

# 12.10

MAKING OUR COMMUNITIES MORE WALKABLE

# walk

# Boston

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT — SHARING OUR STREETS

WalkBoston is playing a pivotal role in advancing Complete Streets programs in the City of Boston and across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. As we traverse the streets as pedestrians, we tend to forget that 18th century Colonial society had a 21st century vision! Early photos of Boston show crowds of walkers, horse-drawn trolleys, bicycles, carriages and roaming pigs.... all sharing downtown streets. Even in the mid-20th century when cars began to dominate city streets, state highways were built with sidewalks, most of which can still be seen beside many roads.

WalkBoston is thrilled to see the Complete Streets concept coming full circle with the early colonial perspective that all modes of travel must be accommodated on our streets, highways, and bridges. We believe that our advocacy efforts on both the Longfellow and Charles River bridges can establish an important precedent of including the needs of walkers and bikers in future transportation planning and policy. Toward this end, WalkBoston is excited about the long-term impacts of the City of Boston's soon-to-be unveiled Complete Streets Guidelines on future planning efforts.

Happy New Year!



**BY VINEET GUPTA** Dir. of Planning, Boston Transportation Dept.

## Share the road — the vision

“The car is no longer king in Boston.” With these words, in fall 2009, Mayor Thomas Menino and Transportation Commissioner Thomas Tinlin ushered in a new era of street design in the City of Boston. We are already a great walking city. From the wide boulevards of the Back Bay to the quiet leafy streets of Hyde Park, streets define our neighborhoods. We must build on this rich heritage and embrace innovation to address climate change and promote healthy living.

**The new Boston Complete Streets approach puts walkers, bicyclists and transit users on equal footing with drivers, and promotes a vision of streets that are safe, attractive and conducive to healthy, active transportation.**

Key City agencies in meetings with some of the community's most innovative thinkers and practitioners [including WalkBoston's Wendy Landman] have developed new guidelines to implement this vision. Due out in spring of 2011, the objective is to ensure City streets are:

- Multimodal: safe and equally accessible for people of all ages and abilities,
- Green: sustainable, energy efficient, low-maintenance with pleasant plantings,
- Smart: using innovative technologies to improve efficiency and comfort.

Early products of this unprecedented collaboration include **City approval of ten-foot travel lanes to accommodate wider sidewalks and bicycle lanes as on Commonwealth Avenue from Kenmore Square to Arlington Street, permeable pavement in sidewalks to allow stormwater to seep directly into the soil, setting context sensitive sidewalk widths and clear zones for walkers, and a multimodal approach to intersections.**

Ongoing roadway design projects are already applying the new guidelines. These include Peabody Square in Dorchester, Audubon Circle in the Fenway, Central Square in East Boston, and Rutherford Avenue in Charlestown as well as over 30 miles of new bike lanes.

The success of this program will be determined in the neighborhood community meetings where street design decisions are made. We ask WalkBoston and its members to continue to participate in the public discourse as we carve out the future of our shared public spaces. **Voice your support for these initiatives at community meetings and write or call our office with your ideas.**

**BY NINA COHEN**

## Complete Streets are coming

A 2009 national transportation survey found that 50% of all trips are three miles or less, and 28% of all trips are a mile or less. These distances can easily be traveled by foot, yet a lack of adequate sidewalks, paths or bike lanes can make it uncomfortable or even dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists.

Complete Streets is an approach that addresses pedestrian and cyclist needs by reimagining the public street as a place for all users, encouraging a variety of modes — thus lessening traffic for those who must drive. Providing for the needs of all travelers enables communities to realize significant health and safety benefits as well as cleaner air and more pleasant surroundings.

The effort moves forward intersection by intersection, road by road. New York City focused recently on designing and installing dedicated bus and bike lanes on the Upper East Side. This Select Bus Service, recently introduced on an eight-and-a-half mile stretch of First and Second Avenues, reduces bus trip times by an average of 20 minutes. The bus travels in a dedicated bus lane with stops every half-mile. Curb-mounted MTA fare payment machines allow prepayment of fares, reducing stop time. Traffic signals along the avenues, equipped with new computerized equipment, extend green lights for oncoming buses. On the other side of these one-way streets, a dedicated bike lane serves cyclists.

Since 2006, the National Complete Streets Coalition [www.completestreets.org] has worked to develop best practices for communities adopting Complete Streets policies. According to the Coalition, communities with well-designed streets and bike paths provide significant health benefits to residents, including commuters, the elderly, people with disabilities, and children walking to school. And early one-third of transit commuters meet federal recommendations for minimum daily exercise as part of their daily commute. In Portland, Oregon, an expanded network of bike lanes resulted in a 490% increase in bike commuting from 1991 to 2008.

In addition to improving residents' health and safety, Complete Streets increase cities' overall capacity to accommodate growth. New York City's planners anticipating continued population growth are adopting Complete Streets practices to optimize the limited space and create a more livable, prosperous and sustainable city.

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## want money

**Please renew now by mail or online! We need your support to help us continue to do all the wonderful things we do such as:**

- Training young people from Grove Hall how to report walking problems. Of the 134 problems they've reported so far – uneven bricks, dead animals, graffiti, potholes and clogged catch basins – 75% were fixed in a timely fashion.
- Working with Watertown parents and Safe Routes to Schools organizers to persuade the public works department to shovel all curb ramps along “walking school bus” routes.

Not a member yet? You can join at [www.walkboston.org](http://www.walkboston.org). We want you!

## got money

Road designs that incorporate bicycle and pedestrian features got extra points when applying for the federal TIGER II [Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery] competitive grant program in October 2010. In this funding round, monies were awarded to develop Complete Streets guidelines in St. Paul, Minnesota, and for a bridge reconstruction in Ann Arbor, Michigan, that will create new bike lanes and sidewalks. In rural Randolph County, West Virginia, a planning grant will support efforts to create pedestrian and bike connections between residential areas and workplaces in two neighborhoods.

## perspectives

“More traffic and road capacity are not the inevitable result of growth. They are in fact the product of very deliberate choices that have been made for us, not by us, to shape our communities around the private automobile. We as a society have the ability to make different choices – starting with the decision to design our streets as comfortable places for people.” – *Fred Kent, Project for Public Spaces*

“The critical mass of bikes has pacified traffic. Now the street belongs to everybody. It has become a more convivial public space.” – *Giles Vesco, Vice-Mayor in charge of bike-sharing program of Lyon, France*

## new training

Studies find that 43% of those with safe walking places within 10 minutes of home met recommended activity levels, while just 27% of those without them were active enough.

In the Lead Advocates program, WalkBoston, the Boston Public Health Commission and the Boston Transportation Department are training neighborhood residents about public health, urban design and transportation benefits of Complete Streets. The program will start in East Boston, coinciding with the redesign of Central Square. Neighbors will talk with neighbors and participate in the City's efforts to implement Complete Street designs that encourage more active living.

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WalkBoston encourages walking throughout Massachusetts for transportation, health and vibrant communities. Our education and advocacy programs give voice to citizens to make their communities walkable.

### mission

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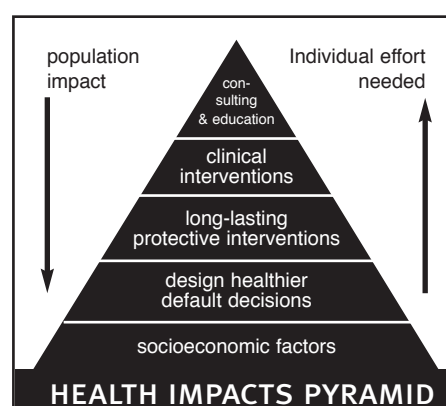
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BY NINA COHEN

## Making the healthy choice easy

**Public health interventions that change environmental context have a greater impact on health outcomes than clinical disease prevention or public education,** according to a recent study by Dr. Thomas Frieden of the US Centers for Disease Control, published in the American Journal of Public Health. Frieden observes that broad health gains are made when the built



environment makes it easier for people to choose a healthy action like walking up a staircase than to choose a less healthy action like taking an elevator. The easier choice is called “the default option,” the choice made when you don't think you are making a choice. He concludes that public health specialists overlook the health gains from making sure people's daily lives have healthier default options.

Public health policy should support “designing communities to promote increased physical activity and enacting public policies that encourage public transit, bicycling and walking instead of driving.” These study findings underscore the need for walkable communities.