



Walk Friendly Communities

walkfriendly.org

COMMUNITY REPORT CARD AND FEEDBACK

Sitka, Alaska
October 22, 2013

Introduction

Thank you for submitting an application to the Walk Friendly Communities program on behalf of Sitka, Alaska! A Walk Friendly Community is a city or town that has shown a commitment to improving walkability and pedestrian safety through comprehensive programs, plans and policies.

Each application was evaluated by at least three reviewers to provide a fair assessment of your community and provide technical feedback on how to improve the walkability of your community.

After thorough consideration of your application, we are designating Sitka as a Bronze Walk Friendly Community. In reviewing your application there were several areas we were particularly impressed with, including:

- A consistently high walking mode share for a town of this size, indicating that people are able to walk safely and comfortably. It is equally important to see the low of crash rate.
- The level of planning effort and community support for Sitka's trail system, which provides important recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.
- Slow speed limits through downtown and in school zones, paired with pedestrian countdown signals at Sitka's two main intersections.

Sitka has exhibited a desire to become a community that supports active transportation. The application to the Walk Friendly Communities program is an endorsement of that desire and it is our hope that the feedback and information we provide can help your community improve in this regard. We also hope that, by identifying Sitka as a Bronze Walk Friendly Community and highlighting some of these impressive programs on our website, other communities can follow your example and build their own successful programs.

We have noted several areas in which your community can improve its policies, programs, and standards. This report card provides detailed feedback on how your community can take its programs and initiatives to the next level; take the time to review the feedback and contact us with any questions.

Primary Recommendations

This section identifies and provides suggestions for the most vital areas of improving Sitka's overall walkability. Additional details are provided in the following sections. **We recommend that you read these areas thoroughly and develop clear goals, benchmarks, funding sources, and an implementation schedule for reaching these goals.**

- To complement comprehensive planning efforts, Sitka should develop a **Complete Streets policy, connectivity standards**, and a **policy requiring sidewalks** as part of all new projects and redevelopment.
- Expanding **educational opportunities** and **SRTS programs**, as well as offering **additional staff training**, would go a long way. Staff training should reach out to many types of professionals (public health, law enforcement, city planning, engineering, schools, etc.). An easy way to provide training is through free webinars offered by PBIC.
- Sitka should implement an **inventory and update process** for sidewalks, crosswalks, and curb ramps on local roads, not just Alaska DOT-owned roads.
- Without conducting counts of pedestrians, it can be very difficult to determine where pedestrians are walking and, as a result, where to direct investment in pedestrian facilities. Sitka should consider implementing a [pedestrian count program](#), possibly using the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation project methodology.
- Expand Sitka's **Open Streets** events beyond two blocks so there is more of an opportunity for encouraging physical activity and space for more programming.

Feedback by Section

This remainder of this report card will provide detailed feedback and suggestions for each section in the community assessment tool. Feedback will include research to support the importance of this question as well as tools, guides, and case studies of successful implementations in other communities.

Each section received an overall score as defined below:

- **Walk Friendly:** The responses in this section indicate that your community is particularly strong in this area with great efforts being made towards improving walkability. Even so, there are always areas within this section where improvements and growth could be made.
- **On the Right Track:** This score indicates that your community does not exhibit the characteristics to be truly walk friendly in this section, but that there are still good existing programs or new programs that could be expanded. Please review our suggestions on how you could improve the walkability in this area.
- **Needs Attention:** This score indicates that your community does not yet demonstrate strong programs, policies, and results, characteristic of a Walk Friendly Community based on the responses in this section. Please review our suggestions carefully on how you can create positive change in your community with both short- and long-term objectives.

Community Profile

Walk Friendly

- It is great to see the mayor demonstrate Sitka's commitment to enhancing walkability and pedestrian safety by signing the [International Charter for Walking](#).
- For such a small community, it is heartening to see that anyone in local government spends time on pedestrian and bicycle issues. Creating a pedestrian and bicycle, or a more broadly defined transportation advisory board, would bring pedestrian issues to the forefront in your town and could be a good way to get citizens involved in transportation issues. The [PBIC has information](#) on how to start an advisory group.

Status of Walking

Walk Friendly

- Amazing walking mode share! The mode share, paired with the low number of crashes involving pedestrians, suggests that walking is comfortable, easy, and convenient in Sitka. It is also good to see the high rates of carpooling and biking.
- The next step is to collect and analyze pedestrian counts. Cities and towns of all sizes benefit greatly from this data. Seattle, designated as a Platinum-level Walk Friendly Community, is a leading example of positive evaluation practices and has developed an outstanding reputation as a walkable city due, in large part, to the understanding of trends in pedestrian travel. This understanding comes from [significant pedestrian counts](#) that have been occurring biannually since 2006. Data is collected during the peak summer and winter periods and analyzed for seasonal and time of day impacts on walking volumes. Sitka could consider identifying areas of the city to begin baseline pedestrian counts.

Planning

On the Right Track

- It is great to see pedestrian issues covered in multiple planning documents. Since the Active Transportation Plan will be due for an update soon, make sure the revised plan draws on public input and includes SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals. Fort Collins, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, has a comprehensive [Pedestrian Plan](#) that sets reachable targets. This [resource](#) can provide some additional examples.
- Creating a stand-alone ADA transition plan with a time line for implementing improvements will improve accessibility. In addition, requiring ADA compliance with all new development and creating an evaluation schedule will help to prioritize maintenance and new construction. The resource, the [Checklist for Accessible Sidewalks and Street Crossings](#) can provide more information. Santa Barbara, a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, has an exemplary ADA plan. The five main components of this project include: an accessibility survey, ADA Transition Plan update, self- evaluation update, accessibility training program and Preliminary Capital Improvement report. Sitka could consider checking out this [example](#).
- The Complete Streets movement, while relatively new, has gained traction with communities. Complete Streets are designed to create safe and convenient access for all

users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, motorists, and transit riders. The [Complete Streets Web site](#) provides some useful guidelines and many other resources about this initiative. By adopting a Complete Streets policy, some communities have been able to leverage more funds for pedestrian infrastructure. Forest Park, Illinois, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, has a great Complete Streets policy, which was signed by the Mayor and demonstrates a good understanding of Complete Streets and outlines performance measures. Sitka could use this as an [example](#).

- Sitka does a reasonable job of soliciting public input from citizens. Public input is vital to creating a vision for the community that is lasting and appealing to residents. Input can be incorporated through public forums, participation in advisory boards, committees, etc. The PBIC's Web site can provide some helpful [resources](#) on public input. Sitka should also consider creating a transportation advisory board, or more specifically, a bicycle/pedestrian advisory board. This type of board could provide feedback on transportation and safety issues that might not be addressed by Sitka's Park and Recreation Committee.
- Research suggests that the more sidewalks in a community, the more people will walk. Ensuring that new developments build or repair sidewalks and that collectors and arterials have sidewalks encourages people to use the facilities. The small village of Essex Junction, Vermont, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, has a sidewalk policy designed to better allocate resources, prioritize winter sidewalk plowing, and guide the long-term maintenance and reconstruction of the sidewalk network. It can be very difficult to successfully advocate for arterial and collector sidewalk policies, particularly with a less cooperative DOT. Considering Sitka's low sidewalk coverage and the fact that paved shoulders can become filled with snow in the winter months, Sitka should suggest policies to ensure that sidewalks are standard on arterial and collector streets.
- Even if Sitka is largely built-out, a connectivity policy is still important in terms of encouraging pedestrian access and pedestrian travel, particularly for ensuring that infill development maintains a high level of pedestrian access between developments. More information about connectivity can be found [here](#). The Victoria Transport Policy Institute also provides [guidelines](#) on connectivity policies. Lincoln, Nebraska, an honorable mention Walk Friendly Community, has a [connectivity policy](#) for the entire city, which mandates that the city block lengths not exceed 1,320 feet in length, and if they exceed 1,000 feet, pedestrian easements are required.
- The number of trails cited is impressive, though Sitka could consider creating further impetus to add trails through incentives and zoning. High quality trail networks form the facility network backbone of many walkable communities and can also encourage recreational walking. These types of trails also stimulate economic development and tourism and can raise property values. It is great to see that Sitka has a trails plan that includes project specifics (such as lead agency and prioritization) and is given weight by an MOU between relevant agencies in the region.
- The transit service in Sitka is excellent for a community of its size. Great job! The next step is to work with your transit providers to identify locations where the accessibility of transit stops can be improved and then prioritize those improvements. The Bronze-level Village of Shorewood, Wisconsin, uses guidelines from its county transit agency before the improvements are sent to the Village Board for final approval. Also, consider a policy for how crosswalks are placed around bus stops and other transit locations. The [Pedestrian Safety Guide for Transit Agencies](#) is an excellent resource.

- It is great to see that Sitka is working on a policy that will permit accessory dwelling units as a way to provide affordable housing options.
- While the urban design features are good in Sitka, more could be done to improve the comfort of pedestrians along roadways. Charlotte, North Carolina, designated as a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, has a [Center City Transportation Plan](#) that provides guidance on the design of urban features and enhancements of the pedestrian environment. Chicago, a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, has Streetscape Design Guidelines, which could provide some extra information for Sitka. These guidelines were created to assist community leaders, design consultants, and public officials in making informed decisions on the design of city streets. See this Web site for more [information](#). Sitka could consider establishing guidelines for the placement of design features.

Education & Encouragement

On the Right Track

- Even though consistent funding has been an issue for SRTS in Sitka, it is good to see Walking Wednesdays at your elementary school. We strongly encourage you to restore a district-wide Walk to School Day during anytime of the year that works best for Sitka. Additionally, consider collecting some more information about student travel behavior and incorporate this into your school plans—check out the services offered by the National Center for Safe Routes to School. Just visit www.saferoutesinfo.org.
- The SRTS programs in Bronze-level Essex Junction, Vermont, are great for small village and indicate that providing Safe Routes to School programs in smaller communities can be successful. These programs are made possible through collaborations with the [Vermont SRTS](#) Resource Center and community organizations.
- Ongoing education for professional staff underscores the priority a community places upon the importance of walking, walkability, and pedestrian safety. Sitka should take some extra steps to educate not only planning and engineering staff, but law enforcement, health professionals, and others with regard to pedestrian accommodation and safety. By educating public officials, communities can help ensure that ordinances and policies that support walking are actually implemented. The PBIC offers some [training courses](#) and free [webinars](#). This [case study](#) also highlights how the police can benefit from extra training. Webinars, in particular, are often free and are a great way to educate local city officials with regard to walking and walkability.
- It is great to see public health campaigns and events geared toward women and seniors. A combination of education and encouragement efforts can have a large effect on pedestrian volumes as well as pedestrian safety in a community. Also, there can be major differences in the walking abilities, behavioral patterns, and learning capacities of different groups of pedestrians and other road users. Sitka could consider environmental campaigns and walking training or “walk to work” days and should tailor any campaigns to specific populations. This [Web site](#) provides more guidance.
- The downtown walking map from Sitka Visitor's Bureau is a nice addition to all the hiking maps that are available to residents and visitors. We would have liked to have seen more detail about Sitka's wayfinding signs. The City of Philadelphia, designated as a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, has set the bar for pedestrian wayfinding programs learn more about their program [here](#).

- In Flagstaff, Arizona, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, the city hosted a series of 16 themed walks along city trails. The walks were organized by a variety of local community partners with themes including geology, history, flora, or astronomy. By organizing walking tours, people can experience the history and natural beauty of a place, while getting some exercise. This type of program would work great in Sitka considering the history and natural beauty of the region. The Bronze-level Village of Shorewood, Wisconsin, gives every new resident in a "walking kit," which includes a [walking map](#). The kit also provides coupons to encourage residents to shop locally.
- For such a small municipality, it is great to see any street closures whatsoever. Sitka should consider expanding the Wednesday Open Streets events beyond two blocks and ensuring that the event caters to residents, not just cruise ship visitors. More information available at this [link](#) or the Open Streets Project [Web site](#). The case studies from [Chicago](#) and [Clearwater](#), Florida can also provide more guidance.

Engineering

On the Right Track

- Sidewalks are the backbone of a good pedestrian system and encourage walking. It is understandable that a small community relies on paved shoulders, but the amount of sidewalk constructed in the last three years is small and it was unclear to us how sidewalks on non-DOT roads are inventoried and prioritized for construction. Creating an implementation schedule for adding sidewalks can be a helpful tool to legitimize and prioritize sidewalk construction and would ensure that a certain number of miles of sidewalk would be installed each year. Also, recording pedestrian walking volumes, which could be done using volunteers, can provide data about where sidewalk construction should occur. Seattle has an excellent [Web site](#) that covers its system of prioritizing sidewalk improvements. Also, given the small percentage of intersections with curb ramps in Sitka, the number of ramps installed each year is too low.
- Sitka should consider creating an easy online form or even using an app to allow people to report missing or broken sidewalks.
- Corvallis, Oregon, a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, has an excellent program to replace and install needed sidewalks called the [Sidewalk Safety Program](#). The goal of the program is to repair and replace hazardous sidewalks and to complete unfinished sections of the sidewalk system over time. Each year, one of eleven sidewalk districts is surveyed for sidewalks in need of repairs. The repair criteria are specific, to ensure consistent application in every situation. Corvallis's Sidewalk Maintenance Fee provides an annual source of funding to do this work, and the city will repair defects each year up to the amount of funding available. Sitka could consider some of these strategies.
- Good job providing pedestrian provisions on your bridges. These facilities can often represent barriers to pedestrian travel, but you have ensured that they do not impede walking trips.
- We were glad to see that Sitka's two signalized intersections include pedestrian countdown signals and that there is a slow progression speed of traffic in your downtown.
- Providing crosswalks at locations where people are crossing is a great way to reduce accidents and increase pedestrian transportation. One way to increase yielding and to provide a safer pedestrian environment is to provide in-road stop/yield lines. Sitka

should also consider creating a maintenance schedule for crosswalks to ensure that crosswalks are maintained on a regular basis.

- It would be helpful if we had more information in your application regarding crosswalk placement practices on non-DOT roads in Sitka—is crash data or pedestrian count information used to make those decisions?
- Before making changes to the flow of traffic from two-way to one-way through downtown, we hope Sitka carefully considers the [safety tradeoffs](#) for pedestrians and seeks input from the public and downtown business owners.

Enforcement Needs Attention

- It is great to see a small community with a dedicated traffic safety officer. Targeted enforcement programs in Sitka could be improved with the addition of media campaigns and DUI check-points.
- It is great to see that failure-to-yield tickets are given out in Sitka at all. Also, keeping parked cars away from crosswalks and off of sidewalks is critical, so it's good to see Sitka is doing that as well.
- Adult school crossing guards play an important role in the lives of children who walk or bicycle to school. They help children safely cross the street at key locations. They also remind drivers of the presence of pedestrians. The presence of adult crossing guards can lead to more parents feeling comfortable about their children walking or bicycling to school. While the primary role of an adult school crossing guard is to guide children safely across the street, children also remain responsible for their own safety. There are many model crossing guard programs in existence. At minimum, crossing guards should be vetted by the community, trained by certified training programs, provided with class 2 reflective vests and hand held stop paddles. The [Adult School Crossing Guard Guidelines](#) might be a helpful resource.
- Even though Sitka has a very low crash rate, city police, traffic engineers, and planners should establish an informal quarterly meeting to discuss pedestrian safety and review any crashes involving pedestrians or bicyclists. This can have a profound effect on safety by approaching the issue from different standpoints and using different tools.

Evaluation Needs Attention

- Sitka should implement a count program, which could have substantial benefits in terms of funding for pedestrian improvements. A count program can help "make the case" for more/enhanced walking amenities and can help prioritize improvements. Consider participating in the [National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project](#), or use their [count forms](#) and methodology to begin your own counts. Oxford, Mississippi, an honorable mention Walk Friendly Community, conducts [counts](#) and could be a good model for Sitka.
- Sitka should look into conducting road safety audits. The [Pedestrian Road Safety Audit Guidelines and Prompt Lists](#) can be very valuable for diverse groups of city staff (engineers, planners, law enforcement) in reviewing the pedestrian environment and developing recommendations, while other tools such as [walkability checklists](#),

- pedestrian level of service, and [Pedestrian Intersection Safety Index](#) can provide targeted information about pedestrian safety in the community.
- Conducting pre- and post-evaluations for developments and other projects in Sitka is the only way to know how your efforts have improved pedestrian safety. Sitka should begin pre- and post-evaluations for every pedestrian project in order to develop a better understanding of how it has impacted pedestrian safety and walkability—you can use positive findings to justify more investment in pedestrian projects.

More Information

If you have questions or comments regarding this feedback, your community's initiatives and programs, or the application process in general, we'd like to hear from you. Please contact:

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You can also send general inquiries to info@walkfriendly.org