

9.20 walk

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The last five months have been like no other. As COVID-19 continues to paralyze our mobility and economy, people walk to maintain physical and mental health, commute to essential jobs, and connect with people from a safe distance. Never has it been more obvious that sidewalks—typically five feet wide—are too narrow as we try to stay six feet away from each other. For the first 15 weeks of our COVID-19 experience, our *Keep Walking* weekly newsletter chronicled new neighborhood discoveries and made you laugh with silly walking videos, songs with COVID-19-inspired lyrics like “Stayin’ At Home,” and uplifting messages to keep you going.

Then, George Floyd’s murder on May 25, 2020 once again forced us to confront the horrors of police violence against Black and brown people, and acknowledge that police brutality robs Black people of the fundamental right to walk their streets without fear.

WalkBoston’s mission—to make Massachusetts more walkable—converges with COVID-19 response efforts and the anti-racism movement.

In the midst of this public health crisis, we are advocating for the repurposing of street space so people can safely walk, run, and roll. With fewer vehicles on the road, we called for a rebalancing of street space to immediately serve those most vulnerable. WalkBoston worked with MassDOT, AAA, MassBike, and others to make a plea to drivers to slow down as traffic speeds soared after volumes plummeted. We know that walkability goes beyond safe crossings and wide sidewalks. Walkable main streets are lively community places whose vibrancy depends on the businesses along them. In the wake of COVID-19, their role has intensified—WalkBoston’s Main Streets Resiliency panel discussion brought people together to strategize on how to support their local businesses as they face economic challenges during the pandemic. (June 24, 2020 panel video available at WalkBoston.org)

WalkBoston continues to work in Black and brown neighborhoods where racism has led to disparities in the quality of the built environment. Our work takes us from the Gateway Cities to Boston’s Mattapan and Talbot Norfolk Triangle neighborhoods among others. Our approach in these places draws on the expertise and desires of residents, community-based organizations, and municipal staff. Our definition of safe public spaces and our experiences in public spaces as a predominantly-White staff is not the same as for Black and brown residents. **We commit to do more to better understand, identify, and expose the racist processes and policies that continue to deprive Black and brown residents of the safe, connected public realm others enjoy.** Look for an upcoming WalkBoston email series on racial equity and walkability.

We commit to being better advocates for Black communities, in addition to working to dismantle the system that perpetuates disparities in the built environment. As an organization, we are actively investigating how to make anti-racist strategies and mobility justice central to our mission, and have committed resources to hiring outside help to lead us through an internal racial equity analysis, to help frame our upcoming strategic plan. This process will take time, but we are dedicated to fighting for mobility justice and will share our completed concrete plan.



Stacey Beuttell, Executive Director

Boston

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BY LILY LINKE

Dismantling the White Definition of Walkability

In 2020, many White Americans are awakening to the enduring reality of structural, anti-Black racism in the United States. Some are seeking to become “allies”—a call for White people to display racial solidarity—by educating themselves and engaging in the fight for racial justice. Others are unsure of where or even how to begin. One mistake many new allies can make is putting “racial justice work” in a box, separating it from the other facets of their lives. A White-centric perspective has embedded itself in every component of American daily life. Walkability advocacy is no different.

This is evident in the very definition of walkability. Ask any White transportation planner, researcher, or

advocate what makes a city walkable, and it’s more than likely you’ll get a similar answer: the built environment. Research supports the idea that the built environment can strongly affect our perceptions of a place, and thus our behavior. But walking is also deeply personal, political, social, and cultural. Our experience of walking through public space is determined just as much by our identities as by a space itself. Black people walking are twice as likely to be hit by a car (Streetsblog 2017). They are more likely to be stopped, ticketed, and searched by police (U.S. DOJ 2018). They face frequent harassment by White road users, who sometimes deem them “not to belong,” even in their own neighborhoods (Elijah Anderson, *The Guardian*, 2018). **continued**

Annual Meeting

WalkBoston's 30th Annual Meeting
Wed, Sept 23, 2020
Zoom: 5—6pm

Speaker: Mark Fenton, a nationally recognized public health, planning, and transportation consultant, an advocate for active transportation, and former host of the "America's Walking" series on PBS television.

GOLDEN SHOE AWARDS:

- **Boston Public Library** Renovations that enhance walkability
- **Coalition for a Better Acre Walking Champions** Advocating for safer walking in Lowell
- **Tufts Health Plan Foundation & Boston Age Strong Commission** Advancing age-friendly walking throughout Massachusetts

Tickets: \$30 (pay-as-you-can basis).
RSVP: walkboston.eventbrite.com

Dismantling the White Definition of Walkability continued

One can build the "perfect" street, but failing to address the deeply unjust social systems that design, implement, and govern those streets, renders walking a luxury enjoyed by some; not the deeply human right it must be for all. These entrenched systems cannot be toppled overnight. The first step that advocates can take in the long journey of walkability reform is to abandon the internalized bias that there is only one true form of walkability, and that it is some version of, for example, Copenhagen. The obvious flaw in that definition is that Denmark is a majority-White homogeneous society. Broadening the idea of walkability requires recognizing that no two people experience public space in the exact same way. It also means that approaches to promoting walkability must center on diversity, equity, and inclusion, just as much as they center on wider sidewalks and lower speed limits. If you're a White walkability advocate, and all of your ideas about walkability come from other White walkability advocates, consider who will feel safe and comfortable in the public realm you design and who might not.

In my own work as a White walkability advocate, I am taking all of my cues from people of color, in particular Black women. In practice, this sometimes requires that I abandon solutions that make sense for me and my experience, and take a step back when I think I might have the answer. Undertaking the internal work of uprooting White supremacy from my own neural wiring means constantly questioning my own judgment. The truth is that I will never be able to devise solutions that incorporate all perspectives. As part of that commitment, I am recognizing when my perspective is valuable, and when it is not, never assuming I have all the answers; that Black voices should be at the center of each and every transportation policy decision; that I will intentionally be aware of who I am drawing inspiration from and who I am listening to. With these commitments top of mind, I'm going to get to work and be a better advocate.

Lily Linke just completed her Master's in Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University. Her thesis, a podcast on walkability and race, will be released on September 8. footnotespod.com

Attend our Zoom Annual Party on 9.23.20

9.20 Race / COVID-19

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mission
WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities.

thank you!

RACEWALKERS



STRIDERS

- Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA
- Boston Properties
- Cambridge Innovation Center
- Ciccolo Family Foundation
- Eaton Vance
- Eversource
- Garfinkle Design
- Howard Stein Hudson

- Massachusetts Councils on Aging
- Massachusetts Convention Center Authority
- Mass General Brigham
- Massport
- MP Boston
- National Development
- Robinson+Cole
- Sasaki
- Solomon Foundation
- Stantec
- Trinity Financial

STROLLERS

- Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
- Boston Society of Architects
- Breakstone, White & Gluck
- BSC Group
- Goulston & Storrs
- HMFH Architects
- HYM Investment Group
- Kittelson & Associates
- Related Beal
- Somerville Road Runners
- WS Development

AMBLERS

- Architectural Heritage Foundation

BETA Group

- Crosby, Schlessinger, Smallridge
- Epsilon Associates
- Friends of Post Office Square
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New Book: 'Right of Way'

Angie Schmitt's new book, *Right of Way: Race, Class, and the Silent Epidemic of Pedestrian Deaths in America*, is now available from Island Press. Angie was the longtime national editor at Streetsblog and her writing has appeared in the New York Times, The Atlantic, Bicycling, GOOD, and Landscape Architecture Magazine. *Right of Way* documents the traffic violence that occurs daily on America's streets and reveals the racist policies and practices that contribute to creating this tragedy. More than 6,000 people were killed while walking in America in 2018.

Buy it at your local bookstore or from www.islandpress.org, where the code SCHMITT will get you a 20% discount.

Book Reviewer: Follow Angie's Lead

"I am most often asked by well-meaning persons, usually racialized White persons, 'What can I/we do as allies to aid in the eradication of pedestrian injuries and fatalities in low-income and minority communities across America?' My short answer usually stresses the importance of intentionality, empathy, and the courage to act expeditiously. Henceforth, I will add to my list, 'Follow Angie'."

— Charles T. Brown, America Walks Board Member, Senior Researcher / Voorhees Transportation Center, Rutgers University

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