted that while walkability refers to one travel mode, the factors which influence walkability can be translated to other non-driving travel modes, such as rolling and bicycling (Baobeid et al., 2021). The term “walkability” is context-dependent and can refer to different elements of a place, depending on the means and outcomes associated with walking (Forsyth, 2015). For example, walkability can be defined by using indicators for traversability like dedicated crosswalks, sidewalk connections, and ADA curb ramps.

Walkability can also be defined by how easily someone could access or reach a specific destination by foot, such as a grocery store, park, trail, school, or pharmacy, based on proximity and comfort. It is helpful to consider walkability in a place by asking the following questions:

- How safely can someone walk here?
- How comfortably can someone walk here?
- How efficiently can someone reach their destination?
- How convenient is it to walk here?

This resource guide is designed to help municipalities and community members consider ways to improve walkability that promote health equity and placemaking in Vermont. By the end of this guide, you will have a comprehensive understanding of how to plan, implement, and use a walkability audit in your own Vermont community.

MAKING THE CASE FOR WALKABLE PLACES

Many of the attributes and outcomes associated with improved walkability have community-wide benefits. More direct benefits include increased

physical activity which is known to improve health outcomes, increased social capital and networks, and greater freedom of movement for youth and non-driving persons. Environmental improvements to enhance walkability through physical infrastructure and land-use can also lead to increased accessibility and connectivity between places. In addition, walkability leads to consumer cost savings (Litman, 2003) and supports economic activity. (Baobeid et al., 2021)

BENEFITS OF WALKABLE STREETS

Benefit	Description
Accessibility	Degree that non-auto transport provides mobility options, particularly for people who are transportation disadvantaged.
Consumer cost savings	Degree to which non-auto transport provides consumer transportation cost savings, e. g., private vehicle ownership and operating cost, parking.
Public cost savings	Degree that non-auto transport substitutes for vehicle travel and reduces negative impacts, including externalities (e. g., air pollution, crashes, etc.).
Efficient land use	Degree that non-auto transport helps reduce the amount of land used for roadway and parking facilities and helps create more accessible, clustered land use.
Livability	Degree that non-auto transport improves the local environment, including property values, business activity, etc.
Public fitness and health	Degree that non-auto transport provides physical exercise to people who are otherwise sedentary.
Economic development	Degree to which non-auto transport makes commercial areas more attractive and shifts consumer expenditures to goods that provide more regional economic activity and employment (see discussion under “other considerations” above).
Equity	Degree that non-auto transport helps achieve equity among various user groups, especially the elderly, young, disabled and disadvantaged.

Complete Streets Guide for Vermont Communities, Dubois & King Consulting Engineers et al. (2012), p. 31

ASSESSING READINESS

The Vermont Department of Health [outlines several action steps](#) that staff and organizations can take to assess readiness for creating walkable communities. Walk audits are one method included in the toolbox to assess readiness and identify specific opportunities for improving walkability in their environment (Vermont Department of Health, 2013).

USING A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH

Walk audits are a systematic and interactive tool that gathers quantitative and qualitative data to assess existing conditions, identify needs, and develop a range of solutions. The process of a walk audit promotes team building and cross-discipline collaboration when working towards a common goal. Walk audit results are often used to support further technical assistance or substantiate funding applications for long-term and permanent improvements.

WALK AUDIT LEVEL-SETTING:

- **Develop Walk Audit Goals:** Walk audits can be most successful if those who will use and conduct the walk audit have a set of shared goals. The goals influence what data will be collected, how data will be recorded, and even where the walk audit will take place.
- **Be ‘Street-Level’ Ready:** The walk audit process allows participants to experience new perspectives, develop insight on others’ challenges, and establish new connections with neighbors and other participants while in the field. Part of the process is pausing and observing to allow individuals to process and document their surroundings. During a walk audit, be open to hearing about others’ experiences to mold your perspective.
- **Bring Along Multiple Perspectives:** When walk audit groups are more collaborative and involve a wide range of perspectives, the audit can produce a lot of data with more unique data points. For example, if you know there will be a public utility project along the corridor, then make sure a public works staff member is represented in the audit group. A diverse set of experiences and expertise can also lead to short-term success, especially when local government and regional representatives are involved.

There are many ways to approach a walk audit depending on the goals, resources, and setting. Walk audits can be used to pull together a multi-disciplinary group, including local and regional staff and advocates. This often results in a lot of enthusiasm and energy to carry momentum past the walk audit itself. Walk audits can prepare communities to apply for grants and other funding opportunities to deliver on solutions and recommendations.

IMPLEMENTATION TIPS AND TOOLS

Walk audits can be held within a neighborhood park, along a short stretch of road, following a route between two destinations, or even at a few intersections. Below are some tips that will contribute to a successful walk audit.

- **Do some homework.**
 - Draw a map of your route! Include key assets and connections.
 - Take an inventory of existing or upcoming projects along the walk audit route, especially development, transportation, and utilities projects.
 - Check to see if your local, regional, or state transportation organization has a standard walk audit or road safety assessment form. Sharing walk audit results with these forms may be effective in informing future transportation projects.
- **Prepare for the field.**
 - Maintain a manageable group size— this may mean multiple, small groups.
 - Plan to conduct the audit during various hours (e.g., school drop-off, weekends).
- **Document, document, document.**
 - Watch for driver behavior too. Driver behavior is key data to inform necessary interventions.
 - Some examples of things to pause and pay attention to: crossing signals, overhead traffic lights, turning lanes, curb cuts, sidewalks, crosswalks, vehicle stop lines, and lighting.
 - Take lots of photos! A picture is worth a thousand words.

Several walk audit guides and worksheets are published and can be used to equip your walk audit. Below are some resources with walk audit worksheets to use while in the field:

- Plain Language Walk Audit (available in Spanish)
- [Walk Audit Tool - AARP](#) (available in Spanish)
- [8-80 Walk Audits](#) - 8-80 Cities (available in Spanish)
- [Get to Know Your Neighborhood with a Walk Audit](#) - Safe Routes to School National Partnership
- [Universal Design Walkability Audit Tool](#) - National Transport Authority, Ireland

WALKABILITY IN ACTION

Marshfield, VT

The Healthy Communities Vermont team conducted a comprehensive walkability audit with the TA Pilot community team in Marshfield Village to enhance the pedestrian experience and ensure the safety of its residents. The primary goal of the audit was to identify areas of improvement, assess community concerns, and document issues with the existing pedestrian infrastructure. Over 17 people representing community members of various ages and abilities, conducted the walk audit using the [AARP walk audit worksheets](#). The worksheets were used to note challenges and highlight pressing needs of the walk audit corridors. Among the primary concerns were poor pedestrian crossings, uneven or lack of sidewalks, and overgrown greenery and loose debris.





WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- **Technical Assistance Resources:**
 - [Better Connections Program | Agency of Transportation](#)
 - [Recreation Economy for Rural Communities | US EPA](#)
- **Vermont Walkability Case Studies:**
 - Danville, VT- [The Danville Village to Village Project Activity Center Master Plan](#)
 - Bethel, VT
 - [AARP Walk Audit Report 2022](#)
 - [Bethel for All](#)
 - Fairlee, VT- [Fairlee Village Center Action Plan](#)
 - Poultney, VT
 - [Better Connections Town To Trails Report November 2022](#)
 - [Recreation Economy for Rural Communities Poultney Action Plan](#)
 - [Town To Trails Storymap](#)
 - [Western Transportation Institute Case Studies Report: Small \(< 10k people\) communities with bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure- February 2022](#)
- **Walk Audits/Assessment Resources and Guidance (General - Non-Vermont-Based)**
 - [How to Perform a Walk Audit - Patronicity](#)
 - [How to Conduct a Walk Audit in Your Community: Quick Video Guide for Assessing Your Neighborhood Walkability - America Walks](#)

- [What is Walkability and How Do You Measure It?: Takeaways From This Year's TRB Meeting \(2011\)](#) - Project for Public Spaces
- [So You Want to Conduct a Walkability Assessment](#) - NCHPAD
- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Resources**
 - [VTRANS Bike and Pedestrian Design Resources](#)
 - [Vermont Complete Streets Guide](#)
 - US Department of Transportation
 - [Low-Cost Pedestrian Safety Zones: Countermeasure Selection Resource](#)
 - [Low-Cost Pedestrian Safety Zones: An Eight-Step Handbook](#)
 - [Improving Safety for Walking, Biking, and Rolling](#)
 - [Federal Highway Association: Focusing on Pedestrian Safety](#)
- **Vermont Grants/Funding Opportunities**
 - [VTRANS Bicycle and Pedestrian Program](#)
 - [VTRANS Municipal Grants Guide](#)

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