

America Walks' Position Statement:

CREATING PLACES TO WALK

Efforts to encourage walking must extend beyond sidewalks, crosswalks and walk signals. Communities must also create places to walk.

The share of trips taken on foot, as measured by the percentage of commuters walking to work (the type of trip for which we have the most data), has declined from 5.6% in 1980 to just 2.5% in 2005, a drop of more than 55% in 25 years. In part, this decline has resulted from people feeling unsafe walking along streets designed primarily to accommodate speeding cars, with little thought for pedestrians.

But perhaps the larger reason for the drop in walking rates is that Americans have fewer destinations within walking distance. A recent study of walking rates among 936 older Seattle residents found that "the strongest relationship was with the daily places we go for eating and socializing," according to the study's author, Anne Vernez Moudon, professor of urban design and planning at the University of Washington.

Communities themselves are increasingly designed to accommodate travel by automobile. Retail uses have moved off of "Main Street" and into strip malls or big box developments. Zoning rules dictate a strict separation of houses from shops, restaurants and offices. Older neighborhood schools are closed to avoid expensive repairs, and students are moved to new, larger facilities on the outskirts of town and accessible only by car or school bus.

These land use changes, along with many others, have become known as sprawling development. While sprawl has significant impacts on a range of quality life issues, perhaps the most important is its role in creating a hostile walking environment.

America Walks' Position on Creating Places to Walk:

America Walks advocates the adoption of smart growth and new urbanist principles to create walkable communities.

Objectives:

Create and redevelop communities that offer a variety of welcoming destinations that are accessible to pedestrians.

To meet these objectives, America Walks will:

Work with existing groups such as Smart Growth America, the Urban Land Institute and the Congress for the New Urbanism to promote walkable communities.

What You Can Do Locally:

- Join local smart growth groups.
- Educate your local elected officials about smart growth principles.
- Participate in local and regional planning boards and in the environmental review process for major developments and land use changes.



Fortunately, a growing movement of forward-thinking land use planners is working to reverse suburban sprawl, offering alternative development patterns such as smart growth and new urbanism. The creation of walkable communities with a safe pedestrian environment and plenty of welcoming destinations is central to these development patterns.

The smart growth movement has made creating walkable neighborhoods an important component of development and includes this goal as one of its ten development principles. The smart growth movement also recommends:

- Creating a range of housing opportunities and choices
- Encouraging a community and stakeholder collaboration
- Fostering distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Making development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective
- Mixing land uses (e.g. housing and retail)
- Preserving open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas
- Providing a variety of transportation choices
- Strengthening and directing development towards existing communities
- Taking advantage of compact building design

Studies have found that the extent of sprawl in a metropolitan area is the greatest predictor for how many of the region's commuters walk to work. Using smart growth principles and other progressive development strategies to limit sprawl can help boost walking rates.

For more information, visit www.americawalks.org.