

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC TO NEW YORK STATE'S ECONOMY AND TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Final Report

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# The Importance of Pedestrian Traffic to New York State's Economy and Transportation Infrastructure

## INTRODUCTION

In this study, we investigated how pedestrian traffic contributes to our State's economy, and what benefits walk trips or walk trips linked with other travel modes (e.g., cars, transit, bicycles, etc.) have for retail sales within communities located on the State Highway Touring Route System. In New York State there are more than 180 Central Business Districts (CBDs) or "Main Streets" located on the State Highway Touring Route System [1]. However, there is very little data available on the value of these downtown commercial centers to New York State's economy.

Previous decades have seen people leaving the city centers for shopping and moving to malls and discount shopping. Small business districts and "Main Streets" were hit hard by this trend, with less and less money being invested into the future of Main Streets [2]. This trend is finally reversing itself, with the realization by developers and shop owners of the need to rebuild their villages by investing in the Main Street [3]. Involvement of government, at all levels, is integral to this revitalization. Many States are developing plans for revitalizing their Main Streets by creating more walkable communities, and pedestrians are increasingly being considered in planning and design.

Massachusetts, for instance, has done a lot of work in planning for pedestrians. They have created the Massachusetts Pedestrian Transportation Plan [4] to guide land use policies at all levels to better meet walking needs. This plan was sponsored by the Massachusetts Highway Department, with the goal of developing more walkable communities across the state. The plan seeks new opportunities for partnering with local public and private interests to encourage safe, convenient walking throughout the state. It also considers the pedestrian realm in urban, suburban, and rural areas throughout Massachusetts, using prototypes as models for physical improvements in a variety of situations, and recommends local and statewide encouragement and education programs, law enforcement initiatives, and improvements in the coordination of policy and planning for facilities and programs. Although no specific data or

connections to economic improvements are given. they obviously believe in the **benefits** of the improvements they are recommending.

Similarly, the planning department of the City of San Francisco created The Downtown Pedestrian Program from the fieldwork and analysis of the 1980 Center City Pedestrian Circulation and Goods Movement Survey produced by Wilbur Smith Consultants [5]. This Downtown Streetscape Plan recommends guidelines and specific designs for investing in a more walkable City.

To estimate latent and future pedestrian activity levels and walkable infrastructure needs for suburban retail corridors, Ercolano et al [6] developed a “sketch planning method” that estimates peak pedestrian volumes by links (sidewalks), nodes (intersections); and adjusts those volumes according to the completeness of walkable infrastructure and climatic conditions. Estimated pedestrian activity (based on the sufficiency and completeness of pedestrian infrastructure) were further supported by the empirical findings of Moudon et al [7], which provided evidence that “the completeness of pedestrian facilities and route directness” in suburban commercial centers does support more pedestrian travel and influences mode share. The above methods, and other nonmotorized trip estimation methods to guide walkable infrastructure investments in retail corridors (and specific sites) are also available from USDOT/FHWA guidebooks [8,9]

The Alaska Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan [10] provides specific steps that lead to selection and funding of a particular bicycle or pedestrian project. This study mentions that pedestrian-oriented transportation facilities are common to all parts of their transportation system, including such features as public telephones and roadside emergency call stations, view points and rest areas, separated trails and paths, and tourist information centers. Other pedestrian-oriented facilities include bus stops and ude bus shelters, pedestrian overpasses and underpasses, and rest room facilities at roadside rest areas. No direct information about the pedestrian impact on economic development is discussed, but it is implied that revitalization of a community can be expected through making a more “walkable,” “livable” community.

In an excellent article, “What is a Walkable Community?” [11], seven success stories of revitalized communities are described. Those include: San Antonio’s

Walk (Texas); Boulder's Pedestrian Mall (Colorado); Washington. D.C's National Mall; Downtown Portland, Oregon: Downtown Corning (New York), The streets of Boston (Massachusetts); and Stowe Recreation Path (Vermont). All of these projects state that they have improved the prosperity of the downtown and that "a walking environment encourages foot traffic and increases the economic success of the core area. In Portland, it is stated that since the 1970's, the share of regional retail sales has risen from less than 10 percent to 30 percent. In Stowe, Vermont, the path has increased summer hotel room revenues by 24 percent.

In an article about State Street, in Chicago [12], the revitalizing of this declining area is discussed. The design team for this project emphasize some important considerations that are echoed in many similar articles. These include: "that the street needs to be viewed as a place for people, with landscaping being an integral part of the design"; also that redesigning needs to be a public process that engages both the business community and the public sector.

In a New York "Mainstreet" news letter article [13], it is stated that there is a great deal of recent emphasis on main street revitalization among New York State communities as well as throughout the nation. Concerns focus on economic vitality as well as aesthetics and historic preservation. The article states that opinions vary about the goals of improvement societies, where some authors emphasize beautification as the goal, while others emphasize attracting further economic development and social well being as well as beautification. The article states that "What is fascinating about the history of main street is how, in many ways, we have come full circle. Preservation and aesthetics still go hand in hand with economic business vitality, and that residents are back to beautifying the community centers to erase decay and attract economic development."

A study performed by Muse Architecture/Planning, Inc. called A downtown pedestrian improvement program for the city of Saratoga Springs [14] states that improving the pedestrian environment is not just a transportation project or an attractive amenity, it makes good economic sense, and that economic viability of the downtown area is dependent on the quality of the experience for the shopper, office worker, conventioner, and tourist

In the article, "When Shoppers Walk Away From Pedestrian Malls" [15] it is stated that pedestrian malls, which were built to invigorate aging downtowns, have started to fail. The only places that pedestrian malls tend to work, retail consultants say, are at the centers of large college towns, where there are fewer drivers than normal, or in tourist areas that lend themselves to strolling, as in Miami Beach and Santa Monica, Calif. By contrast, most cities are hard pressed to get retailers into their malls.

In an article published in American Demographics [16], it is stated that many communities are finding that pedestrians are good for the economy; and that forty percent of walkers depend on their two feet to do errands and 17 percent depend on walking to get to work.

Many cities are creating planning manuals for improving the walkability of their communities with the intent to revitalize neighborhoods. The strategy for most of the revitalizations is for an integrated plan that moves towards intermodal thinking, transit and pedestrian-friendly communities, with both public and private support.

All of these articles and many more refer to the economic sense of investing in pedestrian amenities, and there seems to be a common sense inference of the effect on the economy. In this study we tried to actually document that relationship with real data.

In the first part of this study, surveys were distributed to determine the amounts of money being spent throughout New York State on Pedestrian projects and also to determine the amount of money being spent in Main Streets. After applying a number of different sampling techniques and methods, including both survey questionnaires and telephone inquiries, it was found to be impossible (under existing record-keeping formats applied to collect data on retail sales, rent, taxes, demographics, etc.) to get the data needed. On-site data collection options were not feasible due to the limited funding that was available for this effort. Therefore, it was decided to look for second-hand sources of data that would show the impact of pedestrians and investing in pedestrian amenities on the economic vitality of the State.

In the remainder of this report, the findings that have been discovered from second-hand sources of information will be documented. It is believed that they show a clear and real link between improvements in economic activity and investments in pedestrian infrastructure (for access, mobility, and safety needs).