

## America Walks' Position Statement:

### **WALKING IS MORE THAN LOCAL**

Investment and policy decisions that encourage or discourage walking are made at the local, regional, state and federal levels. Likewise, the public health, environmental and quality of life impacts of walking or not walking extend beyond local borders.

#### **Local**

Local governments routinely make decisions that improve or detract from the walking environment. Local transportation projects tend to be smaller in scale than state or regional ones but are often more important to pedestrians. On most streets, decisions about sidewalks, crosswalks, walk signals and other pedestrian infrastructure are made by local officials. Zoning laws, which dictate what type, how many and where buildings can be built, have an enormous impact on the walking environment.

Local police departments set priorities for how best to enforce laws and protect public safety with limited resources. Where pedestrian safety sits among those competing priorities can have a significant effect on how safe walkers feel on city streets.

#### **Regional**

Regional agencies, typically metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), serve as the gatekeepers for transportation capital projects.

Under the Clean Air Act's conformity process, the federal government requires MPOs to regularly compile a comprehensive list of all proposed transportation projects in the region and to ensure that the combined air pollution impacts of these projects do not exceed statewide quotas. This process enables MPOs to influence which projects get built and which get shelved.

MPOs also coordinate regional transportation projects

#### **America Walks' Position on Making Walking More Than a Local Issue:**

Walking must be included in transportation and land use decision-making at the local, regional, state and national levels.

#### **Objectives:**

Ensure all pedestrians' issues are considered at all levels of decision-making.

#### **To meet these objectives, America Walks will:**

- Work for the inclusion of federally-mandated MPO pedestrian programs in the next federal transportation funding bill.
- Urge improved data collection of pedestrian activity and safety.
- Argue for increased Safe Routes to Schools funding.
- Advocate for a federal Complete Streets policy, as well as federal funding to retrofit streets not covered by Complete Streets.
- Promote safe routes to transit to reflect the importance of those linked trips and improve transit efficiencies through increased ridership.

#### **What You Can Do Locally:**

- Encourage local, regional and state entities to consider pedestrians in transportation investment and policy decisions.
- Urge your state to establish programs that promote walking and bicycling.
- Push for the development of state, regional and/or local Pedestrian Safety Action Plans.
- Talk to community leaders and take them on a field visit to see problems firsthand.
- Participate in the transportation planning process and in project reviews.

and policies so that roads do not end at city limits and efforts to encourage walking in one town are not cancelled-out by policies in other neighboring municipalities.

The goal of improving air quality gives MPOs an incentive to promote walking, and some have provided Walkable Community Workshops and other popular programs.

## **State**

State departments of transportation (DOTs) play a key role in creating walkable environments because they hold the purse strings. In most states, the DOT determines how much funding will be spent on various types of projects and in which areas of the state. State DOTs control state transportation funds and most federal transportation funds. Many state DOTs have established special programs to promote bicycling and walking through infrastructure investments.

State DOTs and other agencies also set policies recommending or mandating priorities for local and regional governments. States are also required by federal law to have a pedestrian and bicycle coordinator to help promote walking and bicycling, as well as a Safe Routes to School Coordinator to help determine how best to spend these federal funds in each state.

## **Federal**

The federal transportation funding bill, known as SAFETEA-LU, has created important funding programs for walking and bicycling investments. These include the Congestion Management and Air Quality Improvement program, Transportation Enhancements, Transportation and Community and System Preservation and Safe Routes to School, among others. Federal law also makes the lion's share of federal transportation funding flexible, which enables states to spend funds as they see fit.

The Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies have promoted smart growth development and walkable communities. They have not, however, provided much financial or legal support on these issues.

## **Walking Provides Local, Regional and National Benefits**

As more people in a community choose to walk, physical activity increases, public health improves and state spending on chronic diseases declines. Cars and trucks emit fewer pollutants and greenhouse gases, which improves regional air quality and slows global climate change. Traffic congestion lessens and the local economy improves as businesses benefit from walk-in customers. In short, efforts to promote walking, even at the local level, benefit everyone.

For more information, visit [www.americawalks.org](http://www.americawalks.org).