

10.22



MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

**WalkBoston has a vision: A Massachusetts where people walking—no matter their race, identity, age, ability, or lived experience—feel safe, connected, and valued on our streets and sidewalks.** This vision speaks to our commitment to working on walking throughout the state; to address racial and health inequities in public space; to include those who roll or use a mobility device; and to embrace a broader definition of what it means to be safe and to belong on our streets and sidewalks. That feels really big to me—because it is.

Over the last year, we developed a strategic plan to work toward this vision. It is available on our website, and I encourage you to read it. The plan has three goals:

- Goal 1: Advocate for inclusive, safe, and enjoyable places for people to walk.
- Goal 2: Work in places where people walking have the greatest need.
- Goal 3: Achieve policy and built environment change that is noticeable, replicable, and impactful.

We define a number of strategies that we believe will help us work toward these goals. The articles in this newsletter are examples of how we are already implementing some of these strategies. Whether you are a longtime

WalkBoston supporter or a newly anointed follower, it is important for you to know how we are working toward our mission. But more importantly, you should know why we are committed to this vision and these goals. Here's why:

- Black and Latino people walking in Massachusetts have roughly double and triple the rate of injury compared to white people in this state.
- The number of people killed while walking in the first 7 months of 2022 is at its highest since 2015 (over 50 victims).

We know we can help to change these numbers. WalkBoston has worked in over 125 cities and towns across the state; with 351 municipalities in Massachusetts, there are still plenty of places that could benefit from safer, walkable streets.

It's people like you, who believe in and support our work, that allow us to make a difference. We hope that all of you had a wonderful summer and are looking forward to the change in season.

Stacey Beuttell, Executive Director

# Boston

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BY CAROL STEINBERG / ATTORNEY & WALKBOSTON BOARD MEMBER

## Rolling out an inclusive definition of walkability

As a member of the board of WalkBoston as well as its strategic planning committee, I am proud to say that WalkBoston has made crystal clear that when it advocates for improved “walkability” in communities throughout Massachusetts, it advocates to improve the lives of everyone—including people like me, a longtime wheelchair user.

Our new strategic plan officially recognizes that accessibility is a crucial part of “walkability.” To us, walkability means everyone (whether they are traveling on their feet or on wheels or using other mobility devices) can freely and safely get around. WalkBoston proudly declares as its first goal that we must make the places where people walk—in whatever form they do it—inclusive, safe, and enjoyable places for all to get around. In order to pursue this goal, we “embrace a more inclusive definition of walkability that accounts for the lived experiences of all people no matter their race, identity, age, or ability.”

Barriers to the free movement of all people, regardless of their circumstances, must be removed. What does it look like to put this priority into practice? Recently, the Muddy River walk in memory of beloved former staff member Bob Sloane was modified once it was discovered that the original route included stairs that not everyone would be able to climb.

Another example is the work we are doing regarding snow and ice removal, which are barriers to many people when not done properly. It is crucially important that curb cuts are kept completely cleared at all times so that even wheelchair users are able to cross the streets. I have often rolled to the end of a shoveled sidewalk, only to find the curb cut blocked with snow, forcing me to roll all the way back.

Fighting for adequate snow/ice removal in this state is challenging. While it was an exciting development for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to include a pilot snow removal program in the Statewide Pedestrian Transportation Plan, it takes more than just good intentions to clear snow.

WalkBoston recently pushed for the purchase of snow removal equipment to be authorized through the popular Shared Streets and Spaces grant program. This would allow municipal employees to clear snow efficiently from sidewalks with sidewalk plows, instead of having to rely on outside contractors. In the first round of awards with the new authorization, 43 communities received funding. That shows places are ready and willing to clear snow from sidewalks and trails—they just needed a little help.

I am very proud to be part of such an inclusive and effective organization!

# BTBS is back!

**Beat the Bay State is Back!  
BTBS Challenge  
November 1–30, 2022**

**How it works:**

- Walk/run wherever you are
- Virtually move along a route of the Commonwealth’s 900-mile perimeter.
- Earn fun badges showing your progress as you “travel” the state

**Win prizes for:**

- The biggest team
- The most money raised
- First to complete the route

Your participation supports our work and advocacy efforts across Massachusetts.

**Register and more info:**  
runsignup.com/baystate

# Walkable streets mitigate the heat

If you’ve ever crossed the street on a hot summer’s day to walk on the shady side of the road, you know firsthand that getting around in the summer is incredibly uncomfortable without shade. Heatwave after heatwave has shown us that we are not ready for the increasingly hot summers coming our way thanks to climate change. Cities are especially vulnerable to rising temperatures because urbanized places contain a high concentration of heat-trapping materials (like the dark, hard surfaces of asphalt and concrete) and raising baseline air temperatures.

The urban heat island (UHI) effect is what causes neighborhoods with lots of pavement and little greenery to experience much higher temperatures than their tree-lined counterparts. Trees capture sunlight and release moisture, which cools the environment. In addition, less walkable neighborhoods experience more traffic, another major contributor to the UHI effect. Vehicles release heat into the environment, and the roads they drive on capture it. Designing neighborhoods that encourage people to walk rather than drive minimizes excess heat and the UHI effect.

In our new strategic plan we commit to focusing on places where people walking have the greatest need: environmental justice areas and those areas vulnerable to the effects of climate change. This August, we worked with students from Consult Lela—a consulting group dedicated to encouraging youth involvement in municipal planning processes—to lead a Blue Hill Avenue youth workshop and walk audit. Ish, one of the students, presented the data they collected to City of Boston staff. The Mattapan air temperature had been 80°, the bus stop bench was 105°, the sunny sidewalk was 116°, and the shady sidewalk was 92°. That’s a 24° swing between the surface temperature of a shady and sunny sidewalk!

WalkBoston is exploring solutions from warmer climate cities with tried-and-true heat adaptation practices while also looking to colder climate cities that face challenges from snow and ice. To achieve our goal, it will take a concerted effort on all our parts to find the best strategies for combating climate change. Based on the latest forecasts we need them soon—so let’s get to work.

Beat the Bay State is back November 1–30!  
runsignup.com/baystate

# 10.22 strategic plan

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

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# thank you!

You can become a supporter today! [walkboston.org](http://walkboston.org)

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# Coming soon: Walk Audit video series

Maybe you have been on a WalkBoston walk audit or heard WalkBoston staff talking about them. They are our primary community engagement tool that brings about improvements to the walking conditions in neighborhoods across the state. Just this summer, WalkBoston staff conducted audits in Cummington (a Hilltown in Western Massachusetts), Mattapan (neighborhood in Boston), and in many places in between. The thing is, we can’t be everywhere—and thanks to the Walk Audit Academy video series, we don’t have to be.

Together with funding from the UMass Worcester Prevention Research Center, we developed a short video series that introduces WalkBoston’s way of leading a walk audit and shares additional resources that groups across the country have created. We want to demystify the process and give everyone the confidence to push for safer streets. The videos will be part of a larger curriculum for public health professionals looking to implement changes in the walking environment to improve physical activity rates and other health equity measures in their communities.

This video series is just one of the many tools WalkBoston is developing to broaden our reach across Massachusetts—a commitment solidified in our strategic plan. We want to achieve policy and built environment changes that are noticeable, replicable, and impactful. We’ll be piloting the Walk Audit Academy videos this fall before releasing to the public. Stay tuned.