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Measure Your Community's AFQ: Activity-Friendliness Quotient

Here's a quick quiz to assess how friendly your community is to living an active lifestyle. It may seem more a test of urban planning and roadway design, but the questions reflect the research on how inviting an area is for walking, bicycling, and transit. So take a 30-minute or longer walk in your neighborhood, and then answer these questions about what you experienced (just pick the closest answer). At the end, add up your score and see how your area stacks up; it will give you ideas on possible improvements that you could even share with local officials and health advocates.

1. How many different kinds of destinations (e.g., homes & apartments; shopping and restaurants; work places; churches; schools; civic buildings; recreational or natural areas, etc.) did you see on your walk?
   a. Lots--at least four or more different kinds of destinations.
   b. Some--two or three types of destinations.
   c. Very few—E.g., mostly just homes and residential buildings; or just businesses.

2. Were streets well-connected, and blocks generally long or short on your walk?
   a. Well connected, short blocks; takes a minute or so to walk a block (~400 feet or shorter).
   b. Medium connections & blocks; takes two to four minutes to walk a block (~400 to 800 feet).
   c. Poorly connected, long blocks; takes more than four minutes to walk one (over ~800 feet).

3. Do streets have sidewalks or side paths and are they inviting for walking (e.g., wide enough for two people, set back from the road, and in good repair)?
   a. Plenty--There are wide, inviting sidewalks on most streets.
   b. Some--Sidewalks on over half of streets, but plenty are missing or uninviting.
   c. Few--Many streets lack sidewalks or those that exist are in very tough shape.

4. Did it appear convenient and safe to ride a bicycle? Specifically, are there multi-use trails available and/or bike lanes painted on the busier roads?
   a. Plenty: Plentiful trails and bike lanes so it's very easy to bicycle in safety.
   b. Some: There are some trails and/or lanes for bicyclists, but not a complete network.
   c. Very few or no trails and/or bike lanes in the area.

5. How many streets have on-street parking, trees along the street, and amenities such as benches, water fountains, public art, bicycle parking racks, etc. that make it pleasant for bicycling and walking?
   a. Most streets are inviting for walking and cycling.
   b. At least half of streets are inviting for walking and cycling.
   c. Few streets have those inviting elements.

6. Are homes and buildings in business and retail areas set up near the street, with parking on the street and/or behind the building, and with easy access for bicyclists and pedestrians?
   a. Most buildings are near the sidewalk and inviting to walkers and cyclists.
   b. At least half of the buildings are near the sidewalks and inviting.
   c. Most buildings are set back from the road, often with a sea of asphalt parking out front.

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7. How was traffic, and did you feel safe as a pedestrian?
   a. Traffic was fine--cars moved at reasonable speeds; it was easy to cross streets with a reasonable wait.
   b. Traffic was okay, but sometimes it seemed too fast or close, and/or crossing streets took too long.
   c. Traffic was bad--there was too much, it was too fast, and/or too close; crossing streets felt dangerous.

8. Did you feel safe from crime or other dangers?
   a. I felt very safe--there were no (or very few) scary places, people, or animals.
   b. Fairly safe--but occasional scary things would give me pause.
   c. Not so safe--several scary things disincline me to walk there again.

How'd you score? Add 3 points for each (a), 2 for each (b), and 1 for each (c).

What it means:

20-24 Good. Your neighborhood is inviting you to get out and walk or bike; take it up on the invitation and be a role model for regular walking and bicycling.

14-19 Fair. A mix of good and bad, your neighborhood needs you to get involved; see the resources below for ideas on improving your score.

8-13 Poor. Your neighborhood is a heart attack waiting to happen! Get your neighbors and public officials involved, or it's time to consider a move.

Resources for Improving Your Town for Walking and Bicycling

Active Living by Design program, Univ. of North Carolina, www.activelivingbydesign.org. *Resources for community change; web site loaded with research-based evidence.*

AmericaWalks, Boston, MA; www.americawalks.org. *A coalition of over 50 local and regional pedestrian advocacy groups nationwide, provides technical assistance.*

League of American Bicyclists, Washington, DC; www.bikeleague.org. *National advocacy group advancing the* Bicycle Friendly Communities *program.*

National Center for Bicycling and Walking, Washington, DC; www.bikewalk.org. *Provides Walkable Community Workshops, technical assistance, annual* Pro Walk/Pro Bike *conference.*

Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, Chapel Hill, NC; www.walkinginfo.org; www.bicyclinginfo.org. *Technical design guides and on on-line image library.*

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Washington, DC.; www.railtrails.org. *Great help for trail and greenway advocates, including research supporting trails' benefits.*

Promoting Active Communities, http://mihealthtools.org/communities/. *This Michigan-based website includes a detailed community self-assessment tool and resource guide.*

National Safe Routes to School clearinghouse: www.saferoutesinfo.org. *Resources & funding for walking & cycling to school; Walk to School Day (first Wed. in Oct.) event registry.*

Walkable Communities, Inc., High Springs, FL: www.walkable.org *Loaded with images and ideas on creating more walkable places.*