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# **Note to editors:** *The underlying data is available to reporters and graphics editors. When contacting, please confirm you will be able to respect the embargo.*

**New Report: As COVID-19 Disrupts the Way We Move,**

**Four New Tools Launched to Ramp up Walkability in Cities Globally and Improve Pedestrian Safety**

***New report includes walkability data for nearly 1,000 cities around the world--revealing US cities to be less walkable compared to global best practices; with Boston, San Francisco and Baltimore among the most walkable cities in the US***

**NEW YORK** (October 14, 2020)—As cities around the globe are seeing a drop in public transit use amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, new maps and tools released today provide urban planners, local officials and citizens the data they need to make their cities safer and more accessible to people on foot. The alternative — evidence of which is already cropping up in some cities — is a surge in car traffic, which worsens air quality, increases social inequity, kills pedestrians and other road users, and increases the impacts of climate change, among other damaging effects.

“COVID-19 has dramatically exposed our inequalities at every level, including our options for travel. Those higher on the income scale tend to have access to both walkable neighborhoods and transport, while those who are lower have neither,” said Heather Thompson, CEO of the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP). “In order to provide safe and inviting walking conditions for all city residents, it is essential to shift the balance of space in our cities away from cars, providing more travel options for people. We have so much to gain — from cleaner air to better health to stronger local economies and deeper bonds within communities, and we all need that now more than ever.”

[*Pedestrians First*](http://pedestriansfirst.itdp.org/), released today by ITDP, includes practical tools that allow urban planners and city officials to assess the inclusivity of their cities’ transit systems as well as the walkability of their neighborhoods and streets. The guide also includes walkability data for nearly 1,000 metropolitan areas worldwide, which users can explore in an interactive map. This is the first-ever worldwide analysis to measure walkability in cities globally.

Globally, the World Health Organization estimates that pedestrians account for 22% of all road traffic deaths, but in some countries that figure is as high as 66%. Around the world, nearly 230,000 people walking will likely be killed in road crashes this year; that’s more than will die from natural disasters, terrorism and poisoning combined. [Additional studies](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160412019315223) have shown that poor conditions for walkers can lead to premature deaths due to air pollution and other environmental factors. A COVID-triggered decline in public transit could lead to greater inequalities and increased threats to human health and safety. Despite the prevalence of traffic congestion in cities throughout the global south, only a small percentage of people actually own cars. In most Indian and African cities, for example, car ownership rates are under 10%.

“Walkable cities don’t happen by accident,” said D. Taylor Reich (they/them pronouns), Research Associate at ITDP and the primary author of the guide. “Policymakers first have to understand the problems that car-oriented planning has caused. Then they can take specific steps: from planning dense, human-scale, mixed-use developments to equipping streets with benches, wide sidewalks and shade. *Pedestrians First* gives city planners and officials everything they need to get started.”

**Tools for Measuring Walkability**

*Pedestrians First* includes four tools that allow policymakers to assess the walkability of their city’s streets and neighborhoods, as well as the inclusivity of their transit systems. All four tools come with extensive lists of policy and design recommendations and resources to improve walkability.

1. ***Measure Inclusive Transit*** — Allows users to measure ways that their city’s transit system supports vulnerable travelers, especially babies, toddlers and their caregivers. Public transit enhances walkability by connecting residents across the city.
2. ***Examine a Neighborhood*** — Allows users to determine whether a neighborhood is a place where people, including babies, toddlers and their caregivers, can get around on foot.
3. ***Visit a Street*** — Allows users to measure walkability at the smallest scale. It can reveal whether walking in a street is safe, healthy, comfortable, convenient and enjoyable.
4. ***View City Measurements*** — Offers maps and statistics of measurements of certain indicators of walkability in cities around the globe.

**Select Indicator Rankings**

In the *View City Measurements* tool, *Pedestrians First* includes extensive, explorable maps that display walkability data for nearly 1,000 metropolitan areas around the world. Rankings on three of the most telling indicators — proximity to services, proximity to car-free places and block density — reveal some surprising bright spots for walkability around the world:

* *Proximity to services.* This indicator measures the proportion of the population living within 1 kilometer of both healthcare and education. Closer social services mean better walkability. On this indicator, the top five major cities worldwide are **Paris**, France; **Lima**, Peru; **London**, Great Britain; **Santiago**, Chile; and **Bogotá**, Colombia.
* *Proximity to car-free places*. This indicator measures the percentage of the city’s population living next to a car-free public open space. Such spaces are important because they can enhance health, foster community connections and increase pedestrian safety. On this indicator, the top five major cities worldwide are **Hong Kong**, China; **Moscow**, Russia; **Paris**, France; **Bogotá**, Colombia; and **London**, Great Britain.
* *Block density.* Small city blocks make cities more walkable because they make it easier for people to walk directly to their destinations without a detour. On this indicator, the top five major cities worldwide are **Khartoum**, Sudan; **Bogotá**, Colombia; **Lima**, Peru; **Karachi**, Pakistan; and **Tokyo**, Japan.

**Walkability in U.S. Cities**

U.S. cities tend to rank low on walkability indicators — in some cases, far lower than cities in the global south. This is largely a function of urban sprawl: U.S. cities tend to have very low urban density, which makes walkability a challenge. The U.S. is also seeing a rise in pedestrian deaths, both as a total number and as a percentage of all road crash fatalities: In 2019, more pedestrians were killed in the United States than in any year since 1990. If COVID-19 triggers a sustained rise in car sales, that trend could grow even worse.

But there are some bright spots: several U.S. cities have already succeeded in improving their walkability, mainly by adopting policies that counter urban sprawl and that encourage the mixing of residential and commercial spaces. And many other cities are well positioned to score easy gains on walkability. For example, the **Los Angeles** metro area has the third-highest weighted population density in the country, only slightly lower than Copenhagen. This means that, by deploying some targeted policy measures, leaders in Los Angeles could go a long way to improve the city’s walkability.

**Philadelphia**, **Baltimore**, and **Miami** are the U.S. cities with the smallest average block size, a fundamental measure of walkability in neighborhood layout. These cities could further improve walkability by putting “pedestrians first.” Neighborhood-level indicators like Roadway Area and Prioritized Connectivity measure how much space is dedicated for people walking and how well intersections are designed for the convenience of pedestrians rather than cars.

Overall, the Pedestrians First data reveal that **New York City, Boston,** **San Francisco** and **Baltimore** are the four most walkable major U.S. cities. The four U.S. cities with the lowest overall scores are **Orlando**, **Atlanta**, **Indianapolis**, and **San Antonio**.

1. **Orlando** — Florida’s third-largest metropolitan area had a score of zero for the indicator “people near transit,” which measures the share of the city’s residents who live within a walkable distance of a place where they can access public transit that arrives every 10 minutes or better throughout the day.
2. **Atlanta** — The walkable areas in Atlanta have the largest block sizes of any major U.S. city. A city with large blocks, no matter how wide its sidewalks and calm its streets, will never be ideally walkable because pedestrians will be forced to take indirect, lengthy routes to reach their destinations.
3. **Indianapolis** — The state capital of Indiana tied with Orlando and **San Antonio** for the lowest score on the indicator that measures the percentage of a city’s population that lives within 100 meters of a car-free place. Car-free places encourage good physical and mental health by providing areas away from vehicle emissions and the threat of collisions, and by encouraging walking as a means of getting around.

**Global Success Stories**

The report also includes a number of walkability “best practice” examples from neighborhoods around the world.

* **Toronto’s** Kensington–Chinatown neighborhood is known for its diversity, eccentricity and walkability. The mix of shops, restaurants and public market spaces encourages walking, while the variety of entrances, windows and storefronts ensures a comfortable and visually interesting environment.
* **Pune, India,** has become a pioneer of people-oriented transportation and urban development. The city’s Jangali Maharaj road redesign prioritized pedestrians and cyclists by streamlining haphazard parking conditions, implementing signage and building wide sidewalks and crosswalks, and creating dedicated spaces for vendors to sell and for children to play.
* In the Quartier Massena in central **Paris**, 100% of blocks have street-level retail that opens up to the sidewalk. This helps the neighborhood provide a safe, continuous, human-scale environment that encourages safe pedestrian and cyclist mobility.

**Benefits of Walkability**

The benefits of pedestrian-friendly cities are wide reaching, and are particularly strong among babies and toddlers and their caretakers, who are most vulnerable to air pollution and dangerous roads. Increasing a city’s walkability can help it to achieve the following outcomes:

* **Improved air quality** — Reducing car traffic [can decrease emissions](https://www.transportenvironment.org/news/plummeting-pollution-exposes-transport%E2%80%99s-role-air-quality-crisis) of toxic air pollutants such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and particulate matter. These pollutants are especially dangerous for babies and young children, as well as for people with asthma, older adults and people who are active outdoors.
* **Better health for city residents** — [Research has shown](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/oby.22611) that living in a walkable neighborhood is associated with a reduced Body Mass Index; the effect is particularly strong among men.
* **A safer environment for children** — Improving walkability makes cities safer and more welcoming for children and their caregivers. A recent project to support [walkability in Bogotá](https://bernardvanleer.org/blog/walking-the-city-at-95cm-high/) led to measurable increases in children’s play time as well as vehicles stopping at road crossings; it also reduced the amount of garbage on the road.
* **Reduced road deaths** — In 2019, [more than 6,500 pedestrians](https://www.ghsa.org/resources/Pedestrians20) were killed in road accidents in the United States; that’s the highest number in more than 30 years. Globally, the World Health Organization estimates that pedestrians [account for 23%](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/road_safety_status/2018/infographicEN.pdf) of all road fatalities; in Africa, that figure [rises to 40%](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/277370/WHO-NMH-NVI-18.20-eng.pdf).
* **Stronger local businesses** — Research has shown that walkable urban areas perform better economically than their car-heavy counterparts. [One recent study](https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/a/326/files/2019/06/FTA19.pdf) found that the six most walkable urban areas in the United States have 52% more GDP per capita than the seven lowest-ranked areas.
* **Reduced inequalities** — The same study found that walkable urban areas are associated with positive indicators of social equity, including the cost of housing and transportation and the mix of rental and for-sale housing.
* **Increased resilience** — Increasing neighborhood walkability can make the area and its residents more resilient to a number of stressors, including [climate change](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S221414051730909X), [natural disasters](https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/10/2878/pdf), and [economic shocks](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316118940_Are_Walkable_Neighborhoods_More_Resilient_to_the_Foreclosure_Spillover_Effects).

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[The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP)](https://www.itdp.org/) works around the world to design and implement high-quality transport systems and policy solutions that make cities more livable, equitable, and sustainable.

ITDP produced *Pedestrians First* with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. *Pedestrians First* is part of the [Urban95 project](https://bernardvanleer.org/solutions/urban95/), which asks the question, “If you could experience the city from 95cm—the height of a 3-year-old—what would you change?”