

International Charter for Walking

**Creating healthy, efficient and sustainable communities
where people choose to walk**

Developed in the framework of the
WALK21 international conference series

Contacts:

Daniel Sauter, Urban Mobility Research
daniel.sauter@urban-mobility.ch

Jim Walker, The Access Company
jim.walker@walk21.com

Rodney Tolley, Walk21
rodney.tolley@walk21.com

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Walking is the first thing an infant wants to do and the last thing an old person wants to give up. Walking is the exercise that does not need a gym. It is the prescription without medicine, the weight control without diet, and the cosmetic that can't be found in a chemist. It is the tranquilliser without a pill, the therapy without a psychoanalyst, and the holiday that does not cost a penny. What's more, it does not pollute, consumes few natural resources and is highly efficient. Walking is convenient, it needs no special equipment, is self-regulating and inherently safe. Walking is as natural as breathing.

John Butcher, Founder Walk21, 1999

Introduction

We, the people of the world, are facing a series of inter-related, complex problems. We are becoming less healthy, we have inefficient transport systems and our environments are under increasing pressure to accommodate our needs. The quality and amount of walking as an everyday activity, in any given area, is an established and unique primary indicator of the quality of life. Authorities keen to create healthier and more efficient communities and places can make significant advancements by simply encouraging more walking.

Built on extensive discussions with experts throughout the world this Charter shows how to create a culture where people choose to walk. The Charter may be signed by any individual, organisation, authority or neighbourhood group who support its vision and strategic principles regardless of their formal position and ability to independently progress their implementation. The actions listed provide a practical list of improvements that can be made in most communities but may need adding to in response to local need and this is encouraged.

Please support this Charter by signing it and encouraging friends, colleagues, government bodies, and national and local organisations to work with you to help create healthy, efficient and sustainable walking communities throughout the world.

Background

Commuters scurry; shoppers meander; bush-walkers trek; lovers stroll; tourists promenade... but we all walk. Walking is a fundamental and universal right whatever our ability or motivation and continues to be a major part of our lives, yet in many countries people have been walking less and less. Why walk when you can ride? Walking has stopped being a necessity in many parts of the world and become a luxury. Walking seems too easy, too commonplace, too obvious and indeed too inexpensive an activity to pursue as a way of getting to places and staying healthy. We choose not to walk because we have forgotten how easy, pleasurable and beneficial it is. We are living in some of the most favoured environments man, as a species, has ever known, yet we respond by taking the ability to walk for granted.

As a direct result of our inactivity we are suffering from record levels of obesity, depression, heart disease, road rage, anxiety, and social isolation.

Walking offers health, happiness and an escape. It has the ability to restore and preserve muscular, nervous, and emotional health while at the same time giving a sense of independence and self-confidence. The more a person walks the better they feel, the more relaxed they become, the more they sense and the less mental clutter they accumulate.

This International Charter identifies the needs of people on foot and provides a common framework to help authorities refocus their existing policies, activities and relationships to create a culture where people choose to walk.

Vision

To create a world where people choose and are able to walk as a way to travel, to be healthy and to relax, a world where authorities, organisations and individuals have:

- ***recognised the value of walking;***
- ***made a commitment to healthy, efficient and sustainable communities; and***
- ***worked together to overcome the physical, social and institutional barriers which often limit people's choice to walk.***

The International Charter for Walking

I/ we, the undersigned recognise the benefits of walking as a key indicator of healthy, efficient, socially inclusive and sustainable communities and acknowledge the universal rights of people to be able to walk safely and to enjoy high quality public spaces anywhere and at anytime. We are committed to reducing the physical, social and institutional barriers that limit walking activity. We will work with others to help create a culture where people choose to walk by developing an action plan with commitments to the following principles:

1. Increased inclusive mobility

People in communities have the right to accessible streets, squares, buildings and public transport systems regardless of their age, ability, gender, income level, language, ethnic, cultural or religious background, strengthening the freedom and autonomy of all people, and contributing to social inclusion, solidarity and democracy.

ACTIONS

- Ensure safe and convenient independent mobility for all by providing access on foot for as many people as possible to as many places as possible particularly to public transport and public buildings
- Integrate the needs of people with limited abilities by building and maintaining high-quality services and facilities that are socially inclusive

2. Well designed and managed spaces and places for people

Communities have the right to live in a healthy, convenient and attractive environment tailored to their needs, and to freely enjoy the amenities of public areas in comfort and safety away from intrusive noise and pollution.

ACTIONS

- Design streets for people and not only for cars, recognising that streets are a social as well as a transport space and therefore, need a social design as well as engineering measures. This can include reallocating road space, implementing pedestrian priority areas and creating car-free environments to be enjoyed by all, supporting social interaction, play and recreation for both adults and children

- Provide clean, well-lit streets and paths, free from obstruction, wide enough for their busiest use, and with sufficient opportunities to cross roads safely and directly, without changing levels or diversion
- Ensure seating and toilets are provided in quantities and locations that meet the needs of all users
- Address the impact of climate through appropriate design and facilities, for example shade (trees) or shelter
- Design legible streets with clear signing and on-site information to encourage specific journey planning and exploration on foot
- Value, develop and maintain high quality and fully accessible urban green spaces and waterways

3. Improved integration of networks

Communities have the right to a network of connected, direct and easy to follow walking routes which are safe, comfortable, attractive and well maintained, linking their homes, shops, schools, parks, public transport interchanges, green spaces and other important destinations.

ACTIONS

- Build and maintain high-quality networks of connected, functional and safe walking routes between homes and local destinations that meet community needs
- Provide an integrated, extensive and well-equipped public transport service with vehicles which are fully accessible to all potential users
- Design public transport stops and interchanges with easy, safe and convenient pedestrian access and supportive information

4. Supportive land-use and spatial planning

Communities have the right to expect land-use and spatial planning policies which allow them to walk to the majority of everyday services and facilities, maximising the opportunities for walking, reducing car-dependency and contributing to community life.

ACTIONS

- Put people on foot at the heart of urban planning. Give slow transport modes such as walking and cycling priority over fast modes, and local traffic precedence over long-distance travel
- Improve land-use and spatial planning, ensuring that new housing, shops, business parks and public transport stops are located and designed so that people can reach them easily on foot
- Reduce the conditions for car-dependent lifestyles (for example, reduce urban sprawl), re-allocate road space to pedestrians and close the missing links in existing walking routes to create priority networks

5. Reduced road danger

Communities have the right for their streets to be designed to prevent accidents and to be enjoyable, safe and convenient for people walking – especially children, the elderly and people with limited abilities

ACTIONS

- Reduce the danger that vehicles present to pedestrians by managing traffic, (for example, by implementing slower speeds), rather than segregating pedestrians or restricting their movements
- Encourage a pedestrian-friendly driving culture with targeted campaigns and enforce road traffic laws
- Reduce vehicle speeds in residential districts, shopping streets and around schools
- Reduce the impact of busy roads by installing sufficient safe crossing points, ensuring minimal waiting times and enough time to cross for the slowest pedestrians
- Ensure that facilities designed for cyclists and other non-motorised modes do not compromise pedestrian safety or convenience

6. Less crime and fear of crime

Communities have the right to expect an urban environment designed, maintained and policed to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

ACTIONS

- Ensure buildings provide views onto and activity at street level to encourage a sense of surveillance and deterrence to crime
- Conduct pedestrian audits by day and after dark to identify concerns for personal security and then target areas for improvements (for example, with brighter lighting and clearer sightlines)
- Provide training and information for transport professionals to increase awareness of the concerns of pedestrians for their personal security and the impact of such concerns on their decisions to walk

7. More supportive authorities

Communities have the right to expect authorities to provide for, support and safeguard their ability and choice to walk.

ACTIONS

- Commit to a clear, concise and comprehensive action plan for walking to set targets, secure stakeholder support and guide investment to include the following actions:
 - Involve all relevant agencies (especially transport, planning, health, education and police), at all levels, to recognise the importance of supporting and encouraging walking and to encourage complementary policies and actions
 - Consult, on a regular basis, local organisations representing people on foot and other relevant groups including young people, the elderly and those with limited ability
 - Collect quantitative and qualitative data about walking (including the motivations and purpose of trips, the number of trips, trip stages, time and distance walked, time spent in public spaces and levels of satisfaction)
 - Integrate walking into the training and on-going staff professional development for transport and road safety officers, health practitioners, urban planners and designers in particular
 - Provide the necessary ongoing resources to implement the adopted action plan
 - Implement pilot-projects to advance best-practice and support research by offering to be a case study and promoting local experience widely
 - Measure the success of programmes by surveying and comparing data collected before, during and after implementation

8. A culture of walking

Communities have a right to up-to-date, good quality, accessible information on where they can walk and the quality of the experience. People should be given opportunities to celebrate and enjoy walking as part of their everyday social, cultural and political life.

ACTIONS

- Actively encourage all members of the community to walk whenever and wherever they can as a part of their daily lives by developing regular creative, targeted information, in a way that responds to their personal needs and engages personal support
- Create a positive image of walking by celebrating walking as part of cultural heritage and as a cultural event, for example, in architecture, art-exhibitions, theatres, literature readings, photography and street animation
- Provide coherent and consistent information and signage systems to support exploration and discovery on foot including links to public transport
- Financially reward people who walk more, through local businesses, workplaces and government incentives

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

There may be local needs or circumstances which require additional actions. Space is provided below for these to be specified.

Signed:

Name:

Position:

Date:

Walk21 are grateful to many people for their assistance with the production of this Charter and to you for your personal commitment to helping create healthy, efficient and sustainable walking communities throughout the world.

For more information on walking visit www.walk21.com