



ch. 1

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

More than 65 percent of Los Angeles County is unincorporated—2,630 square miles across approximately 120 non-contiguous communities, home to one million people.

From Marina Del Rey on the edge of the Pacific Ocean, to Altadena at the base of the Angeles National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains, to Lake Los Angeles in the heart of the Antelope Valley, the unincorporated communities of Los Angeles County are unique and diverse in landscape, history, and people. They are a mix of rural, suburban, and urban communities – each with different opportunities for and challenges to walking.

While the many natural areas of Los Angeles County invite people from around the world to hike our mountain trails and stroll our beaches, it is in our unincorporated communities where people walk every day to get to school, enjoy neighborhood parks, visit friends and family, run errands, access transit, and get to work. Step by Step Los Angeles County (the Plan) is a plan to enhance walkability, a measure of how friendly an area is for walking, for the one million residents of communities in unincorporated Los Angeles County.

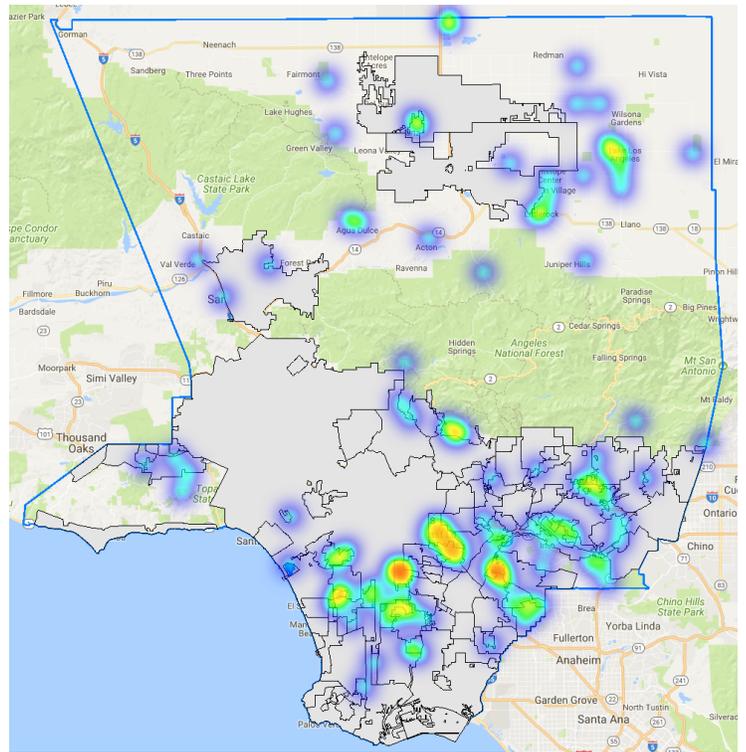
The Plan outlines actions, policies, procedures, and programs that the County of Los Angeles (the County) will consider to enhance walkability across unincorporated communities. It also includes Community Pedestrian Plans that identify potential pedestrian infrastructure projects for specific unincorporated communities. This tailored approach to pedestrian planning enables the County to work closely with residents, businesses, and other stakeholders to meet the unique needs of each unincorporated community.

THE NEED FOR A PEDESTRIAN PLAN

In 2015, the County completed a major overhaul of its General Plan, which emphasized the importance of providing healthy, livable, and equitable communities as a guiding principle.

One of the ways identified by the General Plan to accomplish this principle is to create safe, pedestrian-friendly streets that are accessible to all users. To achieve this, existing challenges to walking should be identified and addressed, such as wide roadways with fast-moving vehicle traffic, or gaps in the sidewalk network.

There is an urgency to enhancing pedestrian safety. Between January 1, 2013 and December 31, 2017, the most recent period for which complete data was available, 219 people were severely injured and 86 were killed while walking in unincorporated communities. Among people killed or severely injured while walking, 20 percent were youth (under 20 years old) and 26.2 percent were seniors (60 years or older).¹ Pedestrian-involved fatal and severe injury collisions were concentrated in the southern parts of the unincorporated county, largely in the denser urban and suburban communities. However, there was also a concentration of collisions in the Antelope Valley, where high-speed roads are often the primary streets in communities.²



Pedestrian-related collisions involving severe injuries or fatalities in the unincorporated county areas (January 2013 - December 2017)

¹ Data provided by Los Angeles County Public Works, 2018.

² *County Vision Zero Opportunities*; Report to the Board of Supervisors. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. February 10, 2017

On February 14, 2017, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors directed County departments to implement, in collaboration with the California Highway Patrol, a Vision Zero Initiative for unincorporated Los Angeles County. Vision Zero is a strategy that aims to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries through engineering, enforcement, education, engagement, and evaluation approaches. Success requires collaboration between various sectors including public health, public works, law enforcement, and community stakeholders. Step by Step Los Angeles County helps move us toward our Vision Zero goal by identifying specific actions, programs, and projects that prioritize pedestrian safety in the design and operations of the County's transportation system. These suggested steps will reduce fatalities and severe injuries and promote healthier living for Los Angeles County residents.

Creating walkable communities also helps the County address poor health outcomes and health inequities. Almost 24 percent of adults in Los Angeles County are obese and an additional 36 percent are overweight. In some unincorporated communities, such as Westmont/West Athens, adult obesity rates are higher than the county average.

Children in Los Angeles County also face health challenges related to obesity and being overweight. Only 29 percent of Los Angeles County children ages 6 to 17 obtain the recommended amount of physical exercise each week (30 minutes or more daily for youth). In Los Angeles County, 23 percent of youth are considered obese, though in some unincorporated communities the rate is significantly higher, such as in Walnut Park and West Whittier-Los Nietos (39 percent and 31 percent, respectively).¹

Step by Step Los Angeles County will help address health inequities, obesity and inactivity, and chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease by creating physical environments that provide everyone with the opportunity to lead active lifestyles. One critical strategy for establishing environments that encourage walking is through projects that enhance the built environment; for example, projects that involve closing gaps in the sidewalk network or adding curb extensions. Ensuring walkable communities also offers an opportunity to work with schools, law enforcement, and community members to address violence concerns, which may limit

¹ California Health Interview Survey, Neighborhood Edition, 2014; American Community Survey, 5-year estimate 2010-2014

physical activity, and update critical County policies, procedures, and programs that support safe walking for people of all races, income levels, ages, and abilities.

The proposed projects in this Plan build on conversations with County departments, public safety and transit agencies, and community residents, as well as careful observations of the existing transportation network, to identify actions that can support efforts for people to walk, wheel, live and thrive in unincorporated communities.

Implementation of proposed projects is contingent upon environmental analysis and future engineering review to ensure consistency with applicable County guidelines and practices, including, but not limited to, the California Vehicle Code, the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (CA MUTCD), Caltrans Highway Design Manual, Los Angeles County Code, and the Los Angeles County General Plan. Additionally, installation/construction of the proposed projects, fulfillment of actions, and implementation of programs described in this Plan are contingent upon available resources; right-of-way; sufficient funding to finance installation, operation, and on-going maintenance; and obtaining community and political support.

30
MINUTES

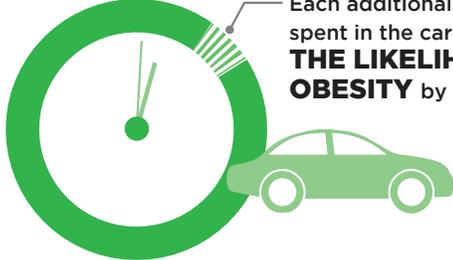


Children and adolescents should engage in 30 minutes or more of physical activity daily.

Nearly
1 in 4
Adults in
Los Angeles County
are **OBESE**.¹



Each additional hour per day spent in the car **INCREASES THE LIKELIHOOD OF OBESITY** by **6%**.²



BENEFITS OF WALKING

Walking is not only a way to improve individual health, but can contribute to enhancing the health and vibrancy of our communities. The walkability of a community has economic, environmental, and social equity implications.

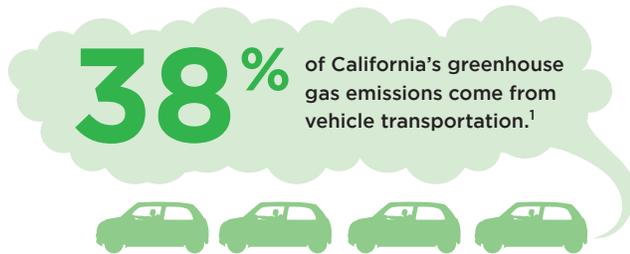
Health

Walking is an easy way to start or maintain a physically active lifestyle. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises 30 minutes of walking five days a week to significantly reduce health risks for adults while contributing to healthy bones, muscles, and joints. Walking can help prevent weight gain and lower the risks of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Daily physical activity is associated with

mental health and cognitive benefits such as reducing stress and symptoms of depression and anxiety. The CDC notes that walkable communities increase social interaction, contributing to overall health and wellness. How the County shapes the built environment and transportation systems influences our mobility choices, such as whether people can walk to destinations or must drive to get around.

¹ American Community Survey, 5-year estimate 2010-2014

² Frank, L. et al. Obesity Relationships with Community Design, Physical Activity, and Time Spent in Cars, 2004. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 27(2), 87-96.



Increasing a neighborhood's walkability can result in:

9 - 15%  reduction of vehicle-related greenhouse gas emissions²

Environment

Creating walkable communities reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by encouraging people to walk rather than drive for short trips. According to the California Air Resources Board, transportation accounts for 38 to 42 percent of GHG emissions, with cars and light trucks accounting for almost three-quarters of those emissions. By promoting walkability in Los Angeles County neighborhoods, we could reduce transportation GHG emissions by 9 to 15 percent.¹

Air pollution is another critical health and environmental issue that can be affected by transportation choices. In 2017, Los Angeles County received failing grades from the American Lung Association for ozone, 24-hour particle pollution, and annual particle pollution. The Los Angeles-Long Beach area was ranked as the most ozone-polluted place in the country. Replacing automobile trips with walking trips can help reduce automobile emissions and improve air quality for everyone.

¹ United States Environmental Protection Agency. Smart Growth and Climate Change, 2017. <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-and-climate-change>

Economic

Walking is economically advantageous to individuals and communities. Replacing automobile trips with walking can reduce vehicle maintenance and fuel costs. These savings are accompanied by potential reductions in health care costs, as regularly walking can minimize health complications associated with an inactive lifestyle. In 2009, the CDC estimated that the direct medical costs of physical inactivity to the country totaled more than \$147 billion.²

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2016, 12.1 percent of household expenditures were spent on transportation, the second highest household expenditure besides rent/mortgage.³ Increasing opportunities for non-automobile travel can reduce spending on transportation, which may, in turn, allow for households to increase spending on health-promoting activities such as healthcare, education, and nutritious food.

² California State Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Profile. Center for Disease Control, 2009. <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/state-local-programs/profiles/california.html>

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics. Consumer Expenditures-2016, 2017. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cesan.nr0.htm>



Increasing the number of daily trips made by walking instead of by driving reduces the burden on the region's transportation system, thus reducing the need for enhancements and expansion projects that affect community space.

Social Equity

Step by Step Los Angeles County provides a framework for all of the county's unincorporated communities and provides detailed plans for an initial four communities that are disadvantaged economically and environmentally. The facility investments, programs, and procedures proposed in the Plan will enhance the accessibility of pedestrian networks in unincorporated areas, making daily transportation and physical activity more viable for youth, seniors, and those with disabilities. Enhanced access, together with additional lighting, greenery, and community programming will help to reinforce sidewalk vitality and eyes on the street,¹ deter crime, and enhance real and perceived safety.

¹ "Eyes on the street" is a concept that was introduced by author Jane Jacobs, referring to the more people in the streets, the safer they become. People's "eyes on the street" provide informal surveillance of the urban environment. For residents to move safely through the streets, other people need to be present, contributing to an atmosphere of safety.

By enhancing pedestrian connections to transit, the Plan is also a key tool for the County to address the mobility needs of low-income households that are typically more transit-dependent or are otherwise relatively less able to afford a car. Strengthening the crucial connection between walking and transit, typically the first or last portion of a transit trip (the “first/last mile”), helps families minimize transportation cost-burdens by making it easier to choose transit over driving; these savings become available for expenditures on other essential household costs, such as housing, groceries, and health care.

Further, enhanced pedestrian networks are a way to address park disparities in disadvantaged communities in the county. In some cases, conventional park development is slowed by the

lack of viable sites. The Plan helps to implement recreation paths and enhanced sidewalk corridors that utilize the existing public realm to create innovative recreation spaces.

Creating a better walking environment also supports social cohesion by offering opportunities for personal interaction and social involvement. People can walk with family, stop to talk to neighbors, walk to local destinations to meet friends, participate in group walks, and more. These situations strengthen the personal relationships that bring and keep communities together.

PLANNING PROCESS AND PLAN ORGANIZATION

Step by Step Los Angeles County was developed in response to community feedback received during outreach for previous County planning efforts in unincorporated communities. Community members identified the need to address roadway safety concerns, enhance walkability, and provide new opportunities for walking and physical activity in their communities.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) PLACE Program (Policies for Livable Active Communities and Environments) received an Active Transportation Program (ATP) grant from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to develop Step by Step Los Angeles County in close collaboration with Los Angeles County Public Works. The purpose of the Active Transportation Program is to fund projects that will encourage active modes of transportation, such as walking and biking. The ATP specifically aims to increase the proportion of walking and biking trips; increase mobility and safety for people walking and biking; advance efforts to achieve greenhouse gas reduction goals; enhance public health; and ensure that disadvantaged communities fully share in program benefits.

The grant has enabled the County to develop a framework for enhancing walkability across unincorporated communities and includes four initial Community Pedestrian Plans, with specific infrastructure projects proposed in Lake Los Angeles, Walnut Park, Westmont/West Athens, and West Whittier-Los Nietos. These four unincorporated areas are considered, by statewide indicators, “disadvantaged communities”; indicators include median household income, participation in the National School Lunch Program, environmental pollution burden, and various socioeconomic and health determinants. As additional funding is available, the County will add chapters for the remaining unincorporated areas, identifying the specific pedestrian projects and programs needed in each additional community.

To develop the Community Pedestrian Plans, DPH contracted with three community-based organizations to lead outreach efforts: Antelope Valley Partners for Health in Lake Los Angeles, the YWCA of Greater Los Angeles in Walnut Park, and the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative in Westmont/West Athens and West Whittier-Los Nietos. Each organization used a variety of strategies, from stakeholder interviews, surveying and

tabling at various school and community events, to community walk audits and Photovoice projects. In addition, community advisory committees (CACs) were established in each community with members representing youth, seniors, homeowners, non-profits, businesses, and other key stakeholders. The goal of the outreach was to facilitate a dialogue with community members about the physical and social challenges to walking, identify preferred routes and potential projects, and build broader understanding and support for roadway safety projects.

Community feedback was supplemented by a technical analysis of existing roadway and sidewalk conditions, collision and crime data, and County practices and procedures as they relate to encouraging or hindering walkability. County and partner agency staff participated in a technical advisory committee to share information and identify the ways their agencies can contribute

to enhancing walkability in the unincorporated communities. These included the Los Angeles County Public Works, Regional Planning, Parks and Recreation, Public Health, Sheriff, Fire, and Consumer and Business Affairs; the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and Community Development Commission; and California Highway Patrol and Metro.

Purpose of the Plan

This planning document provides a framework for enhancing walkability across unincorporated communities in Los Angeles County. To accomplish this, the Plan:

- ▶ Formalizes a vision for walkability based on community, departmental, and Board input
- ▶ Provides specific actions the County can integrate into departmental work programs related to their policies, practices, and procedures that can enhance walkability and help eliminate fatalities and severe injuries to people walking
- ▶ Documents existing conditions and community input on pedestrian safety issues
- ▶ Suggests potential pedestrian safety enhancements
- ▶ Identifies possible new programs as well as proposed actions to enhance existing programs that support and encourage walking

POLICY CONTEXT

Step by Step Los Angeles County is consistent with and helps implement state, regional, and local plans, programs, and initiatives.

The Plan serves as a critical step in implementing the County's Vision Zero goal of eliminating fatal and severe injury traffic collisions. It also helps to implement many other County initiatives that promote healthy communities and a sustainable environment. For example, the County's General Plan, adopted in 2015, establishes goals, policies and programs that promote healthy, livable communities and includes a Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP) to mitigate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The Pedestrian Plan helps to implement these goals by enhancing walkability, safety, and accessibility as well as helping increase sustainability and reduce transportation related emissions.

Step by Step Los Angeles County helps implement the County's Purposeful Aging Initiative (adopted 2018), which emphasizes the need to prepare the Los Angeles region for a rapidly aging population and includes recommendations for supporting the ability of older adults to safely walk in their communities as a means of transportation. The Countywide Park and Recreation Needs Assessment examines park availability

to residents, park accessibility, and new park needs; implementation of the projects proposed in the Pedestrian Plan will enhance the safety of walking routes to parks in unincorporated communities.

The Plan is also well aligned with regional and State policy goals. Metro's Active Transportation Strategic Plan (adopted 2016) and First and Last Mile Strategic Plan (adopted 2014) both provide policy and infrastructure recommendations that support walking, rolling, and biking to local destinations and promote facilities for making connections between transportation modes.

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) adopted a Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy in 2016 that identifies how the region plans to use active transportation to help meet challenges related to population growth and demographic shifts over the next 25 years and includes strategies to increase the number of short trips taken by walking, especially to transit, and reduce collisions involving people walking.

On the State level, Step by Step Los Angeles County helps implement a wide variety of plans and laws, including the California Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (adopted 2017), the California Transportation Plan (adopted 2016), and Assembly Bill 32, also known as the California Global Warming Solutions Act, adopted in 2006 to reduce the state's emissions of greenhouse gases. For a full description of local, regional and state policy efforts Step by Step Los Angeles County helps to implement, please see Appendix A.

