California WALKS Network

Messaging for Walkability

A messaging guide for pedestrian advocates
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Acknowledgements

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Background

California WALKS (CW), our partners and member organizations, have been working to describe the world of walking and pedestrian safety. Together, we have come up with this list. Each aspect has a policy statement, some supporting facts, and a personal message exemplifying what this aspect of walking means to a real person. The categories identified are by no means exhaustive of pedestrian safety and walkability. They are a starting point from which we, as pedestrian advocates, can build, moving forward in creating a safer, healthier, and more accessible pedestrian friendly California.

How to use this resource

This resource is free to use by advocates and organizations. Pedestrian safety movements of all sizes usually start with an individual who attracts a group interested in creating safer spaces. Talking points and facts from this CW resource can be used as aids in gathering community, organizational or political support. Each of us may find that the messages and facts presented here are in full alignment with our work or that this resource is a starting place to define messages and strategy. Please feel free to use these resources as they meet your needs; we only ask that you cite California WALKS and this resource in your work.

Defining walking, pedestrians and walkability

Walking is a fundamental mode of transportation and almost everyone walks every day. Walking itself is transportation, and is also used with every other form of transportation (from car driving to bicycling to riding public transit). For example: transit riders walk at either end of the public transit trip, and automobile drivers have to walk from a starting point (home) to the car and then from parking to the door of a destination. Most of these connecting trips are one block to a half mile long. While some people walk more than others, it is important that our community environments are safe, accessible, and encourage walking for everyone. When we do so, more people have an option to walk more often, improving their own physical health as well as the surrounding natural environment (fewer greenhouse gas emissions).

Pedestrians include both those who walk on two feet and those persons who walk or roll using an assistive device, whether it is a baby in a stroller, a youth on skates, or a person using a cane, crutches or wheelchair. Walkability indicates the number of people who can or will be physically active. It is often said that a pedestrian environment walkable for an older adult or someone with a stroller/small child is an environment that is walkable for nearly everyone. This is called universal access.

Walkability refers to how safe, friendly and accessible walking is in a neighborhood or community. Many factors influence walkability. Common elements of the built environment include continuous, level sidewalks and pathways; safe, accessible crossings; pedestrian-friendly lighting; suitable vehicle speed; limited number of lanes and street width. Other factors that influence walking and walkability include real and perceived safety from crime, gang activity and aggressive dogs, graffiti and trash, maintenance of trees and greenery, safe access to desired destinations (park, school, grocery, library, post office, etc.), public amenities like benches, drinking fountains, public art, restrooms, and trash cans, among many others.
Messaging

We at California WALKS and our partners, hope that you find the following messaging statements useful for your work. Messaging statements included in this document are as follows:

- Walking as a form of transportation
- Walking for personal health
- Walking and the environment
- Walking and public transit
- Walking in rural communities
- Walking and older adults
- Walking and persons with disabilities
- Walking and children
- Walking and youth
- Walking connects us to people and places
- Walking and complete streets
- Walking and pedestrian safety
- Walking investments save money in the long run
- Walking is for everyone
- Walking to nearby destinations

Please contact California WALKS if you have any questions.

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Walking as a Form of Transportation

Messaging Statement

- Walking is the most universal form of transportation.
- Walking is essential to every other mode of transportation.
- Walking is reliable transportation.
- Walking is FREE!

Supporting Facts

- Walking, riding transit, bicycling, or carpooling—just one day a week for a year—can typically save about 1,200 miles on vehicles and about $567 in total driving costs.\(^1\)
- After housing, transportation is the second largest expense for the average American household—exceeding food, education, recreation, and healthcare—according to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.\(^2\)
- Walking is free.

Personal Messages

- “Walking gets me where I need to go.”
- “Even when I drive or take public transit, walking is a connecting piece to get me where I need to go.”

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Walking for Personal Health

Messaging Statement

- Walking is a form of physical activity that is good for the physical and mental health of everyone.
- It is recommended that people engage in at least 20-30 minutes of exercise each day and walking can be that exercise!

Supporting Facts

- Walking is “a foundational first step in encouraging the healthy and active lifestyle that is critical to combating obesity and its life threatening consequences.”
- Brisk walking reduces body fat, blood pressure, and the risk of bone fracture, while it increases high-density lipoproteins.
- Walking at least 2 hours per week is associated with a significantly lower risk of mortality.
- 43% of people with safe places within a 10-minute walk from their homes met their recommended levels of physical activity, whereas only 27% of people without walkable neighborhoods and nearby destinations met recommended levels of physical activity.
- Older adults in Alameda County with high levels of physical activity (including walking) were associated with low prevalence of baseline depression.
- People who travel by transit get their recommended physical activity since they walk or bike to and from the transit stop or station.

Personal Messages

- “Healthy minds and healthy hearts start with a neighborhood walk.”
- “I de-feat the blues by walking.”
- “When I walk, I feel happier.”

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1 California Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP). “Challenge Area 8: Make Walking and Street Crossing Safer”
Walking and the Environment

Messaging Statement

- Walking reduces our carbon footprint. For every mile we walk, rather than drive, we save 1lb. of carbon.
- Walking is good for the environment, because unlike other forms of transportation, walking does not contribute to air pollution.

Supporting Facts

- 28% of all trips are one mile or less, a distance that can be covered on foot. Yet 60% of trips less than one mile are currently made by car. 50% of all trips are three miles or less.¹
- “Starting and driving a vehicle the first few minutes results in higher emissions because the emissions control equipment has not yet reached its optimal operating temperature.”²
- “You can reduce more air pollution if you walk or bicycle for short trips, compared to a long commute, because emissions are highest when a vehicle is started “cold.” For instance, eliminating 5 separate one-mile vehicle trips reduces about the same amount of ozone-related pollution as eliminating one 15-mile trip.”³
- In California, the transportation sector contributed 38% of total greenhouse gas emissions, and the majority of that is from on-road vehicles, such as private automobiles and light duty trucks (2004).⁴
- Transportation accounts for more than 28% of our country’s energy consumption and more than 25% of its air pollution.⁵
- If Americans substituted walking for driving the distance recommended for daily exercise (3-5 miles, depending on walking speed), the United States would consume 35-38% less oil.⁶

Personal Messages

- “I walk for short trips because I care about the environment; it’s a way I can do my part to reduce our carbon footprint.”

³ Statement from the FHWA’s Fall Fact Sheet contributed 38% of total greenhouse gas emissions, and the majority of that is from on-road vehicles, such as private automobiles and light duty trucks (2004).⁴
Walking and Public Transit

Messaging Statement

- Walking is an essential element in using public transit.
- To make public transportation accessible, we need safe walking routes to transit.

Supporting Facts

- “A quality transit system encourages walking and creates opportunities for riders to exceed the CDC’s recommended guidelines by building in extra activity into their daily commute.”¹
- In Houston, less than 10% of disabled and elderly citizens use public transportation, even though 50% of them live within two blocks of a bus stop, because 60% of them do not have sidewalks between their homes and the bus stop.²
- “Walking and bicycling are efficient transportation modes for most short trips and, where convenient intermodal systems exist, these non-motorized trips can easily be linked with transit to significantly increase trip distance.”³
- Every transit rider is a pedestrian,⁴ and the majority of all of transit riders get to the stop by walking.

Personal Messages

- “Every time I take transit, I also walk. I walk to the bus, ride the bus, then walk to my destination.”
- “I use transit more when I can safely walk to and from transit on both ends of my trip.”

Walking in Rural Communities

Messaging Statement

- Rural areas present unique challenges to walking.
- Longer distances, narrower roads with no places to walk raise unique challenges. We need unique strategies for pedestrian safety in rural communities.
- Risk of fatalities is high due to high speeds, no paved shoulders or sidewalks, and no crossings.
- Walking provides transportation independence in rural communities.
- Safe pedestrian spaces can be identified in rural areas where sidewalks may not be realistic. Marked, paved shoulders work as do signed, marked crossings at destinations (schools, school/transit stops, stores, etc.).

Supporting Facts

- Approximately 25% of nationwide pedestrian fatal and injury collisions occur on rural highways.\(^\text{1}\)
- Rural areas and small towns have higher concentrations of older and low-income people, less likely to own automobiles and therefore depend more on walking and public transportation to get anywhere.\(^\text{2}\)
- Children who live in rural areas are 25% more likely than urban children to suffer from obesity and accompanying diseases. Making rural communities walkable encourages these youth to be more physically active.\(^\text{3}\)

Personal Messages

- “Walking is a way for me to get to my job and for my kids to get to school, since we are without a car or public transit. We often walk on the shoulder of the road, and are very concerned about our safety from traffic.”
- “Now that my son is old enough to walk home from school, I can go back to work full-time.”
- I can’t drive anymore, but I like my independence. I walk and take the senior shuttle, so that I won’t have to ask my kids for so many rides.
- Walking is an important form of exercise for me, and I want to be safe (from traffic) walking along my country roads.
- When I walk alone or with my children, we walk on the road in front of our home. It is dangerous. Often there are no cars, but when they pass at the speed limit of 45 or over, we have to jump into the 2’ ditch which is the “shoulder.”
- My dog takes me on long walks.
- Freedom in the country; it’s my choice. Sometimes I drive, sometimes I walk, and sometimes I ride with friends.

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Walking and Older Adults

Messaging Statement

- Walking is an essential form of transportation for many older adults, especially as driving is less practical.
- Walking can be adapted to individual endurance and abilities.
- Real and perceived crime impact pedestrian safety, especially for older adults.
- When walking outside is not safe or uncomfortable, whether from crime, weather, or other issues, we older adults can walk indoors or in other identified safe and comfortable places.
- Non-driving seniors who don’t walk and ride transit become more isolated, visiting friends and family less than do others.

Supporting Facts

- Non-driving seniors make 65% fewer trips to visit family or friends or to attend church; many of them report reticence to ask for a ride.1
- 54% of older Americans who live on streets unfriendly to walking, bicycling, or public transportation would do those things more often if the streets were better suited to them.2
- More than half of older Americans who do not drive choose to stay at home because they cannot otherwise get where they want to go safely or reliably.3
- Older adults in Alameda County with high levels of physical activity (including walking) were associated with low prevalence of baseline depression.4
- Research shows that doing balance and muscle-strengthening activities each week along with moderate-intensity aerobic activity, like brisk walking, helps reduce the risk of falling.5

Personal Messages

- “Walking gives me independence.”
- “I walk with my friends because I feel safer in a group.”
- “Walking gets me where I need to go.”
- “Walking is great for me because it is free!”
- “I can’t drive anymore, but I like my independence. I walk and take the senior shuttle, so that I won’t have to ask my kids for so many rides.”

Walking and Persons with Disabilities

Messaging Statement

- Universal design and complete streets improves access to everyone.
- The ability to use sidewalks and street crossings is critical for persons with disabilities, especially for those who are unable to drive frequently.
- Walking mobility can easily be adapted to individual endurance and abilities.
- Safe routes to schools can be identified and/or created for children with physical limitations or other disabilities.
- Many older adults also have limited mobility. The growing older adult population vastly increases the need for safe and accessible pedestrian spaces.
- Implementing the American with Disabilities Act and Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (ADA and PROWAAG) to create accessible pedestrian spaces benefits all users (e.g. strollers, toddlers, carts, deliveries, etc.).
- Real and perceived crime impact pedestrian safety

Supporting Facts

- Nearly 1 in 5 Americans is has some type of a physical or sensory disability.\(^1\)
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) sets minimum standards to ensure accessibility for all.\(^2\)
- “Accessible routes shall consist of one or more of the following components: walking surfaces with a running slope not steeper than 1:20, doorways, ramps, curb ramps excluding the flared sides, elevators, and platform lifts.”\(^3\)
- “Independent travel with access to public and private transportation, places of business and government services begins with a pedestrian-friendly environment that accommodates the unique abilities of all citizens.”\(^4\)

Personal Messages

- “Having accessible paths and walkways with safe crossings enables me to move throughout my neighborhood and community.”
- “Walking and rolling give me independence.”
- “Walking gets me where I need to go.”

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Walking and Children

Messaging Statement

- Walking is an active form of transportation for children, encouraging healthy lifestyles. We must make it safe for our children to walk to school, home, parks and other destinations.
- Walking helps kids become responsible, by learning about rules of the road, independence, safety, and other neighborhood issues building good judgment skills in children and youth.
- Walking is a lifelong activity that begins when we are toddlers.
- Walking creates independence.
- Walking helps kids learn to be responsible.
- Walking helps kids meet friends and neighbors, making social connections.
- Real and perceived crime impact pedestrian safety.

Supporting Facts

- More children do not walk to school because of dangers from traffic than from avoidance of strangers.  
  


Personal Messages

- “Walking helps me be responsible and aware of my surroundings.”
- “Walking is a great form of physical activity and gets my mind going in the morning”
- “I walk with my parents and friends in a ‘walking school bus’ to school and afterschool programs”
Walking and Youth

Messaging Statement

- Walking is a primary mode of transportation for youth and we want our youth to have safe streets for walking.
- Youth and adults have the responsibility to promote safety in our communities to make it safe to walk.
- We can take a stand in our communities by walking. The act of walking itself helps create a safe and healthy environment where people want to walk and play.
- Real and perceived crime impact pedestrian safety.

Supporting Facts

- Walking is free.
- Many youth cannot afford to drive or take transit, don’t own a car or bicycle, which leaves walking as the one viable mode of transportation.
- Walking is the universal means of independence available to youth.

Personal Messages

- “I am embarrassed to own a car. Walking and biking is cool.”
- “Walking gets me where I need to go.”
- “I am too young to drive and afford a car, so walking is a perfect way for me to get around because it is free!”
- “Walking gives me independence.”
- “Car driver licensing and car purchasing is an “old school” rite of passage. Cars are expensive. I can wait to learn to drive but be independent now when I walk, bike and travel by transit.”
- “I walk with my friends because I feel safer in a group.”
Walking Connects us to People and Places

**Messaging Statement**

- Walking is a form of engagement with our physical and built environments and helps us to be more aware and connect with our surroundings.
- Walking provides opportunities for social interactions with friends, family, neighbors and more.
- Neighborhoods with lots of people walking have high social cohesion.
- Walking connects us to people and the environment; we become more aware of how our neighborhoods are changing.

**Supporting Facts**

- "Comparisons between the more walkable and less walkable neighborhoods show that levels of social capital are higher in more walkable neighborhoods...Social capital is a measure of an individual’s or group’s networks, personal connections, and involvement. Like economic and human capital, social capital is considered to have important values to both individuals and communities."\(^1\)
- Walking around and exploring your neighborhood helps people to understand how our neighborhoods work and are designed. Engaging with our environment and neighborhoods encourages residents to take ownership of our spaces.\(^2\)
- "Studies in the US and Europe have found that walk friendly neighborhoods are associated with greater levels of social interaction, sense of community, social capital and place attachment."\(^3\)

**Personal Messages**

- “Breathe in the atmosphere of your neighborhood”
- “Invite a neighbor, enjoy your neighborhood.”
- “I walk so I can slow down and see the world.”
- “My kids and I walk to explore our neighborhood.”
- “Walking expands my world.”
- “People recognize me because I walk in the neighborhood.”
- “Invite a friend to walk together.”
- “I love meeting my neighbors when I am out walking.”
- “I walk in a group because it is safer and more fun to walk with others.”

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Walking and Complete Streets

Messaging Statement

- Adoption and implementation of Complete Streets policies will integrate pedestrians, bikes and transit into all travel and make streets safer.
- Streets can and should be built for people, not just for cars.
- Streets can and should be accessible for all users of all abilities and ages.
- Streets can accommodate multiple forms of transportation (walking, biking, transit, car, etc.).

Supporting Facts

- The power of the Complete Streets movement is that it fundamentally redefines what a street is intended to do, what goals a transportation agency is going to meet, and how the community will spend its transportation money. It breaks down the traditional separation of highways, transit and biking/walking and instead focuses on the desired outcome of a transportation system that supports safe use of the roadway for everyone, however they are traveling.¹
- Complete streets make economic sense, improve safety, encourage more walking, transit travel and biking, ease transportation woes, help children, are good for air quality and make fiscal sense.²
- “Complete Streets planning presents an opportunity to increase the safety and availability of older adults’ travel options.”³

Personal Messages

- “Streets that are built for pedestrians, bikes, transit and cars make me feel good because everyone is included.”
- “Completing our downtown streets has added livelihood and economic vitality to our neighborhood and city.”
- “I like walking down a street that makes it easy for me to walk or bike and shop.”
- “As more of us age, fewer of us will be forced to use paratransit and door-to-shuttles when complete streets allow us to safely walk to and from the transit stop.”

Walking and Pedestrian Safety

Messaging Statement

- Walking should be safe, healthy, and accessible of people of all ages and abilities.
- I have the right to be safe when using any form of transportation.
- Pedestrian investments should reflect both the mode share and safety need and be made proportionate to the both.
- Walking is one of the most dangerous forms of transportation, in large part because our society is spending almost no money on walking safety.
- Safety from neighborhood factors, such as crime, aggressive dogs and bullies, is just as important, if not more important, than traffic safety concerns when people consider whether walking for transportation or health. Real and perceived crime impact pedestrian safety.
- The more we walk and the more people who walk, the safer it becomes.

Supporting Facts

- In 2008, California pedestrian fatalities were 58% higher than the national average.¹
- In 2009, 21% of California’s total traffic fatalities and 18% of the total severe injuries were pedestrian.²
- When comparing all traffic collisions to all pedestrian collisions in California (2009), pedestrian collisions are 150% more likely to result in death.³
- Each day in California, from 2000-2009, an average of 42 collisions involving pedestrians, 2 pedestrian fatalities, and 5.4 severe injuries occurred.⁴
- “There is a documented relationship between vehicle speeds and pedestrian crash severity. About 5 percent of pedestrians are likely to be killed when struck at 20 mph, about 40 percent of pedestrians are likely to be killed when struck at 30 mph, about 80 percent of pedestrians are likely to be killed when struck at 40 mph, and nearly all are likely to be killed when struck at 50 mph or more.”⁵
- Improving street design can make streets safer for all users, especially vulnerable road users.⁶
- Reducing speeds 5 mph reduces the likelihood of pedestrian death by 59%.⁷

Personal Messages

- “I would walk more but I am afraid of fast cars and crossing wide streets.”
- “Sometimes I walk in a group with my friends. Because of crime in my neighborhood, walking in a group makes me feel safer. This way I get my daily exercise.”

¹ California Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP). “Challenge Area 8: Make Walking and Street Crossing Safer” FARS data.
² SWITRS data query using the UC Berkeley SafeTREC Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS). http://tims.berkeley.edu/
³ SWITRS data query using the UC Berkeley SafeTREC Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS). http://tims.berkeley.edu/
⁴ SWITRS data query using the UC Berkeley SafeTREC Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS). http://tims.berkeley.edu/
Walking Investment Saves Money in the Long Run; Walking Makes Economic Sense

Messaging Statement

- Planning for pedestrian safety in the first place saves money by preventing the need for costly road and sidewalk retrofits and upgrades (like curb extensions or ramps).
- Streets that are well designed and safe for pedestrians prevent injuries and fatalities that are costly to society.
- Creating walkable spaces with destinations promotes economic vitality.
- Safe pedestrian environments can save 2 pedestrian lives lost in California every day to drivers, in turn avoiding an economic loss of more than $7 Million daily.  

Supporting Facts

- In a San Francisco study, the average medical cost of treating pedestrian crash victims from 2004-2008, was $47,303-$77,679 per admitted patient and $3,798-$6,405 for emergency room patients who were not admitted. The highest cost for one individual patient was $1.9 million. The highest cost directly billed to an uninsured patient during the five (5) years study period was $505,952. San Francisco found it could upgrade and add countdowns to its traffic signals on its travel corridors most dangerous to pedestrians for less than the cost for just the uninsured medical treatment of pedestrians hurt on those same streets.
- The total monetary cost to society of a single traffic fatality is $3.36 million in Year 2000 dollars.
- In the width of one lane, walking and bicycling can move five to ten times more people than can car driving.
- For every one million dollars invested in pedestrian-only infrastructure construction, an average of ten jobs are created.
- Creating accessible pedestrian spaces in the first place reduces the risk of future, costly legal actions such as the Caltrans ADA lawsuit where to settle, Caltrans is spending $1.1 billion over 30 years (starting in 2010) to remove pedestrian access barriers on state highways.

Personal Messages

- “Walking is cheaper than paying $4 a gallon for gas.”
- “I want our streets to be safe for walking.”
- “Walking improves my health and reduces my individual medical bills.”

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7 Californian’s for Disability Rights, Inc. v. California Department of Transportation. Case No.: C 06 5125 Settlement Agreement Re Class Action Settlement. 2010. Available at: http://www.dot.ca.gov/Documents/Master_Stipulation_and_Settlement_Agreement.pdf
Walking is for Everyone

Messaging Statement

- Everyone walks as part of every trip.
- Walking is an essential component to every other mode of transportation.
- Walking in a group can help overcome real or perceived barriers such as crime and safety.

Supporting Facts

- More than 8% of all trips in California are walking-only trips.\(^1\) However, walking is truly a part of 100% of trips.

Personal Messages

- “Everybody walks, let’s all watch out for each other.”
- “Walking gives me lots of ideas because my walking time is my thinking time.”
- “Even though sometimes I drive, take public transit, and bike, walking is always the connecting piece to get me where I need to go.”

Walking to Nearby Destinations

Messaging Statement

- Having places to walk to (nearby destinations) is essential when encouraging people to walk more.
- Creating destinations within walkable distances is an economic revitalization tool.
- Walkable communities have higher property value and contribute to economic vitality.
- Walking improves property value and neighborhood values.
- The more we walk and the more people who walk, the safer it becomes.
- More destinations, the more people at those places, and more people going to more places.

Supporting Facts

- Older planning efforts and research stated that people are willing to walk about a half mile, or 10 minutes (give or take) to transit and other destinations. New research indicates that people are actually willing to walk longer/farther as social norms change and destinations become better connected.\(^1\)
- 28% of all trips are one mile or less, a distance that can be covered on foot. Yet 60% of trips less than one mile currently are made by car. 50% of all trips are three miles or less.\(^2\)
- Proximity link between jobs and housing avoids long commutes and gives people the option to walk more.
- Walk Score is a number between 0 and 100 that measures the walkability of any address. “One point of Walk Score is worth up to $3,000 of value for your property.”\(^3\)

Personal Messages

- “I choose to live in a walkable communities mixed with grocery stores, restaurants, community centers and more, because is important to me to have amenities nearby. I like walking to places I want to go to.”
- “I would like to see more communities become more walkable and safer for pedestrians, but we have to be careful when investing in communities not to displace existing residents.”

