
WalkBoston: Good Walking is Good Business

Posted on [May 20, 2011](#) by [Wendy Landman](#), WalkBoston Executive Director



[BostonCompleteStreets.org](#)

The following is a guest post from Smart Growth America's ally WalkBoston.

[WalkBoston](#), Massachusetts' main pedestrian advocacy organization, is working to reach beyond active transportation and smart growth partners to recruit allies in the retail, employer and real estate worlds to promote walkable communities. WalkBoston's latest publication, [Good Walking is Good Business](#) (PDF), presents a wide array of research that shows how walking benefits many elements of the economy.

According to the [Urban Land Institute](#), vibrant, walkable retail areas attract people to stay longer, spend more money, and visit more often. According to Marlon Boarnet, director the Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California-Irvine and author of *Retrofitting Suburbia*, the most walkable, densely-built shopping districts in Los Angeles have [four times the retail activity](#) of "strip mall" shopping centers in less dense areas. For businesses, supporting improved walking conditions is a sound but sometimes overlooked investment. Here are some of the ways businesses can benefit from more walkable neighborhoods:

- Some of the country's most popular tourist destinations – like the National Mall in Washington DC and the Las Vegas Strip – are also some of the most pedestrian-oriented places around. In Massachusetts, the \$15.6 billion tourist industry thrives not just in Boston, which Frommer's lists among [the 10 most walkable](#)

[cities in the world](#), but also in the compact, historic town centers across the state.

- The economic impact of walkability affects homeowners and taxpayers, too. Homes in walkable areas [command a premium](#) – on average \$20,000-\$34,000 – over similar homes in less walkable areas, and they have experienced less than half the average decline in value since the real estate peak in the mid-2000s. At the same time, walkable, higher-density neighborhoods [cost taxpayers less](#): a home built in a low-density suburb requires, on average, \$10,000 more in infrastructure than a home built in an urban core.
- There's also evidence that walking can lower health care costs. In Massachusetts, if just 1 out of 10 adults started walking regularly, the Commonwealth would [save \\$121 million](#) in heart disease expenditures.
- And of course, there's the cost of car ownership. While people who live in auto-dependent communities [may pay up to \\$500 a month](#) toward gas, insurance and car payments, in walkable communities that money can be spent on local goods and services.
- Research also shows that today's young adults don't drive like they used to. In 1995, people ages 21-30 accounted for 21% of all miles driven in the United States. In 2009, the same demographic accounted for [only 14% of miles driven](#), despite steady growth of this age group.

Dollar for dollar, the returns are impressive, from more customers to healthier, more productive employees. Make an investment in improving the walking conditions around your place of business. It will pay off with more customers, healthier employees, and a stronger bottom line.

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