

Ways to Support Accessible, Safe Pedestrian Paths to Transportation and Service Centers

Introduction

What is an Accessible Pedestrian Path of Travel & Why is it Important?

Accessible pedestrian pathways (i.e., corridors of travel in the public right-of-way and on private property that incorporate such elements as sidewalks, curb ramps, cross walks, way-finding signage, and pedestrian signals at intersections) are a key element of *complete streets* initiatives. Accessible pathways help form the foundation of an accessible transportation system and a livable community. The benefits of building accessible pathways and improving connectivity to transit can be measured by the social, health, and economic value that access to transportation brings to individuals and the communities in which they live. About 33% of the U.S. population nationwide does not drive and about 20% of seniors do not drive. Accessible pedestrian pathways are, therefore, an integral element of what are now considered *livable communities*. In its *Policy Book 2015-2016, Chapter 9: Livable Communities*, AARP defines a livable community as “one that is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and offers supportive community features and services.”

“Improving senior pedestrian mobility requires a comprehensive approach of engineering, education, and enforcement elements.”

[Montclair, NJ Senior Walkability Workshop Report](#)

Development and support of livable communities that include accessible pathways are vital as they

- assist the over 39.7 million* people with disabilities in the U.S. who are living in non-institutionalized environments with transportation options that enable independent living;
- provide safe mobility for the ever-increasing number of older adults who acquire changes in functional abilities (note: U.S. Centers for Disease Control

- & Prevention reported in 2015 that by 2030, the number of U.S. adults aged 65 or older will more than double to about 71 million);
- decrease the cost of long-term care by facilitating community-living;
 - help families, individuals, and caregivers maintain healthy lives, thereby potentially reducing healthcare costs;
 - boost economic and social vitality by creating jobs, protecting the environment and enhancing community engagement; and
 - reduce traffic and pedestrian fatalities (note: U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's most recent report showed 19% of all pedestrian deaths & an estimated 10% of all pedestrians injured in 2013 were aged 65 or older.)

Steps toward Pedestrian Improvements

Improvements in a community's livability can enhance ease of use for all modes of transportation, including walking, thus encouraging community interaction, promoting economic viability, and ultimately adding value to neighborhoods.

What should be considered when designing pedestrian pathways and facilities?

No universal, prescriptive design exists when it comes to creating and implementing a plan for building accessible pathways that meet the needs of every community. Instead, plans must take into account local context, need, and demand. All streets and pathways should be designed to fit a particular community or neighborhood, provide for adequate mobility as well as provide balance among competing needs for access, safety, economic development, and vehicular travel. Travel needs can vary considerably from an urban arterial, to a main street, a suburban residential street, or a rural byway.

Actions to make streets and pathways accessible do not necessarily require significant costs or new funding sources. Although the underlying goals of balancing the needs of all users and accommodating them in cost-effective ways remains paramount, meeting the needs of older adults and people with disabilities will call for a few specific considerations. Simple solutions (e.g., using paint to restripe a roadway and alter its layout making a crosswalk clearer to both pedestrians and vehicle operators) can often be implemented during routine maintenance and repairs.

Regardless of the depth and cost of changes that a community may need to make to create pedestrian pathways accessible to all, areas to consider including in plans for creating or upgrading pedestrian pathways include:

- pedestrians' physical abilities and/or limitations related to walking speed, hearing, vision, balance, depth perception, and gait;
- street furniture & amenities (e.g., benches, trash receptacles, protection from heat, cold & wind) that would benefit residents walking to or waiting to catch public transportation to their destinations;
- intersection treatments (e.g., marked crosswalks; right turn on red restrictions; safe mid-block crossings islands, raised crossings, striping pattern, instructional signage, pedestrian lighting);
- enforced crosswalk compliance for both pedestrians and vehicle operators; and
- safe access to transit – bus access, (e.g., minimize driveways).

Who Needs to Address the Issue of Accessible Pathways and Pedestrian Facilities?

Determining the current state of a community's pedestrian pathways and facilities, identifying needed changes, and developing a plan to take action requires the input and cooperation of a variety of organizations, agencies, and individuals. Examples include:

- local government agencies/departments (e.g., planning, transit, law enforcement, engineering/public works, elected officials);
- health, disability, and independent living service center administration (e.g., Area Agency on Aging, Easterseals affiliates, Centers for Independent Living, health clinics, rehabilitation facilities, long-term care facilities);
- owners & operators of local shopping centers; and
- program participants who use the service centers (e.g., older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, cross-section of local residents).

The order in which these players are engaged may not make a difference, but the engagement of each at some point in the process is essential. One of the players, however, needs to begin by stepping forward to make sure that an assessment of the current state of the pedestrian pathways is conducted. It is from that assessment that a plan can be developed and the necessary steps taken to implement the plan.

Actions: What Should Providers Do?

What actions can administrators or management staff of senior and disability service centers take to become more involved with and stay informed about transportation plans? This section outlines a few recommendations. For example, a center can host a planning session or presentation on transportation projects or have program participants answer surveys and conduct assessments about transportation needs and

gaps. Those are just two ideas to get started. Read on for details on how service centers can get involved in the process.

Ideas for engagement:

- **Host transportation education and information programs.** Invite planning, public works, and public safety departments to host on-site presentations and Question & Answer discussions about transportation, transit, pedestrian issues, safety, and facilities. Offer your space as a location for a public meeting, planning charrette (defined below), or educational session.

- **Host a planning charrette session at your center.**

Charrettes are hands-on planning and design exercises where planners and community members discuss issues and possible solutions, alternatives are reviewed and discussed in order to identify a preferred plan for the area. Charrettes typically involve creative activities using maps, drawings, and brainstorming.



[Photo: A planning session in Carbondale, Colorado. www.pedbikeimages.org/DanBurden]

- **Hold a transportation assessment event at your facility.** Your program clients can get involved by using a basic assessment tool to identify accessibility, traffic, lighting, and signage conditions, gaps, and needs in the area around your center. This is an outdoor activity that can be completed at the block or neighborhood level. Consider inviting an intergenerational volunteer group (e.g., scout troops, students who need volunteer hours) to join and assist your clients with this activity. Host a reporting-back session upon return and record findings to present to community transportation officials. For assessment templates, see the resource list at the end of this brief.
- **Stay in the loop** and follow land use, transportation, and parking changes by subscribing to the city, county, and/or local government listserv and following announcements via social media (e.g., official Facebook pages and Twitter).

While some governments have one Facebook account for the entire city or county, some larger entities, such as Fairfax County in Virginia, have a Facebook page dedicated just to land use planning.

- **Understand your responsibilities** surrounding Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility, universal design, transportation access, maintenance, and snow removal. Universal design (UD) considerations include both physical and cognitive accommodations. The National Council on Aging, university centers, including the Center for Universal Design, and other organizations have resources and checklists for applying UD principles. In brief, accessible design should flow from the exterior to interior.
- **Share your story.** Let local media know about your involvement with transportation issues. Prepare press releases to announce that you'll be conducting an assessment or hosting a planning event. This will raise awareness among journalists and media professionals who cover local interest and transportation issues. The story will be of interest to multiple audiences—aging, disability, transportation, community living, and public safety.

How Can Program Participants Make a Difference?

Program participants should be encouraged to attend education and information sessions. Allow time for questions and answers. The sessions should be advertised in advanced using a variety of formats. Suggestions include posting and distributing flyers, making verbal announcements to participants, family members, and caregivers, posting information on your website and social media accounts, provide large print copies of all written notifications, and braille as needed by participants.

As noted, conducting a transportation assessment is an active way to get program participants interested in pedestrian safety, wayfinding, and public transit services. An assessment is a walking survey of traffic and accessibility features in a defined area. Participants will look at pedestrian features (e.g., signs, crosswalks, crossing signals, benches, completed sidewalks), path of travel from a parking area or transit stop, and condition of features. For example, are signs in good condition or faded? Do pavement markings need to be improved? Are there features obstructing path of travel (e.g., planters, light poles, sandwich boards)? Easterseals and partner organizations have assessment tools that you can use as-is or adapt for local conditions.

If you think an assessment is a big task to take on with just your facility staff and you would like to have additional assistance or mentoring during the process, contact the

city, county, or town planning office, public safety office, bicycle/pedestrian coordinator, or transit office to ask for their participation in the assessment process, with the understanding that they may not be able to immediately address issues but can use the results to identify trouble spots.

What Should Community Leaders Do?

For the purposes of this brief, community leaders are defined as public officials (e.g., city council member) and local government staff (e.g., planning, public works, transit, public health, law enforcement, community development, disability services or aging services), and business owners. Whether a public planning event is held at your facility or if community leaders participate in a stand-alone event like a lunch and learn, travel training session, or assessment, they will most likely be able to provide the following input:

- Participate in events and assessments. Explain in layman's terms how the transportation improvement process works (e.g., what it takes to get a signal or crosswalk in place; the process for longer-term projects)
- Inform participants of transportation options for reaching the center including walking, bus or rail service, paratransit, driving, center-provided transportation, and taxi services.
- Liaison with health representatives and pedestrian coordinators to explain the relationship of transportation to exercise and health awareness.
- Study locations for improvements and identify projects. Inform centers and participants of options to improve critical transportation issues around your center.
- Inform center staff and program participants how they can find out information on public projects by website, phone, listservs, social media, and news outlets.

Local Example

Montclair New Jersey Senior Walkability Workshop, June 2014

Just as there is no one planning model, it can be said that there is no one model for success when it comes to improving pedestrian access to service centers. In one community, success could be a completed sidewalk or a marked crosswalk. For another community, it could mean adding additional bus service. Across-the-board indicators of success include a decreased number of injuries and fatalities or prevention of

vehicle/pedestrian incidents. Another mark of success is increased driver awareness of pedestrian laws and adherence to traffic safety laws.

An example of putting the recommendations in this brief to action is the Montclair, New Jersey, Senior Walkability Workshop held in 2014. As noted in the workshop report, “improving senior pedestrian mobility requires a comprehensive approach of engineering, education, and enforcement elements.” The output of Montclair’s workshop included recommendations for engineering, policies, and program solutions. Representatives who participated in the Montclair workshop included staff from the state department of transportation; the planning authority; a transportation management association; the New Jersey travel independence program; bike, walk and health advocates; workshop team members; and a group of Montclair seniors. The three main features of the workshop were an overview presentation on older adult mobility, a field walk, and a brainstorming discussion. [Photo: Montclair Senior Walkability Workshop, [The Montclair Times](#), Cecilia Levine.]

Overview Presentation features:

- Explanation of project, highlight of the importance of pedestrian movement and safety, barriers to walking and aging in place.
- Discussion of design and pedestrian infrastructure, reviewed photo images and examples of sidewalk design, connectivity, crossing and curb ramp design, signage, lighting and signal timing.
- Provision of information and tools on how to evaluate walking conditions in their local area.



Field Observation features:

- Organizers led participants in a field walk around the area to identify barriers for travelers with and without physical disabilities, to discuss barriers that seniors experience, and to gather input on potential improvements.
- Attendees were encouraged to use a notes sheet to record their findings while in the field.

- A walking loop of 0.5 miles was used with two scheduled stops for discussion. The project team conducted a preliminary field visit before selecting the route.

Brainstorming Session features:

- Participants were divided into three groups that mixed older adults, public officials, and project leaders.
- Aerial photographs were used to identify key destinations, barriers, current pedestrian routes and potential new pedestrian routes.
- Input was recorded on the aerial photographs and on a project worksheet.

Pedestrian Pros and Cons

- **Pros** identified by workshop participants: ADA compliant curb ramps, wide walkways and street furniture, high visibility crosswalks, stamped brick crosswalks, medians, signage, curb extensions and street trees.
- **Cons** identified by workshop participants: long street crossing distances without refuges or medians, cracked sidewalks, obstructions (e.g., trees, poles, planters) that narrow sidewalk, arterial roadways with high speeds, poorly maintained brick crosswalks.

At completion of the Montclair walking workshop, a general summary of the discussion was prepared along with a summary of specific issues around individual locations and along corridors. Recommendations for each issue (e.g., install crosswalk in a specific location) were documented.

The complete report and assessment materials are available in the Resources section.

Conclusion

Understanding how the local transportation planning process works and identifying potential transportation improvements related to transit service and pedestrian facilities is a great way for both center administrators and program participants to provide feedback to community leaders. Education sessions and walking workshops encourage participants to think about how health and wellness, pedestrian safety, and driver awareness are interconnected. Sharing the story of your event with local media also plays a role in raising awareness of the issues and lets the community know about the programs your center offers. Finally, efforts to make the transportation environment as accessible as possible enable older adults to remain in their homes longer and empower people with disabilities who want to move independently within their communities.

References & Resources

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center Resources
NADTC resources are available at www.nadtc.org.

[*Accessible Pathways & Livable Communities Pocket Guide*](#)

[*Checklist for Assessing the Accessibility of Transportation and Mobility*](#)

[*Driver & Pedestrian Guide to Sharing the Road Safely.*](#)

[*Effective Snow Removal for Pathways and Transit Stops*](#)

[*Ensuring Safe Accessible Pedestrian Routes for Older Adults*](#)

[*Including People with Disabilities: Communication & Meeting Etiquette Guide*](#)

[*Neighborhood Wayfinding Pocket Guide.*](#)

[*Toolkit for the Assessment of Bus Stop Accessibility and Safety*](#)

Pedestrian Safety, Planning, and Events Resources and Examples

[*AARP Public Policies 2015-2016*](#)

[*A Citizen's Guide to Better Streets: How to Engage Your Transportation Agency.*](#) Project for Public Spaces, Inc.

[*A Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities,*](#) ADA National Network

[*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Injury Prevention & Control: Motor Vehicle Safety*](#)

[*Fairfax County, Virginia Land Use Planning Facebook page*](#)

[*Oakland, California Mayor's Pedestrian Access and Safety Task Force Neighborhood Streets Safety Project*](#)

[*Pedestrian Safety Guide and Countermeasure Selection System.*](#) Federal Highway Administration

[Safe Streets for Seniors – New York City](#)

New Jersey Pedestrian Resources

[Montclair Senior Montclair Senior Walkability Workshop June 2014](#). U.S. Department of Transportation, New Jersey Department of Transportation, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Civic Eye Collaborative, and Lifelong. [Includes worksheet template.]

[New Jersey Pedestrian Safety Action Plan Toolbox March 2014](#)

Universal Design Resources

[Design and Renovation of Senior Centers](#), National Council on Aging

[Universal Design: Process, Principles, and Applications](#), University of Washington



Call toll-free: 866.983.3222

Email: contact@nadtc.org

Web: www.nadtc.org

Find us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube & LinkedIn!





Who We Are

Established in 2015, the NADTC is a federally funded technical assistance center administered by Easterseals and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging based in Washington, D.C.

The **National Aging and Disability Transportation Center** is funded through a cooperative agreement of Easterseals, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and the U.S Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, with guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living.

The **National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)** is a 501c(3) membership association representing America's national network of 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and providing a voice in the nation's capital for the 256 Title VI Native American aging programs. The mission of n4a is to build the capacity of its members so they can better help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities for as long as possible. **www.n4a.org**

Easterseals is the leading non-profit provider of services for individuals with autism, developmental disabilities, physical disabilities and other special needs. For nearly 100 years, we have been offering help, hope, and answers to children and adults living with disabilities, and to the families who love them. Through therapy, training, education and support services, Easterseals creates life-changing solutions so that people with disabilities can live, learn, work and play. **www.easterseals.com**

October 2016