

# Safety Benefits of Walking

*"The fatalities on America's roadways are equivalent to a midsize commercial airliner falling out of the sky every other day. The magnitude of roadway crashes is not well publicized, while a single airplane crash would make headlines across the nation."*

— Scott Bricker,  
Executive Director, America Walks

## Problem Overview

- In 2009, there were 33,808 traffic fatalities in the United States and 2.2 million people were injured on the nation's roadways.<sup>1</sup>
- In the U.S., every 12 minutes someone dies in a car crash and every 10 seconds someone is injured and taken to an emergency room.<sup>2</sup>
- For people ages 1 to 33, traffic crashes are the single greatest cause of fatalities and disabilities.<sup>3</sup>
- Twelve teenagers (between 16 and 19 years of age) die every day because of a car crash.<sup>4</sup>
- There is, on average, one crash-related pedestrian death every two hours, and one pedestrian injury every 8 minutes.<sup>5</sup>
- Pedestrians are 1.5 times more likely than passenger vehicle occupants to be killed in a car crash on each trip.<sup>6</sup>
- In addition to loss of life, traffic crashes cost about \$164 billion annually in property damage and injuries<sup>7</sup>, which is an annual per-person cost of \$1,051.
- The cost of traffic crashes for pedestrians is \$10 billion annually.<sup>8</sup>
- Speed matters: only 5% of pedestrians would die if struck by a vehicle traveling at 20 mph or less. At 30 mph, there's a 40% chance of fatal injury if struck; at 40 mph, the chance of dying increases to 80%, and at 50 mph, it reaches 100%.<sup>9</sup>
- In urban areas, crashes tend to happen more often in places where there are relatively higher traffic speeds and more conflicts between roadway users.<sup>10</sup>

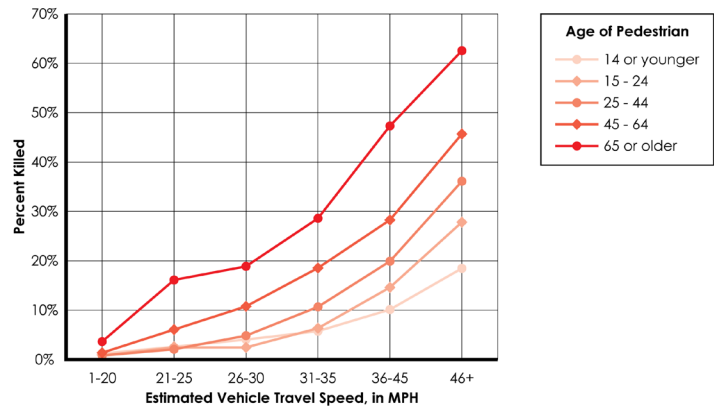


Figure 1: Fatal Injury Rates by Vehicle Speed, by Pedestrian Ages. Source: Literature Review on Vehicle Travel Speeds and Pedestrian Injuries Among Selected Racial/Ethnic Groups, US Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1999. <http://www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/research/pub/hs809012.html>

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## Walking as a Solution

- Walkable urban neighborhoods are significantly safer than automobile-dependent locations: Any urban-homicide risk increase, which is actually small or nonexistent, is more than offset by the higher traffic-fatality risk in suburban and rural areas.<sup>11</sup>
- Walking helps people get out of their cars: The risk of getting into a traffic crash increases with the average amount of travel each person spends in a car (per-person vehicle travel). Reducing that amount lowers the risk of traffic crashes for everyone.<sup>12</sup>
- The more people that are walking or bicycling, the less likely drivers are to collide with them. Policies that increase the numbers of pedestrians and cyclists are effective in improving the safety of those on foot and bike.<sup>13</sup>
- Investing in walking infrastructure saves money in the long-run: The National Safety Council estimates the cost of a pedestrian fatality at \$4.3 million<sup>14</sup>, while a curb extension costs as little as \$50,000<sup>15</sup>, and a high-visibility crosswalk costs about \$1,200.<sup>16</sup>
- Making roads safer for walkers helps make roads safer for everyone. Reducing traffic speeds can improve total traffic safety. In the Netherlands, 20 mph zones are associated with a 42% decrease in all crashes, 46% decrease in serious injury and fatal crashes, and 62% decrease in serious crashes for motor-vehicle occupants.<sup>17</sup>
- Investing in walking infrastructure can reduce the increased risk of injury many seniors face due to their slower walking speeds. Pedestrian crossing islands, particularly on multi-lane highways, can provide older pedestrians a safe place to wait for the signal to change, while countdown pedestrian signals tell people how much time remains to safely cross the street.<sup>18</sup>

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