



## COMMUNITY REPORT CARD AND FEEDBACK

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Columbia, South Carolina  
September 23, 2015

### Introduction

Thank you for submitting an application to the Walk Friendly Communities program on behalf of Columbia, South Carolina! A Walk Friendly Community is a city or town that has shown a commitment to improving walkability and pedestrian safety through comprehensive programs, plans, and policies.

Columbia's application was evaluated by at least three reviewers to provide a fair assessment of your community and provide technical feedback on how to improve the walkability of your community. After thorough consideration of your application, we are designating Columbia as a **Bronze Walk Friendly Community**. In reviewing your application, there were several areas that we were particularly impressed with, including:

- The high mode share for walking, transit, AND carpool. Residents and visitors appear to have multiple convenient options for getting around Columbia.
- The robust planning effort that has resulted in the newly adopted Walk Bike Columbia plan and the start of a pedestrian count program.
- Interdepartmental coordination between city traffic engineers and the police department to review high crash locations and select appropriate countermeasures.

Columbia has exhibited a desire to become a community that supports active transportation. The application to the Walk Friendly Communities program is an endorsement of that desire and it is our hope that the feedback and information we provide can help your community improve in this regard. We also hope that, by identifying Columbia as a Bronze Walk Friendly Community and highlighting some of these impressive programs on our website, other communities can follow your example and build their own successful programs.

This report card provides detailed feedback on how your community can take its programs and initiatives to the next level; take the time to review the feedback and contact us with any questions.

## Primary Recommendations

This section identifies and provides suggestions for the most vital areas of improving Columbia's overall walkability. Additional details are provided in the following sections. **We recommend that you read these areas thoroughly and develop clear goals, benchmarks, funding sources, and an implementation schedule for reaching these goals.**

- An **Open Streets event** during which a selected route will be closed to vehicle traffic and opened up for jogging, walking, and cycling would be a great way to promote active living and encourage more walking.
- It is time to expand SRTS programming and consider developing new **education campaigns that focus on safety.**
- Considering the high crash rate, **traffic calming strategies** need to be implemented more aggressively.
- There are a number of **comprehensive evaluation tools**, including Road Safety Audits, which can help planners and residents of Columbia to understand how to improve the pedestrian environment. The city should also be conducting **pre- and post-evaluations** for transportation projects.

## Feedback by Section

This remainder of this report card will provide detailed feedback and suggestions for each section in the community assessment tool. Feedback will include research to support the importance of this question as well as tools, guides, and case studies of successful implementations in other communities.

Each section received an overall score as defined below:

- **Walk Friendly:** The responses in this section indicate that your community is particularly strong in this area with great efforts being made towards improving walkability. Even so, there are always areas within this section where improvements and growth could be made.
- **On the Right Track:** This score indicates that your community does not exhibit the characteristics to be truly walk friendly in this section, but that there are still good existing programs or new programs that could be expanded. Please review our suggestions on how you could improve the walkability in this area.
- **Needs Attention:** This score indicates that your community does not yet demonstrate strong programs, policies, and results, characteristic of a Walk Friendly Community based on the responses in this section. Please review our suggestions carefully on how you can create positive change in your community with both short- and long-term objectives.

## Community Profile

### Walk Friendly

- It is great to see staff time and committee activity dedicated to pedestrian issues. Should funding permit, establishing a full-time pedestrian coordinator would be a very beneficial step for a mid-size city. Check out the report [Why Communities & States Need Bicycle and Pedestrian Staff](#).

## Status of Walking

### On the Right Track

- The mode share for walking in the city is good for a community of this size and suggests that walking is comfortable and convenient in Columbia. It is also great to see that only about 65% of workers commute by driving alone! Everyone else is carpooling, walking, or taking transit to work.
- Columbia's crash rate is somewhat high, but thankfully there is a low fatality rate and it looks like police are doing a good job reporting non-injury crashes that involve pedestrians.
- Collecting crash data is a first step towards understanding how safe walking is in a community. This data can also help city officials understand if treatments are necessary and, with some crash analysis, where these improvements are needed.

## Planning

### On the Right Track

- We were impressed with the recently adopted (June 2015!) Walk Bike Columbia Plan, especially its focus on implementation. It is good to see the ambitious, yet realistic, mode share target and crash reduction goal.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires public agencies with more than 50 employees to develop and implement an ADA transition plan. Providing accessible facilities improves safety and access for all populations, not just individuals with disabilities. A transition plan should also include a timeline for completion, not just a list of prioritized projects. We understand that more than half of roads in your city are maintained by SCDOT, but are still some important segments that are owned by the city. For an example, check out the transition plans from these Silver-level communities: [Sandpoint, Idaho](#), and [Lee's Summit, Missouri](#). Your plan should address street crossings and signals and should ideally identify a stable source of funding to ensure that ADA treatments continue to be funded and implemented.
- The Complete Streets resolution adopted in 2010 is a great start, but to take Complete Streets one step further would be develop guidelines and implementation strategies that transform streets into better public spaces. Elements from [Charlotte](#) and [San Francisco](#)'s guidelines could be helpful examples.
- To help you evaluate your Complete Streets projects and continue to make the case for a Complete Streets approach to transportation projects, check out the [Evaluating Complete Streets Project guide](#) from the National Complete Streets Coalition.
- Your city has a very impressive and comprehensive approach to involving a variety of perspectives in your planning process. Good job! You may want to consider having the

BPAC review development proposals and make recommendations that focus on the needs of non-motorized users to the Planning Commission.

- A connectivity policy is extremely important in terms of encouraging pedestrian access and pedestrian travel. In addition, street connectivity, grid networks, and short block lengths are helpful in creating direct routes to destinations. The Victoria Transport Policy Institute provides [guidance](#) on connectivity policies. Silver-level Bend, Oregon, has a Development Code that establishes pedestrian friendly block lengths in different zones of the city (e.g., 400 feet block length and 1,500 feet block perimeter in the Central Business District). See page 234 of this [PDF](#).
- If the Planning Director waives the connectivity requirement in Bronze-level Cary, North Carolina, then the town requires residential developments to provide a pedestrian trail to link any cul-de-sacs. Check out section 7.10 of Cary's [Land Development Ordinance](#).
- Since it is routine policy to build trails, Columbia could amend zoning regulations to ensure that trails are included in those areas where crucial trail connections are required.
- A strong public transit system is linked with more walking, as transit riders are also pedestrians at some point during the trip. We liked seeing Columbia's focus on accessibility, although service could be improved through increased frequency and service hours.
- It is good to see priced parking and the absence of a parking minimum for the downtown. However, Columbia could still strengthen its parking policies to encourage a more pedestrian-friendly built environment. For more information, the San Francisco Metropolitan Transportation Commission has produced a [Best Practices](#) resource that can provide further guidance about this. The EPA's [Parking Spaces/Community Places](#) guidebook may also be helpful. To start, the city could draft parking lot design requirements that specify safe pedestrian circulation and building access. It's hard to tell from the application whether the parking requirements have enough teeth outside of downtown, but the city may want to revisit the "maximum" that says developers cannot exceed 110% of the parking minimum. Is this having the intended effect of preventing unnecessary off-street parking spaces?
- For more parking policy and program examples, check out this [Strategic Parking Plan](#) from Gold-level, Denver.
- Columbia has some policies that encourage dense, mixed-use development, but only in limited parts of the city. There is a lot of focus on the urban design districts, but make sure some of these pedestrian supportive policies influence other areas of the city as well. For example, how is pedestrian-scale street lighting dealt with throughout the city? Lighting has a major effect on pedestrian safety. For example code language, check out ChangeLab Solutions' page about [pedestrian-friendly lighting](#). Their website includes lot of other examples of [zoning and municipal laws](#) that support pedestrian-friendly design features.

## Education & Encouragement

### On the Right Track

- Columbia has made great headway with Safe Routes to School programming. The next steps are to get more schools participating in International Walk to School Day and conduct walk audits for more schools. It's good to see that the city schools survey parents and conduct student travel tallies.
- Gold-level Evanston, Illinois, has SRTS programs at all 15 elementary and middle schools that are supported by multiple city departments. The first week of school is designated Evanston Walk Week by the city's Health Department in cooperation with Aldermen and the school district. In 2011, the city traffic engineer and the police department worked with the school district to develop [suggested walk/bike route maps](#) for all schools.
- Austin, Texas, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, has a Safe Routes to School program that benefits from, and works in tandem with, the Public Works department's [Child Safety Program](#). These programs not only provide pedestrian safety education to children, but also to adults. The Child Safety Program employs four safety trainers and targets drivers, parents, teachers, and students in a comprehensive pedestrian safety education program. Austin also encourages people to use alternative modes of transportation through a Walk, Bike, & Roll program.
- A combination of education and encouragement efforts can have a large effect on pedestrian volumes as well as pedestrian safety in a community. Also, there can be major differences in the walking abilities, behavioral patterns, and learning capacities of different groups of pedestrians and other road users. Because of this, educational programs succeed when tailored to specific audiences and to the behaviors they seek to modify. It sounds like there is great focus on active living initiatives in Columbia, but the city could benefit from campaigns that promote safety messages for pedestrians, and all road users. For example:
  - In Gold-level Arlington County, Virginia, the Neighborhood 25 program was a campaign that began in 2010 as a response to the difference in fatal crashes that occur at 20 mph and 30 mph. "Keep Kids Alive – Drive 25" signs were placed throughout neighborhoods in conjunction with police placement of speed feedback signs.
  - The [Pace Car](#) program in Bronze-level Northampton, Massachusetts, residents sign a pledge to drive safely, courteously, and within the speed limit on city streets and receive an official "Northampton Pace Car" sticker to display on their vehicles.
- The historical walking tours are quite impressive – it'd be nice if there was a printable version for the tours that are based in Google maps. We really liked the PDF for the African American heritage tour!
- To experiment with wayfinding and gain support, check out how you can design and print temporary (and affordable) signs through [Walk \[Your City\]](#).
- The City of Philadelphia, designated as a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, has set the bar for pedestrian wayfinding programs learn more about their program [here](#).
- There are many community groups and businesses that might be interested in helping your city create a wayfinding system. In Gold-level Washington D.C., the Downtown Business Improvement District led the effort of 30 stakeholder groups to develop a citywide wayfinding signage system that is now slated to expand to neighborhoods beyond downtown.

- It is great to see that the city has identified an Open Streets event as a priority near-term action under the new Walk Bike plan! There are a number of great examples, not least the events in Seattle. In 2008, Seattle, designated as a Platinum-level Walk Friendly Community, piloted Car Free Days to open up streets to bicycling, walking, and playing. The city renamed it Celebrate Seattle [Summer Streets](#) in 2009 and made extensive efforts to involve local businesses, farmers markets, parades, art walks, and more. In 2012, they had Summer Streets events on four different streets through the summer, as well as [Bicycle Sundays](#) almost every Sunday from May to September.
- [Evanston Streets Alive!](#) is an Open Streets initiative of a local non-profit focused on sustainability. The City of Evanston supported events have two main goals: increase overall levels of active transportation and collectively reimagine and repurpose public spaces.
- Another great example from a Bronze-level WFC is [Atlanta Streets Alive](#), which closes a street segment to motorized traffic and opens it up for people to play, walk, and bike. At least two miles of street are closed for four hours and the route rarely stays the same. The event is organized by the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition and it is held multiple times a year. At the September 2014 event, 106,000 participants enjoyed nearly five miles of open streets and more than 50 activities along the route.

## Engineering

### On the Right Track

- The application was unclear about Columbia's sidewalk design standards. Sidewalks should be a minimum of 5 feet in width in residential areas, and 10 to 30 feet wide in commercial zones. Consider also requiring buffer zones between the street and sidewalk. Buffers can improve the aesthetic appearance and safety of sidewalks, as well as improving stormwater management.
- Was a sidewalk inventory completed as part of the data collection for the Walk Bike plan? Consider making the city's list of missing sidewalk links available online. This will help make the process more transparent to the public. Gold-level Boulder, Colorado, keeps an easy-to-read description of the [Missing Sidewalk Links Program](#) on the city website. Web-users are able to view a prioritized list of sidewalk projects and learn how these projects are funded.
- Establishing a permanent process for inventorying sidewalk and curb ramp conditions could streamline the process for replacing these facilities.
- Silver-level Lee's Summit, Missouri, has a complete [sidewalk and curb ramp inventory](#) that is supported by a [new ADA transition plan](#). The inventory report also includes prioritization criteria that may provide a helpful example for Columbia.
- A maximum cycle length of 130 seconds is too high for pedestrian delay. A lower cycle length (provided that adequate crossing times can be achieved) and understanding that spots of congestion in the downtown might result in slower speeds, and ultimately, a safer environment.
- A simple, useful change at signalized intersections is the leading pedestrian interval (LPI). The LPI gives pedestrians an advance walk signal before the motorists get a green light, giving the pedestrian several seconds to start in the crosswalk where there is a concurrent signal. Pedestrians are more visible to motorists and motorists are more likely to yield to them.

- Providing crosswalks at locations where people are crossing is a great way to reduce crashes and increase walking. It is time for the City of Columbia to consider using high-visibility markings, advance stop/yield lines, and creating a maintenance policy.
- Traffic calming can provide substantial safety benefits in terms of pedestrian crashes. More information can be found in the traffic calming section of PBIC's webpage about [facility design](#). Providing these types of treatments in neighborhoods and along school routes is particularly important for child pedestrian safety.
- Check out how these WFCs make their traffic calming process transparent and easy-to-follow for residents: [Seattle, WA](#); [Northampton, MA](#); [Burlington, VT](#); and [Ann Arbor, MI](#). The city may also need to proactively identify arterials and other corridors that need traffic calming. For an example, check out Platinum-level Seattle's [Vision Zero plan](#).
- It's good to see that Columbia is working with the university on a road diet. If the city has more overbuilt roads that could benefit from lane reduction or narrowing, check out this new [Road Diet Informational Guide](#) from the Federal Highway Administration. It could help you make the case for safer, more complete streets.

## Enforcement Needs Attention

- It is unclear from the application how often officers conduct foot/bike patrols devoted to responsibilities concerning pedestrian laws and safety. We would have liked to read more about the efforts of university police and how the city police department works with university law enforcement.
- Targeted enforcement programs are an area for improvement in Columbia. Enforcement efforts can have a large effect on motorist yielding behavior.
- By informing the public about where and when enforcement activities will be, the police can create public support and offset the complaints of those breaking the law.
- One effective method, particularly at locations with a documented crash problem, is the crosswalk sting or pedestrian decoy technique. This involves plainclothes police officers crossing in the crosswalk and observing if cars are yielding. If cars do not yield, the plainclothes officer will radio to another officer to pull over the offending vehicle. By using this enforcement type, drivers are made aware of what types of behaviors are not allowed. Using this in conjunction with [progressive ticketing scheme](#) allows officers to educate drivers more than penalize them.
- The crossing guard program sounds good. If you aren't already, consider evaluating your crossing guard placement regularly, and reallocating these resources as needed. Walking patterns may shift, or the installation of a new crossing treatment may require an additional crossing guard. We thought it was unusual that city council has the final say in Columbia when it comes to crossing guard placement. Hopefully the police department works with public works and each individual school to provide recommendations to council.

## Evaluation

### On the Right Track

- It's great to see the start of a counting program in Columbia! Ideally these counts would take place more than once a year so the city can adjust for seasonal variation. Understanding where and when people are walking can help Columbia make decisions about where to locate new treatments so they have the most effect and how to prioritize investments in pedestrian transportation.
- Gold-level Arlington County provides a good model where they perform seasonal manual counts in addition to 18 permanent counters. They are also developing an integrated database to store, analyze and share results of the two sets of data.
- The 2013 edition of FHWA's [Traffic Monitoring Guide](#) (TMG) includes a review of existing techniques and guidance for implementing traffic monitoring programs for nonmotorized transportation. See Chapter 4 of the document.
- You could also check out the recently published [Guidebook on Pedestrian and Bicycle Volume Data Collection](#). In addition to explaining different counting methods, this guide shows how count data can be used for measuring facility usage, evaluating before-and-after volumes, monitoring travel patterns, safety analysis, and project prioritization.
- Silver-level Lee's Summit, Missouri, has a Road Safety Audit Program that systematically reviews all roadways, with priority based on street classification. As of 2014, all arterial streets have been audited and a majority of non-arterial streets and intersections have been reviewed. These audits will be repeated on a five to seven year cycle. The city's [Transportation Annual Report](#) contains more information.
- There are lots of examples of project evaluation activities, performance measures, and tools in the [Evaluating Complete Streets Projects guide](#) from the National Complete Streets Coalition.
- Conducting pre- and post-evaluations for developments and other projects in Columbia is the only way to know how your efforts have improved pedestrian safety. Columbia should begin pre- and post-evaluations for every pedestrian project in order to develop a better understanding of how it has impacted pedestrian safety and walkability—you can use positive findings to justify more investment in pedestrian projects.

## More Information

If you have questions or comments regarding this feedback, your community's initiatives and programs, or the application process in general, we'd like to hear from you. Please contact:

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