



April 30, 2013

Dr. Regina Benjamin
Surgeon General of the US
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Docket Number CDC-2013-0003

Dear Dr. Benjamin:

Walking is the first and most fundamental form of personal movement and physical activity for all people of every age, income or (dis)ability. It is part of every single trip we take, irrespective of distance or transportation mode. In part because it is easy and inexpensive, it is frequently overlooked as a critical form of physical activity and transportation, and as a crucial element of social and economic activity. Also overlooked is the need to create environments that make walking safe, easy, and attractive. Despite walking's central role in population, community and environmental health, for the last three generations the United States has focused on moving vehicles faster and more conveniently. It is time to shift our national, state and local attention to walking and to build a broad nation-wide constituency to put walking back into our lives and our communities.

WalkBoston applauds and fully supports the Office of the Surgeon General in its efforts to advance walking through a proposed call to action. The effort seeks to draw many organizations into a new broad-based partnership to inspire and grow a multi-sector strategy to advance walking and walkability in the United States. This collaborative effort will serve as a nexus for growth of the walking movement by building a partnership of coordinated actions and supporting the many dispersed walking campaigns and community-based projects now underway and certain to grow in the future.

How can government policies stop discouraging and start encouraging greater walkability?

We believe that there are deep-seated reasons why walkability is not yet at the center of public concern. Among them are the following:

1. Federal, state and local transportation investments have long provided greater support for roadway infrastructure and capacity to support vehicles than they have for walking or transit. In order to create cities, suburbs and rural communities where people can truly choose to walk, we need to invest in walking routes of all kinds. From sidewalks to roadside paths, these walking routes need to serve neighborhoods, employment districts, schools, civic centers and parks. In addition, creating more comprehensive and convenient transit is an absolutely critical to allow more Americans to add walking to their daily activities.
2. Federal, state and local transportation design and operations regulations have allowed roads to be built without provisions for walking. With the exception of limited access highways, American roads should be built to accommodate walking trips and transit access.
3. Federal, state and local transportation officials frequently downplay the needs of walking and walkers. Speed limits and crosswalk signal times do not always respect pedestrian/cyclist needs for safety – street lights, designated lanes, sidewalks,

crosswalks, traffic lights, traffic calming and speed limits. There is often a lack of enforcement of ADA requirements and even an avoidance of improvements that would trigger ADA standards.

4. Government actions lack integration among land use planning, infrastructure investment and urban services. Varying missions, objectives, budgets, management styles, governance structures and staff profiles hinder the cross-sector and interagency coordination needed to work toward walkability.
5. There are inadequate policies, regulations and supporting mechanisms for maintaining and redeveloping existing built-up areas. We have an enormous opportunity to re-make older city and town centers, which are based on convenient and walkable scales and services.
6. Many municipalities have inadequate policies and regulations for maintaining or strategically creating sufficient density of residences and businesses to encourage walking. Many density, parking and site planning regulations actively discourage walkability.
7. State and national standards often impede siting of pedestrian-oriented facilities in convenient, accessible locations. Federal agencies often site post office branches or other public buildings outside business areas or town centers and unconnected to transit routes. State agencies often site courts, registries of deeds, schools, libraries, and government offices outside areas with good pedestrian access.
8. Urban design often misses the details of a walkable environment at the neighborhood and street level. A diversity of land uses, smooth access to transit stations (enabled by foot paths, cycle paths and street lights), safe and convenient street crossings, benches, public restrooms, water fountains, and landscaping all contribute to a walkable built environment.

How can we find the elements of an area that encourage walking?

1. Examine communities that have centralized government facilities in town centers or business areas. Do they encourage/facilitate walking? What constraints operate against retention of such facilities in urban centers? What can be added to enhance walking/biking in town centers? What physical obstacles interfere with access for people with disabilities or other walkers (e.g., street furniture or trees blocking sidewalks, curb ramps for wheelchairs, etc.)? What forces have encouraged the placement of public buildings in locations that are only or largely accessible by car? Can these causes be mitigated?
2. Survey local businesses. How would more foot traffic affect them? How can they encourage (and remove obstacles) to foot traffic? Could a chamber of commerce or other business organization bring together business owners to plan and to cooperate in walkability improvements? Could businesses contribute to identifying information for the walk routes (e.g., street maps and signs.) Can employers improve walking routes and encourage use of transit to work by providing discounted or free public transit service to work?
3. Involve the community in exploring what is needed. Be conscious of the difficulty persons with disabilities or non-native English speakers may have in attending planning meetings – go to them! How can we be certain to remove or lessen linguistic and vision barriers to understanding walking routes? Community participation is essential to discuss projects with potential users. How can increased participation elevate walking as a subject of higher interest?

4. Create public information concerning the benefits of walking, where to find locations conducive to walking (with street sign-maps). Can we use publicity more broadly to encourage walking and reward walkers and to get people to walk safely?
5. Look for community involvement in the details of other transportation investments. If new transit routes or town center improvements are under consideration, how can we have community involvement for planning not only routes and facilities, but also walking routes to transit stops and stations?
6. Link walkability to programs for development or redevelopment and for transportation improvements of all kinds.

How can we promote cross-sector collaboration and strategy development between agencies?

1. Federal leadership is needed to integrate the improvement of walking facilities into federal agency organizational missions, programs, budgets and implementation plans.
2. Federal leadership is essential to develop objectives to help employees of local, state and federal public agencies to walk more - where possible as part of work assignments and as a method of personal refreshment during work breaks.
3. Federal leadership is needed to carry out the research and data collection necessary to further the understanding of how, why and where people walk as part of their commute, their daily activities in their communities, and as recreation.
4. Research and data collection efforts are needed to understand the how and why of pedestrian safety ranging from pedestrian-auto and pedestrian-bicycle accidents, to the impact of intersection and crosswalk design on pedestrian safety; to the relationship between different sidewalk surfaces, falls and accessibility.
5. State and local governments should undertake inventories of sidewalks, roadside paths, multi-purpose trails and street crossings, along with audits that explore both the sufficiency of these facilities and disparities in crashes and fatalities between neighborhoods. From this data investment, plans should be developed to create better walking infrastructure starting with those locations where it will serve the greatest number of people, meet the needs of vulnerable populations and address safety deficiencies.
6. Public agencies at all levels can lead the way in exploring methods to increase walking opportunities inside existing and proposed parks and green spaces, and in neighborhoods where there are good walking environments in urban areas.
7. Develop walk-supportive siting standards for schools, post offices, police stations and other civic facilities.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and look forward to your responses to them.

Please feel free to contact WalkBoston with questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Robert Sloane
Senior Project Manager