

Community Assessment Tool

One of the keys to bringing about change is to know where you are relative to where you want to be. This Community Assessment Tool is designed to help you define or identify where your community is and to suggest where it needs to go. With this information, you can use various guides as “road maps” to plot a course to make your community bicycle-friendly and walkable, and to support active living.

This Community Assessment Tool focuses on five key elements of a community:

1. Transportation.
2. Land-use and development.
3. Schools.
4. Parks, recreation, and trails.
5. Safety, security, and crime prevention.

For each of these elements, it first presents a broad goal, then a series of objectives. For each objective, in turn, a series of “indicators” are suggested.

You can use some or all of these indicators (or others you may think up) as a way to characterize existing conditions in your community. This information can help identify problems and barriers, and it may suggest needs and opportunities. Whatever, it will help focus attention on these issues and set the stage for a discussion about what is going to be done to change these conditions.

We would really appreciate your feedback on this tool; with your help, we can make it better. Most importantly, though, with your involvement we can create bicycle-friendly and walkable communities.

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Goal 1: Transportation Facilities and Services

There are safe, easy and pleasant places for people of all ages to walk or bicycle using public streets and highways. A balanced system that includes transit, walking, bicycling and automobiles provides people with appropriate transportation choices. Most trips under one mile are made by walking or bicycling.

Objective 1-1: New Streets

Plan, design and construct all new streets and highways on which bicycles and pedestrians are permitted to accommodate bicycling and walking.

Indicators

- Do street design policies, standards, and guidelines make provisions for bicycles and pedestrians a routine, required element of all projects? Yes No
- Are “design speeds” used for new street and highway projects the proposed “posted” levels? Yes No
- Is the “85th percentile speed” of motor vehicles on new streets and highways at or below the posted/design speed? Yes No
- Are new neighborhood and residential streets narrowed so that motor vehicle traffic slows down? Yes No
- What percentage of total street and highway miles include good provisions for bicycling and walking? %

Objective 1-2: Existing Streets

Retrofit existing streets and highways to accommodate bicycling and walking.

Indicators

- What percentage of urban/suburban arterial streets have posted speed limits and “85th percentile” speeds at or below 35 mph? %
- What percentage of urban/suburban collector streets have posted speed limits and “85th percentile” speeds at or below 30 mph? %

- What percentage of neighborhood and residential streets have posted speed limits and “85th percentile” speeds at or below 25 mph?
- What percentage of the transportation budget is allocated to correcting deficiencies in the existing street system?
- What percentage of the children age eight in a neighborhood are permitted by their parents to play outside without adult supervision?
- What percentage of children age ten in a neighborhood are permitted by their parents to bike or walk to a nearby park?
- Are traffic-calming strategies permitted by state and local policies and used to limit motor vehicle speeds or volumes? Yes No

Objective 1-3: Maintenance

Maintain streets and highways to ensure safe use for pedestrians and bicyclists, especially during the winter months.

Indicators

- Do state and local policies provide for sidewalk maintenance by public agencies, at public expense? Yes No
- Do state and local policies provide for snow removal from sidewalks by the same agencies responsible for snow removal on the adjacent roadway? Yes No
- What percentage of sidewalks and intersections are free and clear of snow by the time the adjacent roadway is clear?
- What percentage of residents can walk one block from their homes two days after a snowfall?

Objective 1-4: Disabled Access

Design, build, and maintain pedestrian-type facilities to provide access for the disabled on all segments of the public right-of-way on which pedestrians are permitted.

Indicators

- What percentage of streets and highways have facilities for pedestrians?
- What percentage of pedestrian facilities meet or exceed ADA standards?

Objective 1-5: Funding

Allocate transportation funds to ensure that (a) all projects include the funding needed for bicycling and walking facilities, and (b) an equitable share goes to eliminating the deficiencies in existing roads.

Indicators

- Do legislation and regulations pertaining to the use of federal, state, and local transportation funds require that the funds be used to provide people with transportation choices? Yes No
- What percentage of projects include provisions for bicycles and pedestrians?
- What is the percentage of transportation funds spent on walking?
- What is the percentage of transportation funds spent on bicycling?
- What is the percentage of transportation funds spent on transit?

Objective 1-6: Street Network

Lay out new streets and highways using a traditional “grid” pattern to provide more route choices, to reduce trip lengths, and to slow motor vehicles.

Indicators

- Do local planning requirements and guidelines permit or require a grid-type street system? Yes No
- What percentage of new developments or subdivisions utilize a grid-type street layout?

Objective 1-7: Choices

Develop a coordinated system of public transit, pedestrian, and bicycling services and facilities to provide most people with a viable option to private motor vehicle use for most trips.

Indicators

- What percentage of people live within 0.5 km (0.3 mi) of a transit route? %
- What percentage of trips under 0.5 km (0.3 mi) are made by modes other than a private motor vehicle? %
- What percentage of transit stops are easily accessible by pedestrians? %
- What percentage of transit stops are ADA accessible? %
- Do local transit vehicles include bike racks or permit bicycles to be taken onboard? Yes No

Goal 2: Land Use Planning and Development

Development plans and practices focus on creating transit- and pedestrian-oriented communities where the majority of trips are made by a combination of walking, bicycling and transit. Most people walk or bike as part of their routine activities or specifically for recreation and health. Public health impacts and objectives are a regular, routine and guiding consideration in land-use planning decisions.

Objective 2-1: Smart Growth

Integrate Smart Growth principles in all state and local programs affecting development.

Indicators

- To what extent have Smart Growth principles been developed and incorporated into local land use planning and development processes?
 Major
 Partial
 Minor
 Not at all
- Does zoning ordinance permit mixed land use development and increased density at transit centers?
 Yes No
- Do the land use and transportation planning procedures mandate use of a grid pattern for the layout of streets?
 Yes No
- What percentage of local jurisdictions (or the percentage of urban/suburban areas in a city) are covered by Smart Growth type planning requirements?
 %

Objective 2-2: Community Development

Make public health impacts a priority objective in land use planning and community development decision making.

Indicators

- To what extent are public health goals and considerations a part of the state's or area's smart growth campaign?
 Major
 Partial
 Minor
 Not at all

- Has a Healthy Impact Assessment (HIA) procedure been developed and adopted for public decision making? Yes No
- To what extent is HIA used in public policy assessment? Major
 Partial
 Minor
 Not at all

Objective 2-3: Traditional Neighborhood Development

Make traditional neighborhood development (TND) the standard for residential areas.

Indicators

- Do local land use ordinances permit TND? Yes No
- What percentage of new housing units are built using the principles of TND? %
- What percentage of new developments include sidewalks and bicycle provisions? %
- What percentage of housing has good access to sidewalks and transit? %

Objective 2-4: Commercial Development

Design, build, and maintain pedestrian-type facilities to provide access for the disabled on all segments of the public right-of-way on which pedestrians are permitted.

Indicators

- Do local land use regulations favor town centers versus malls and big box retail? Yes No
- Do local land use plans support development of town center, main street, and neighborhood retail? Yes No
- What percentage of commercial and retail centers have good provisions for access by walking, bicycling, and transit; and safe and easy pedestrian access within the site.? %
- What percentage of commercial areas provide good bicycle parking? %

Objective 2-5: Trip Distance

Reduce typical trip distances.

Indicators

- Do local land use regulations permit mixed-use development? Yes No
- Do local land use plans and regulations require a grid-type street network? Yes No

Objective 2-6: Trip Choice

Make bicycling, walking, and public transit the preferred transportation choices for the majority of trips.

Indicators

- Do local land use plans and regulations encourage the development of pedestrian and transit-oriented development? Yes No
- Do subdivision ordinances and site plan review require good provisions and connections for bicycling and walking? Yes No
- What percentage of new residential and commercial developments incorporate good provisions for bicycling and walking? %
- Have local planning regulations been changed to reduce the number or motor vehicle parking spaces required or permitted? Yes No

Goal 3: Schools

Schools are of moderate size and are located in the neighborhood they serve. Most children walk or bike to school. School sites and facilities serve a wide range of communities services and needs.

Objective 3-1: Location

Locate schools within walking distance of the student population.

Indicators

- Do the state and local governments or school boards have policies favoring neighborhood schools? Yes No
- What is the typical student size of elementary schools?
- What is the typical student size of middle schools?
- What is the typical student size of high schools?
- What is typical size of elementary school sites? ac
- What is typical size of middle school sites? ac
- What is typical size of high school sites? ac
- What is average length of the school trip for students in elementary and middle schools? mi
- What is average length of the school trip for students in high school? mi
- What percentage of children live within walking or bicycling distance of their school? %

Objective 3-2: Access

Make it easy and safe for students to walk and bike to school.

Indicators

- What percentage of school sites are located in neighborhoods? %

- What percentage of schools are served by sidewalks?
- What percentage of children attending schools have a safe walking route?
- Has a Safe Routes to School program been implemented? Yes No

Objective 3-3: Site Design

Design and develop bicycle- and pedestrian-oriented school sites.

Indicators

- What percentage of schools meet accessibility standards?
- What percentage of schools provide good bicycle parking?
- What percentage of schools have site designs that minimize conflicts between buses and motor vehicles and bicyclists and pedestrians?

Objective 3-4: Control Cars

Strictly control the operation of motor vehicles on and near school sites, at bus stops and along school routes.

Indicators

- What percentage of schools have traffic calming treatments in the area around their site?
- What percentage of schools have routine local area traffic enforcement?
- What is the 85th percentile speed of motor vehicles on key roads and routes around schools?

Objective 3-5: Encouragement

Encourage children to bike and walk to school.

Indicators

- Do the state department of education and local score boards have transportation policies that encourage bicycling and walking? Yes No

- What percentage of students live within bicycling and walking distance of a school?
- What percentage of students bicycle or walk to school, at least some of the time?
- Is bicycle parking and student storage space provided? **Yes** **No**
- Is bicycle and pedestrian safety training a part of the regular curriculum? **Yes** **No**
- What is the percentage of schools, and the students in a given school, who take part in Walk Our Children to School Day?
- What is the typical weight of school books a student is required to carry to and from school?

Objective 3-6: Community Center

Plan, develop, and operate school sites and facilities as multipurpose community centers.

Indicators

- Do school policy and local practice provide for routine, regular use of schools and school sites for other community purposes? **Yes** **No**
- What kinds of other activities are served by the school buildings or sites?
 - Meetings**
 - Concerts**
 - Exercise**
 - Sports**
 - Other**

Goal 4: **Recreational Facilities, Parks and Trails**

Basic park and recreation facilities are available in every neighborhood, and most users walk or bike to them. Other recreation facilities are easily accessible by transit. Most children can go to their neighborhood parks by themselves or with their friends. Most organized sports activities take place at parks or school sites located in or near the neighborhoods where the children live. Trail-type facilities are within walking distance of most residential areas.

Objective 4-1: New Development

Provide neighborhood parks and recreational facilities in new subdivisions and developments.

Indicators

- Are there are state or local standards for neighborhood/local parks and recreational facilities? Yes No
- Do land use regulations require neighborhood parks and recreational facilities in new developments? Yes No
- What percentage of new subdivisions provide at least a basic level of parks and recreational facilities? %
- What percentage of new park and recreational sites are easily and safely accessible by children? %

Objective 4-2: Existing Neighborhoods

Provide neighborhood park and recreational facilities in currently underserved residential areas.

Indicators

- What is the current supply of park and recreation facilities (in acres) compared to the population of the community? ac/1000 pop
- What percentage of the population has park and recreation facilities and services within walking distance? %
- What percentage of park and recreation sites are easily accessible on foot or by bike? %

- Is there a plan to increase the park and recreation facilities supply for underserved neighborhoods? Yes No

Objective 4-3: Access

Ensure that neighborhood park and recreation facilities are conveniently located so as to be easily and safely accessed by most people, especially children.

Indicators

- What percentage of park and recreation facilities are easily accessed by bicycle or on foot from surrounding neighborhoods?

Objective 4-4: Smaller Sites

Plan and utilize a variety of smaller sites for youth sport activities (vs. large-scale, regional facilities to which people must drive).

Indicators

- What percentage of youth sport sites and events are located on sites within the neighborhoods?
- What percentage of *new* youth sport sites are located within the neighborhoods?
- What percentage of youth sport sites are located in regional sports complexes?
- What percentage of children taking part in a youth sport activity arrive by walking, bicycling or transit?

Objective 4-5: Multipurpose Facilities

Utilize public facilities such as schools as “multipurpose” facilities, especially for recreation services.

Indicators

- What percentage of schools are used for other kinds of community activities?
- What percentage of school sites are shared with or adjacent to other community facilities?

Objective 4-6: Trails

Develop a system of trails that is readily accessible to most people.

Indicators

- Is there is a local trail plan? **Yes** **No**
- What percentage of people are within walking distance of trail-type facilities? %
- What amount of funds are used to build trails? \$
- How many miles of trails are developed each year? mi

Goal 5: Safety, Security and Crime Prevention

Motor vehicle traffic no longer poses a serious threat to children in neighborhoods, or near schools and parks. Motor vehicle operation is strictly regulated and traffic laws are complied with by all users. Motor vehicle crashes, injuries and fatalities decline significantly. Crimes of all kinds decline, especially in residential areas. Parents are at ease with the notion of their children playing outside, unsupervised in their neighborhood. Children spend more time outside, playing with other children.

Objective 5-1: Driver Behavior

Ensure that all drivers are careful and responsible.

Indicators

- What percentage of police resources are allocated to traffic law enforcement?
- What is the number of traffic citations issued for speed and red-light violations?
- Do state and local ordinances permit red-light cameras and photo-radar speed enforcement? Yes No
- Are red-light cameras and photo-radar speed enforcement being used by the local jurisdiction? Yes No
- What is the 85th percentile speed compared with the speed limit on any particular street or highway?

85th % = mph
Posted = mph

Objective 5-2: Vehicle Speeds

Restrict motor vehicle speeds in neighborhood, school, and shopping areas.

Indicators

- What percentage of residential streets have been treated with traffic-calming techniques?
- What is the number of red-light cameras and photo-radar speed cameras in use?

Objective 5-3: Environmental Design

Plan and design neighborhoods to reduce the threat of crime.

Indicators

- Do local land-use planning ordinances incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles? Yes No
- What percentage of neighborhood streets have street lights?

Objective 5-4: Enforcement

Improve policing and enforcement to help prevent crime.

Indicators

- How many law enforcement personnel are involved in bicycle and foot patrols?
- What is the level of crimes in the community and its neighborhoods?
 High
 Medium
 Low