

Let's Go For A Walk: A Toolkit for Planning and Conducting a Walk Audit



Photo Credit: Orange County Health Care Agency

Acknowledgments

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The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a catalyst for the creation of safe, active, equitable, and healthy communities—urban, suburban, and rural—throughout the United States. Founded in 2005, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership advances safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, to improve the health and well-being of kids of all races, income levels, and abilities, and to foster the creation of healthy communities for everyone. The National Partnership is a 501(c)(3) non-profit.





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A. Introduction

Walk audits are a great tool in creating communities where residents can participate in making their vision of healthy, safe, walkable streets real. In a walk audit, community members go for a walk together, noting what makes their streets feel comfortable for walking and what's missing. Walk audits can be informal and casual, or can include city councilmembers, traffic engineers, and detailed forms. In this toolkit, we give you the tools to hold your own walk audit that will help you achieve the goals of your community.

Why Do We Want Walkable Communities?

When our streets are walkable, our communities benefit in all kinds of ways. Kids can safely walk to school, reducing traffic congestion and arriving at school ready to focus and learn. Walkable streets let people without cars safely get to work or to the corner store. Walkable streets let neighbors meet each other, and provide a pleasant place for physical activity, walking a dog, or jogging. In addition, when people live in walkable communities, they are healthier and more likely to be a healthy weight. Giving people the option to walk instead of drive can improve the safety of streets and reduce air pollution and asthma rates.

Safe Routes to School Tip!

Safe Routes to School helps improve safety for students walking to and from school. Conducting walk audits on streets near the school and students' routes can help:

- Improve safety to and from school on streets and in neighborhoods
- Identify school entrance/exit and facility needs
- Engage students in understanding and improving their neighborhoods
- Lead to reductions in traffic around school at peak hours
- Encourage healthy behaviors and physical activity which can improve student performance
- Assist with attendance and tardiness issues
- Improve air quality around schools by lessening traffic and managing vehicular traffic patterns near schools



What Is A Walk Audit?

A **walk audit** can be as simple as taking a walk during which you assess how supportive the street is for walking. Walk audits can be done solo, but are often conducted by a group of people using a checklist to assess street infrastructure and conditions, documenting barriers, positive features, activities, and perceptions of the walking environment. Walk audits let you survey a planned route, evaluating and documenting the street on a scale that helps to assess the current walkability, and identify how to make it better for people of all ages and abilities. A walk audit can occur as part of a bigger plan to assess overall walkability, or can be a one-time event to understand or express concerns about a specific area.

Why Do a Walk Audit?

Conducting a walk audit can be the start to making positive change in your community, leading to a safer, more accessible, more comfortable walking environment for everyone. A walk audit can occur for different reasons. Walk audits can be used to:

- Document how walkable a route is
- Identify walking barriers and benefits in a community
- Bring community members of all walks together to discuss problems and brainstorm solutions
- Quantify disparities, assessing whether different neighborhoods have walking environments that differ in quality
- Determine problems that can be easily fixed
- Identify needed improvements to be included in funding asks, plans, and projects
- Engage elected and appointed officials around a problem and request change
- Capture conditions before and after a street renovation to assess the effects of improvements



Photo Credit: Orange County Health Care Agency

B. Simple Steps to a Walk Audit

This guide will walk you through a simple, easy way to survey your walking routes:

1. Get Ready: Where's the Route and How to Rate it

This section will help you make initial decisions about your walk audit: your goals, what tool to use, what route to select, and scheduling your walk audit.

2. Get Set: Who Will Help and What You Need

This section will help you figure out who to invite to the walk audit and what supplies you will need.

3. Get Walking: What to Do and What to Look for

This section explains what to do on the day of the walk audit itself.

4. Get Active: Share Observations and Make Change

This section helps you figure out next steps after your walk audit to compile your observations and make change on your streets.



1. Get Ready: Where's the Route and How to Rate It

What's your goal?

The first step in planning your walk audit is knowing what your goal is. Your core goal might be to:

- Engage community members and educate them about walkability and street safety
- Determine which route to school or another location to include as a recommended route to walk
- Perform a technical evaluation of a specific set of streets to plan for funding or improvements
- Get decision makers involved and activated for change

Your goal will inform who you invite, how big you make your walk groups, what information you capture, and where you walk.

Safe Routes to School Tip!

Routes to and from school are easy to identify if you know where students live, and the typical way they walk to and from school. You can identify a school route to walk by talking to families, students, and school staff about where students walk and the entrances they use to get into and out of the school. School families and staff may be very interested in helping with your walk audit!

What information do you want to capture?

Having a list of questions or a checklist for people to document their observations is important. You may simply want a general sense of people's concerns, or you may want a technical assessment of engineering needs along a route. What you want to know and who will be participating in your walk audit will determine the type of walk audit assessment tool you select.

Things to consider when choosing your walk audit assessment tool:

- Who will be conducting the walk audit? Community members, students, transportation professionals?
- How much detail about street problems do you want captured?
- How complex a walk audit checklist do you want?
- How will this information will be used?
- Is there information that you want to collect that is not part of the tool you want to use? Can you add your questions in?
- If you can't find an existing tool that meets your needs, modify one to create your own!

There are many walk audit tools, checklists, and forms available. In the appendices, this toolkit includes two potential walk audit tools – a one page school version and a slightly longer option (either of which you are free to modify) – as well as a chart with links to a variety of additional walk audit tools.





Where's the Route?

The next step is knowing where you want to walk. Identify your route, keeping your goals in mind, and considering:

- Is the route convenient for the people you want to attend?
- Is this a route people walk (or could walk) frequently?
- Is it a route that connects a starting place to a popular destination? Making a route safe, comfortable and convenient will encourage people to walk to the destination, instead of driving, especially short walking distances.
- How long do you want your route to be? Walk audits are commonly a half mile to a mile, although you can make them shorter or longer depending on your group's stamina and desires. Remember that it takes much longer to survey a route than to simply walk it – walk audits often average around 30 minutes per half mile – so think about how long you want to be out.

Create a map to show where your group will walk. You can do this as simply as taking a screen shot of a Google Map or Mapquest map, or by highlighting the route on a community map. Your city or jurisdiction may be able to help make a map for you, and this is a great way to introduce your project and gain their support and participation.

Schedule Your Walk Audit

- **Pick a date:** Pick a date to do your walk audit/walking survey, keeping in mind the time of year, day of the week, and who you want to invite to the walk audit. You may want to give participants a few dates to see when most are available, or hold a number of walk audits/survey and let folks choose which to attend.
- **Pick a time of day:** Think about the time of day that you want to conduct the audit and how long you intend to make it. If you are assessing a school route, you'll want to conduct the audit during arrival or dismissal time, to see how students on foot and bicycle are interacting with cars and buses. Do you want to see conditions at rush hour, or during the middle of the day? Most audits are conducted during day light hours, but an audit at dusk or nighttime will reveal different things.
- **Determine your start & end time:** Plan to have everyone meet 15 minutes before you want to start walking and provide some time after the walk for a debrief.

2. Get Set: Who Will Help and What You Need

Gather people!

You will want to invite people to participate! Who you invite will depend upon your goals, the location of your route, and so on. See the box for potential invitees. You may want to invite elected officials or your public works director in order to encourage follow up action to your walk audit.

Considerations:

- If your goal is more around community engagement, you will likely have a bigger group participating in the walk audit together. Try not to have a walking group that is larger than 15 people, so that it will be relatively easy for everyone to hear each other stay together. If you have a lot of interest, consider having multiple groups start at different locations at the same time, or have multiple walks.
- If your goal is to assess more territory, you may want to have smaller teams of one to three participants covering different streets and routes.
- Determine who will lead each walk audit. The leader should be familiar with the walk audit assessment you are using and should feel comfortable leading a group to discuss the pros and cons of the street environment. Familiarity with the neighborhood is a plus, but not essential. Your leader can lead an informal discussion, or you can get help from city planners or engineers to help identify and discuss issues.
- Provide reminders to everyone regarding the start date, time and location, and to wear comfortable shoes and appropriate clothes for the weather. You may want to discourage umbrellas, since it is hard to hold one and write at the same time.

Gather supplies!

- Copies of maps & of your selected walk audit checklist/assessment tool for each participant. Be sure to provide your selected walk audit checklist or assessment tool in the languages spoken by your walk participants.
- Clipboards & pens
- Nametags
- Cameras or phones
- Sunscreen, snacks and water (or ask everyone to bring a water bottle, especially on hot days)
- You may want to provide safety vests, in case any of your participants would like to wear one



Photo Credit: City of Cleveland Planning Commission

Consider Inviting:

- Neighborhood/community residents & business owners
- Students & families
- City transportation staff (engineers, planners, public works staff)
- City departments interested in safety and physical activity (health department, police/enforcement, parks & recreation)
- School staff & crossing guards
- School district transportation staff
- School board members
- City council members, mayor
- Members of community organizations, faith communities, walk/bike groups, or Neighborhood Watch

3. Get Walking: What to Do and What to Look For

Before you walk

Plan to meet up at least 15 minutes before you will start walking, to accommodate stragglers, pass out supplies, and review instructions.

- If you are using a more complex walk audit assessment tool, you may need to provide some training or more detailed explanation up front.
- Be sure to have everyone in the group introduce themselves. Having participants get to know each other and share concerns and observations is part of the goal.
- In addition to having a leader, consider assigning responsibilities to additional people, such as recorder, photographer, or “sweep” person to make sure you don’t lose any lingerers.



While you walk

Have your leader stop the group periodically to discuss particularly good or bad features, or just to see what people are noticing and experiencing. Along the way ask everyone to look around and listen. What do they see around them? Vacant homes? Litter and trash? Gardens and trees? What do they hear? Dogs barking? Loud cars? Construction? Birds chirping?

On the walk audit, you will be documenting:

- The infrastructure. Note strengths and weaknesses of the physical environment, such as the condition of the sidewalks, intersection crossings, signage, lighting, benches, and bus stops.
- The behavior of people walking, bicycling, and driving. Observe how many people are walking or biking, whether they have strollers, heavy bags, or other items, how they are interacting with others on the street, and whether they are following traffic laws. Ask people walking or biking for their opinions, especially if they live in the area and walk or bike frequently. Take note of traffic flow, vehicle speed, and whether drivers are obeying traffic laws.
- Factors that contribute to comfort while walking. Understanding what feels comfortable and uncomfortable to people walking can help guide improvements and actions. Do people feel too exposed to traffic? Does the area feel desolate and unwelcoming? Are there street trees providing shade and the cozy feeling of a ceiling?
- Encourage people to take pictures of notable features: “A picture is worth a thousand words”

After you walk

- Conduct a debrief right after the walk, to gather everyone’s impressions, talk about what you saw and possible solutions, and gather everyone’s surveys. Find out if attendees want to be part of next steps.
- Your debrief can be a quick check in before people disperse, or can be a longer problem solving session. Have someone take notes as people discuss overall observations, prioritize, and consider possible solutions. You may want to discuss who has the power to fix the problems and what steps would need to take place.

4. Get Active: Share Observations and Make Change

Now that you have insights on your walking route, put it all together and make a plan. Assemble your information and share with those that can help make improvements to the route's safety, comfort, and convenience.

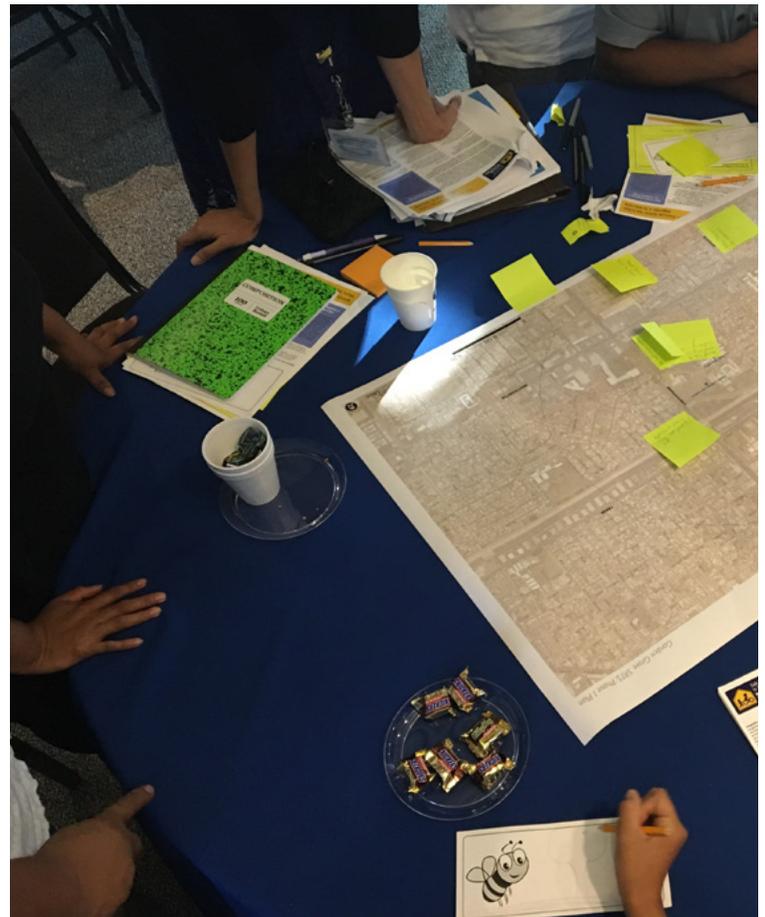
- **Document observations & recommendations.** Compile all of the notes, especially if you have more than one group that conducted walk audits of the same route, and gather and upload photos. Pull the notes, recommendations, and photos together into a simple or more detailed report. Your report can be a one or two page overview of participants' observations, or can be a thorough, detailed list that notes priorities and potential solutions.
- **Follow up with participants.** Share your report or overall impressions, and note what possible solutions could be taken. Let everyone know their time and efforts were appreciated, and how to keep in touch and help with next steps.
- **Take the next step.** Share your report and conclusions with officials, agencies, and departments that can create the changes you want to see. Present your findings at school board or city council meetings and ask what they will do. Involve the participants in the walk in presenting the findings. To create more awareness, write an article or op-ed for local news, publish a blog or comment on social media, and even contact foundations and organizations that may be able to help solve problems. City staff can use this information in their planning processes for transportation and land use development, so make sure your city planner, engineer, mayor and council have access to it.

Walk audits are a great tool to engage community members and gather information for school and community planning and traffic safety projects. Learning how to conduct a strong walk audit will allow you to be more effective in supporting safety, convenience, and comfort and will help you improve walking, health, and quality of life in your community!

Safe Routes to School Tip!

When it comes to city council meetings or press conferences, students make very convincing advocates for safer streets. Have students present conclusions and ask elected officials to make their streets safer.

Sometimes teachers will also have students analyze walk audit data and create charts and summarize concerns as an educational classroom exercise. Students can practice math, writing, and presentation skills.



Appendix A: Sample One Page School Neighborhood Walk Audit



As you walk along the route on the map below, for each noteworthy feature that you observe, write a number at the location on the map. Write a brief description of your observation under Notes at the related number.

Notes:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

What to Look For:

Sidewalks and bike lanes:

- Is a sidewalk present? Is it wide enough?
- Is the sidewalk cracked, broken, or incomplete?
- Are there trip hazards or accessibility issues?
- Are there bike lanes?
- Would children be safe biking?
- Is it easy and safe to cross the street?

School Zone

- Are students walking or biking separated from car/bus drop offs?
- Are there safe street/driveway crossings when approaching the school entrance?
- Are there continuous sidewalks/ bike paths from approaches to school entrance?

Neighborhood

- Are buildings well maintained?
- Are there vacant buildings?
- Are other people out and about?
- Are there playgrounds or parks?
- Are parks unsafe or unmaintained?

Safety

- Does walking feel safe from cars?
- Does it feel safe from crime and violence?
- Is traffic too fast?
- Is it well lit?



We would like to acknowledge Columbus Public Health for sharing the original version of this resource with us.

Appendix B: Sample General Walk Audit Checklist

Directions: Please fill out the following checklist to note problems in the walking environment. You may use the checklist either for each block you walk, or for your entire route.

1. Sidewalks:

- No sidewalks or paths
- Sidewalks are broken, cracked, or have trip hazards
- Sidewalks are blocked by overgrown landscaping, poles, signs, plants, vehicles, etc.
- Sidewalk is not continuous
- Sidewalk is not wide enough (two people cannot easily walk together side by side)
- Sidewalk has nothing separating it from the street (grass, trees, parked cars)
- Other problems: _____

Overall, the quality and safety of sidewalks is:



2. Street Crossings and Intersections:

- The road is too wide to cross easily
- Traffic signals do not give enough time to cross the street
- The crossing does not have a pedestrian-activated button
- There is no crosswalk or it is poorly marked
- I have to walk too far to find a safe, marked crosswalk
- Intersection does not have a curb ramp for carts, wheelchairs, strollers, walkers, etc.
- Other problems: _____

Overall, the quality and safety of street crossings and intersections is:



3. Driver Behavior:

- Drivers do not stop at stop signs or stop behind the crosswalk
- Drivers appear to be speeding
- Drivers do not yield to people walking
- Drivers are distracted (on the phone, texting, paying attention to passengers rather than road)
- Drivers aren't looking out for people walking, make unexpected turns, or seem hostile
- Other problems: _____

Overall, the quality and safety of driver behavior is:



Appendix B (cont.): Sample General Walk Audit Checklist

4. Safety:

- Car speeds are too fast
- There's too much traffic
- Street lights are few or not present
- There are people on the street who seem threatening
- Unleashed dogs or other loose intimidating animals are present
- Other problems: _____

Overall, the feeling of safety in this area is:



5. Comfort:

- There is not enough shade from canopies, awnings, or trees
- There are few or no street trees or other landscaping
- There are vacant lots or rundown buildings
- The street needs benches and places to rest
- Other problems: _____

Overall, the comfort and appeal in this area is:



Additional Comments:

Survey adapted in part from the Microscale Audit of Pedestrian Streetscapes and the AARP Walk Audit Toolkit.

Appendix C: Chart of Walk Audit Tools

This chart provides a compilation of useful walk audit tools. The tools vary based on length, questions asked, complexity, and audience, among other things. This matrix provides the name of the tool, along with a link, the author, audience, skill level, number of pages and a summary of the walk audit content.

Skill levels:

- **Beginner:** walk audits that are shorter in length and ask a series of simple open-ended questions. Easy for students, families, and community groups to use
- **Intermediate:** these walk audits are longer in length and require more time to conduct. They are also tailored to more technical audiences but can be used by community groups.
- **Advanced:** these walk audits use scoring or ranking systems to assess the built environment, and are also tailored to engineers, planners and other professionals. Such walk audits likely require the participation of a transportation or planning professional in order to conduct it.

Document	Author	Audience	Skill Level	Pages	Summary
Microscale Audit of Pedestrian Streetscapes (MAPS) Mini Version	Active Living Research/UCSD	Community members	Beginner	1	This version of the Microscale Audit of Pedestrian Streetscapes (MAPS) has only 15 questions and is intended to be used by community members.
School Neighborhood Walk Audit	Safe Routes to School National Partnership/Columbus Public Health	Safe Routes to School audience	Beginner	1	This one page audit form is short and easy to use. It is open ended and is easily editable. It is designed to include a map of the walk route on the form itself, which auditors mark up to show the location of their observations.
AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit	AARP	Older adults, community members	Beginner/intermediate	6	This toolkit focuses on crossings, sidewalks, safety, and comfort and appeal, and provides an overall rating system. The toolkit also includes proposed solutions, and there is a separate leaders' guide that is a companion piece.
Walkability Checklist	National Center for SRTS, FHWA, NHTSA, EPA, Ped/Bike Info Center	Safe Routes to School audience, community members	Beginner	4	Simple one-page questionnaire with five questions and a 1-6 scale for each one. Add up rankings to get a ranking based out of 30 points total. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you have room to walk? 2. Was it easy to cross streets? 3. Did drivers behave well? 4. Was it easy to follow rules? Could you and your child... 5. Was your walk pleasant? Also includes a list of things you can do to improve your neighborhood walkability based on the score for each question

Appendix C (cont.): Chart of Walk Audit Tools

Document	Author	Audience	Skill Level	Pages	Summary
Active Neighborhood Checklist, Protocol, Version 2.0	Washington University of St. Louis	Community members	Intermediate	3	<p>This is an observational tool designed to assess key street-level features of the neighborhood environment that are thought to be related to physical activity behavior.</p> <p>Five general areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Land use characteristics 2. Public transit stops 3. Street characteristics 4. Quality of environment for the pedestrian 5. Places to walk & bike <p>Mostly a checklist with yes/no answers and some space for taking notes</p>
Microscale Audit of Pedestrian Streetscapes (MAPS) Abbreviated Version	Active Living Research/UCSD	Researchers, Technical (engineers, planners, government agency staff, etc.)	Intermediate	4	<p>The Microscale Audit of Pedestrian Streetscapes (MAPS) has a beginner, intermediate, and advanced version. This is the intermediate version, which is intended to be used by people with some level of technical knowledge, but is much shorter than the full version of MAPS.</p>
Pedestrian Environmental Quality Index	SF Dept. of Public Health, adapted by UCLA for LA neighborhoods	Community members (including Spanish speaking), technical (engineers, planners, government agency staff, etc.)	Intermediate	3	<p>This assessment contains separate questionnaires for street segments and intersections, and includes a number of tools and resources to assist in training and implementing, such as a quiz and a cheat sheet. There are Spanish versions as well.</p>
Healthy and Complete Communities in Delaware: The Walkability Assessment Tool	Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware	Community members, facilitated by government	Intermediate	5	<p>The Walkability Assessment Checklist begins on page 32 of a much longer guide to organizing and conducting a walk audit. The report contains background on walkability and Delaware's policy framework as well as how to structure a walk audit event and how to follow up to create change.</p>

Appendix C (cont.): Chart of Walk Audit Tools

Document	Author	Audience	Skill Level	Pages	Summary
Pedestrian Road Safety Audit & Prompt Lists	FHWA	Technical (engineers, planners, government agency staff, etc.)	Advanced	138	<p>This is a comprehensive document of how to conduct a Road Safety Audit for pedestrian concerns. Over half of the document is a literature review of pedestrian safety and best practices around the U.S. It includes a Master Prompt List that appears to be widely used and adapted by other walk audits. Following the list is a detailed description with open-ended questions to address each issue. Items in the prompt list include (see p. 22):</p> <p>Pedestrian Facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence, Design & Placement • Quality, Condition & Obstructions • Continuity & Connectivity • Lighting • Visibility <p>Traffic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access management • Traffic <p>Traffic Control Devices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs & Pavement Markings • Signals <p>RSA Zones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streets • Street Crossings • Parking Areas/Adjacent Developments • Transit Areas



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