

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

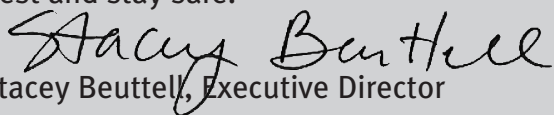
2021 is here. I have never waited with such anticipation to turn the page on a calendar before. My relief that 2020 was over was short-lived as we witnessed an armed insurrection at our nation's Capitol. As we once again wrestle with how to rise above the madness, I remain hopeful that 2021 will be a healthier, happier year as vaccines begin to reach our most vulnerable, and dream for a federal government that leads rather than divides.

WalkBoston continues to advocate for shared streets, safer crossings, and lower driving speeds statewide. Looking internally, we have begun racial equity training for our Board and staff and will launch our strategic planning process in February.

We embraced going virtual as an organization and in our work, saying goodbye to Old City Hall in November and adapting our walk audit process to Zoom (see article). We are committed to having a physical office again someday, and continue to work virtually and gather monthly for socially-distanced walks in the meantime. Our new mailing address is: 405 Waltham Street, Suite 309, Lexington, MA 02421.

As we navigate through the beginning of an already-trying-yet-hopeful year, we look forward to hosting our 31st Annual Celebration on March 24. We hope you join us virtually! Stay tuned for more details to come. And though things look a lot more virtual, our mission remains the same: to make walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage more vibrant communities. As always, thank you for your continued support and advocacy.

Best and stay safe.


Stacey Beuttell, Executive Director

BY LEIGHANNE TAYLOR / WALKBOSTON PROGRAM MANAGER

New Virtual Walk Audits

Walk audits—one of WalkBoston's most effective tools to change the built environment and build a constituency of walking advocates—face an obvious hurdle during the pandemic: we can't meet in person. With more people walking than ever before, we could not hit pause and wait until it is safe to gather again. We adapted our walk audit process to be virtual to continue improving walking conditions. We have conducted four virtual walk audits since the pandemic began: in Salem, Springfield, Fitchburg, and Worcester—we wrapped up the latter two in January and discuss them below.

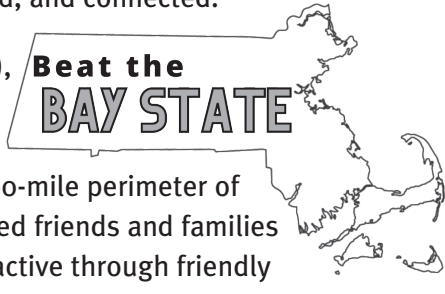
Fitchburg's Intermodal Center Virtual Walk Audit is the second walk audit in a statewide project examining the connections between social infrastructure **continued**

BY ALTHEA WONG-ACHORN / DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Counterpoint to Ageism

When November comes around in New England, even when we aren't in the midst of a pandemic, our instinct is to hibernate until the springtime when the weather thaws. But last November, WalkBoston created a way to keep us moving, motivated, and connected.

Beat the Bay State (BTBS), a virtually-hosted team fitness challenge to run/walk "around" the 900-mile perimeter of Massachusetts, encouraged friends and families to come together to stay active through friendly competition. WalkBoston was thrilled to see people across the state sharing their photos and experiences, but was surprised to discover how many participants were older adults!



COVID-19 recommendations have been more restrictive for older adults, making them appear feeble compared to younger people. While responsibly practicing social distancing and wearing masks, however, this group also finds solace, community, and health benefits from outdoor activities.

Running, It's Not Only For the Young

More than 450 people signed up for the inaugural BTBS Team Challenge. While many of our competitors were younger, a higher-than-anticipated number of older walkers and runners brought the average age up to 44, with the average age among the top 20 finishers being 48. Of the top 20 performers, in terms of miles logged, two were under the age of 30 and two were 65+. To top it off, the second-place winner was a 56-year-old man from Gardner who logged 404 total miles and averaged over 13 miles a day!

The State of Running, a 2018 report published by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) and RunRepeat.com, breaks down how the age of runners is steadily climbing. It found that runners have never been older, increasing from an average age of 35.2 in 1986 to 39.3 in 2018.

Staying Active and Fit as You Age

BTBS highlights a common misconception about the link between increased age and decreased activity levels. Demographics are shifting: Running—and walking—are sports accessible to all ages, and the average age of runners is getting older with every passing year.

Running and walking are fantastic ways to stay fit, regardless of age. Anyone can get started with just a pair of shoes. You can walk or run by yourself, with your grandkids, or with a running club like the Greater Framingham Running Club (GFRC Growlers), which took first place in the Beat the Bay State Team Challenge.

As the evidence shows, motivation for daily walking and running has shifted from recording the fastest times or longest distances to staying social, keeping moving, and seeing your community on foot. So lace up and hit the pavement!

If you're looking for new and interesting places to explore on foot, check out the nearly 80 walking maps available on the WalkBoston website at walkboston.org/resources/maps/. Each one features places that are wonderful to walk, easy to navigate, and convenient to get around, and most are transit accessible.

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Annual Meeting

31st Annual Celebration
Wed, March 24, 2021
Zoom: 5—6pm

Join our virtual Annual Celebration highlighting achievements in walkability and honoring the contributions of the wonderful individuals, board members, and organizations who support us and make our work possible.

Hear a panel discuss how to maintain the momentum of walking advocacy post COVID-19, and lift up efforts in the quest for transportation justice statewide. A brief Q&A will follow.

We have an exciting group of Golden Shoe recipients that will be announced in the next few weeks.

Tickets: \$30 (pay-as-you-can basis)
Registration is now open:
walkboston.eventbrite.com

New Virtual Walk Audits: Fitchburg & Worcester continued

and walkability within transportation-oriented development (TOD) areas. Neighborhood data and resident perspectives will be captured in virtual conversations and self-led walk audits in five Gateway Cities in Massachusetts. This project is co-hosted by WalkBoston and MassINC, with support from the Solomon Foundation.

The Worcester Virtual Walk Audit was conducted by WalkBoston, WalkBike Worcester, and the Worcester Department of Public Health Mass in Motion Program. Residents requested the virtual audit, which is serving as a pilot program for Worcester’s upcoming Complete Streets Prioritization process.

How We Made Our Walk Audits Virtual

Session 1: Participants convene on Zoom for a Ped101 workshop to share their walking concerns, learn about walkability basics, and review the self-led walk audit process.

Self-led walk audit: Participants have two weeks to walk the specified route, and document photos and written observations about the walking environment.

Session 2: Post-walk, participants reconvene on Zoom to discuss and set plans for next steps.

We use Google Sites to share recordings of our Zoom meetings so those unable to attend the first session can watch and provide feedback on their neighborhood’s walkability. The recommendations made during the second session are summarized into a PowerPoint report and memo for participants to use and turn into actions.

Virtual walk audits have served as a valuable tool for conducting our community-partnered work in a socially-distanced world. While we look forward to resuming our in-person walk audits, we plan to leverage these digital engagement strategies in the future to hear from those unable to attend in-person. If you’re having success with virtual community engagement, we’d love to trade notes — get in touch!

Attend our Zoom Annual Party on 3.24.21

2.21 Virtual work

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

Mission

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thank you!

RACEWALKERS



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Beat the Bay State Stories

37,509 MILES WALKED • 450+ PARTICIPANTS • 31 TEAMS • \$25K RAISED

Our first-ever Beat the Bay State Team Challenge wrapped up in November 2020, and we couldn’t be happier about the turnout. What was intended to be a traditional 5K in-person event turned out to be a virtual success that encouraged family and friends to connect with each other. Here’s what participants had to say:

“My name is J.J. I am 6 years old and am in first grade. I don’t like walking early in the morning because I watch TV when we don’t go. For Beat the Bay State, I walked weekly with my mom, grandmother, and sister. This week, we walked to my old day care.” —J.J. / WalkBoston

“The MassDOT Team has developed new relationships, chatted about our kids and dogs, and even encouraged a few to walk more than they usually do! I hope you loved managing the competition!” —Lisa / MASS DOT

“Beat the Bay State motivated me to get outside and get together with colleagues! I live in JP so it was also fun to see pictures of other places people went on their walks, like the Salem waterfront. Outside of the work group I joined the challenge with, it also motivated me to opt for walking to run errands, or to go on walks with friends!” —Jessie / Walkin’ with the T

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