



Issue Brief

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Sidewalks Promote Walking

- **Of America's 205 million adults, 86% took walks during the summer months of 2002, and 40% of those walkers walked more than 15 days per month.** Fourteen percent of adult Americans state they never take walks.
- **The presence of sidewalks has a slight positive effect on the tendency for adults to take walks, but has no effect on the frequency of those walks.** If people in communities without sidewalks (about one-third of the population), were to walk at the same rate as they do in communities with sidewalks, an additional 2.8 million adults would join the ranks of the walking.
- **Nonwalkers are more likely than walkers to assert that their communities need more sidewalks and to voice dissatisfaction with their community designs in making walking safe (overall 17%).** In communities without sidewalks, adults are three times as likely as other adults to state their dissatisfaction.

Walkers, Nonwalkers, and Frequency of Walking

One hundred and seventy-eight million adult¹ Americans took walks during the summer months of 2002, or 6 out of every 7 adults.² About 40% of these walked more than 15 days of the preceding month of the survey, which was administered in the summer 2002. Only a small minority of adults say they never take walks (about 29 million adult Americans). Walking was defined as any outdoor walking, jogging, or running that lasts at least 5 minutes.

Importance of Sidewalks

About two-thirds of the respondents said their community had sidewalks.³ Those who say that sidewalks are not available in their communities are slightly less likely (4%) to be walkers (See Figure 1). However, if sidewalks were available to everyone and this slight difference held true, another 2.8 million Americans could be expected to take up walking.

¹ Survey used respondents 16 and over.

² For survey description, see end of this paper.

³ Sidewalks are generally constructed for walking along a street or road.

Although there is an apparent relationship between sidewalk availability and the likelihood of walking, the presence of sidewalks has no apparent effect on the frequency of walks taken. The median number of days walked for those who take walks fell between 12 and 13 days in the month preceding the survey. That median number was used to divide survey respondents into two groups. Those who walked 13 or more days per month were labeled "frequent" walkers while those who walked 12 or fewer days per month were labeled "occasional" walkers. The presence or absence of sidewalks had no statistically significant effect on the walking frequency of either group.

Satisfaction with Community Design for Making Walking Safe

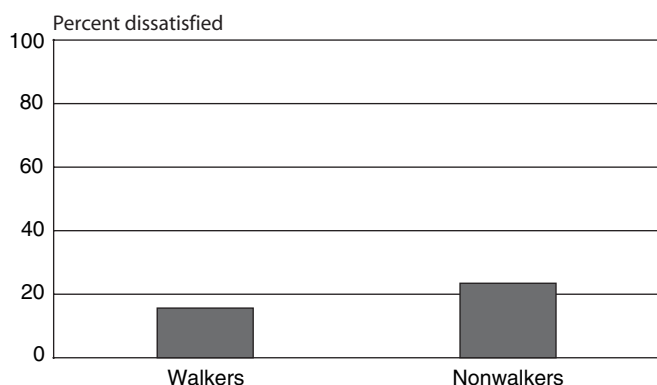
Nonwalkers report dissatisfaction with the safe-walking design of their community.⁴ (See Figure 2). However, this relationship was not found between frequent and occasional walkers within the walking group. Both frequent

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all differences cited are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This means that there is less than a 5% probability that the difference could have occurred by chance.

Figure 1. Percent of Walkers by Sidewalk Availability



Figure 2. Dissatisfaction with the Community Design for Making Walking Safe



and occasional walkers expressed about the same levels of dissatisfaction with their community's safe-walking design—about 17.9% and 16.4%, respectively.

Dissatisfaction with “how the local community is designed for making walking safe” is quite low—below 10%—in communities where sidewalks are available. But the percent dissatisfied increases to nearly a one-third (32%) when sidewalks are not available (See Figure 3). Overall, survey respondents strongly favor acquiring more sidewalks. When asked what changes they would like to see in their communities, those offering suggestions often mention “more sidewalks” before other options, such as more crosswalks or more lights on the streets or paths. Moreover, nearly half the respondents cite either more sidewalks (39%) or better sidewalks (5%). People who say sidewalks are not available in their communities are twice as likely as people with sidewalks to mention more sidewalks as a change they would like to see in their communities (58% versus 27%).

Figure 3. Dissatisfaction with Community Design for Making Walking Safe by Sidewalk Availability

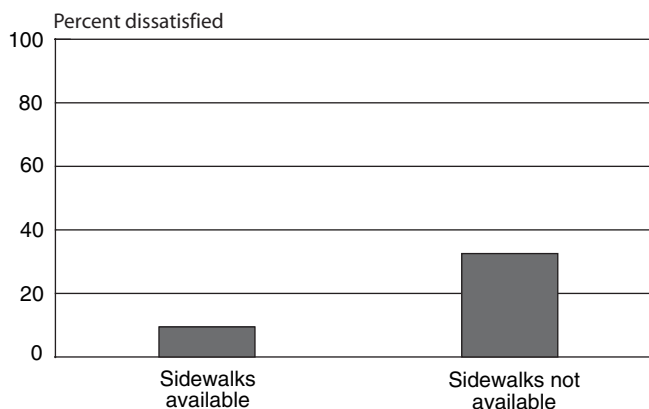


FIGURE SOURCES: *National Survey of Pedestrian and Bicyclist Attitudes & Behaviors*, Bureau of Transportation Statistics and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C., 2002.

Background information for the data presented in this paper. A national survey of 9,616 adults was conducted in the summer of 2002 by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The objective of this survey was to determine the magnitude of bicycle and pedestrian activity in the nation and the public's behavior and attitudes regarding bicycling and walking. This survey—the first national survey of its kind—sheds light on the effect of bike paths, bike lanes, and sidewalks on attitudes and behavior towards bicycling and walking. Bicycling is covered in another Issue Brief, *How Bike Paths and Lanes make a Difference*, No. 11, June 2004.

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