

Promoting Physical Activity and Health by Urban Design
November 4th Harvard School of Public Health and Harvard Design School
Conference Outcomes

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The following are initial outcomes from the Harvard School of Public Health and Harvard Design School Conference titled “Promoting Physical Activity and Health by Urban Design” that was held on November 4th, 2003 at the Federal Reserve Bank in Boston. These design provisions are *in addition to* sidewalks for pedestrians (where other users are sometimes banned) and roads for bicyclists (where individuals can ride who are confident bicycling in the road).

The conference outcomes include these explorations:

- 1) The development and testing of 20 pilot projects in the Boston area related to slowly bicycling, jogging, in-line skating, using a scooter, and skateboarding as part of daily life by all populations. Some of the proposed pilots include:

Corridor related:

- Development of a “Boston Barrier” or a simulated brick concrete Jersey barrier to separate traffic from a multi-use “sideway” path that is adjacent to but lower than the sidewalk (applications also for Emerald Necklace connections and the Democratic Convention).
- Purchase and installation of Chinese metal fencing that is placed in the road to separate multi-use path users on a sideway from the car traffic.
- Stencil “Safe Route to School” on a sidewalk.
- Place “Safe Haven” stickers in store front windows on a “Safe Route to School” route
- Paint lines on a wide sidewalk to indicate a shared “sidepath.”
- Demarcate one sidewalk on one side of the street for pedestrians and the other side of the street for slow-wheeled users and as part of a “Safe Route to School” corridor.
- Test the existing surfaces of brick and asphalt on the new sidewalk/sidepath on Vassar Street by bicyclists, in-line skaters, joggers, users of a scooter, and skateboarders.
- Lay and test red pavement for wayfinding and smoothness.
- Install cross walk light with bicycle and/or in-line skate picture.
- Install more ‘Yield to Pedestrian’ mid crosswalk signs, perhaps with a graphic related to “Safe Route to School.”

Destination related:

- Host a children’s puppet play or summer concert at a major destination on a “Safe Route to School” corridor so parents are encouraged to test the route with their children.
- Bring in a farmer’s market as a precursor to a community grocery store.
- Install temporary benches and measure use.
- Install crossroad directional arrows at a destination to indicate locations of public bathrooms, water fountains, and eateries.
- Place temporary functions at a T or bus stop junction as a hub of human-scale activity.

Analysis related:

- Assemble a “Good Sports Team” of individuals who represent the under-served populations and have them test design innovations and pilot projects. These individuals may include members of the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS), seniors from Chinatown who bicycled in China, and minority representatives who typically do not engage in physical activity.

- 2) Draft a document that would eventually be submitted to the American Association of State and Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) for review. This document would be in addition to the guidelines for pedestrians on sidewalks and bicyclists on roads and instead serve the users who are banned from using the sidewalks or unable, due to skill, agility, and/or age, to use the roads.
- 3) Gather letters in support of the design principles in Physical Activity Oriented Design (PAOD) that would be given to Governor Romney for his endorsement and possible association with his Transit Oriented Development (TOD).
- 4) Consider a joint Harvard School of Public Health, Harvard Design School, and MIT course related to physical activity and urban design.
- 5) Draft Post Occupancy Evaluations (POE) for buildings and the approach corridors all related to measures of physical activity.
- 6) Conduct a feasibility study of Commercial Street that would provide a critical multi-use path connection from the Big Dig Wharf District Rose Kennedy Greenway parcels to the multi-use paths and skateboard park under the Zakim Bridge. Students from Northeastern University in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department are conducting the study under the guidance of Peter Furth, Chair and Professor in the Department.
- 7) Consider additional Safe Routes to School options: sidewalks around schools; small, humped roundabouts; car-free zones near schools during school hours; secure bicycle storage facilities; bike crossing signs; pavements markings; low-cost traffic calming such as bulbouts, and raised crosswalks; Walking School Bus programs; recruitment of seniors to monitor walking school buses, walking and bicycle safety for children; Livable Communities workshops to PTO's; snow removal program.
- 8) Superimpose Physical Activity Oriented Design (PAOD) principles on Transit Oriented Development (TOD) plans, mega shopping mall plans, and proposed projects (Assembly Square, Allston/Brighton Harvard campus, and South Bay) and suggest possible changes.