

Fact Sheet: Why Sidewalks Matter

In Denver, property owners are responsible for sidewalk construction and maintenance. Many decades of this policy have demonstrated that building a transportation network one property at a time is ineffective, and is detrimental to the safety and well-being of Denver residents, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods.

- **Bad sidewalks are a citywide problem:** 40% of Denver streets have missing (10%) or substandard (30%) sidewalks that are too narrow to accommodate a person in a wheelchair, a parent with a stroller, or just two people walking side-by-side.
- **Bad sidewalks are a social justice issue:** 47% of streets in low-income areas have missing or substandard sidewalks. Many people in these neighborhoods depend on walking to access transit and other daily destinations.
- **Bad sidewalks are a public safety issue:** People walking are 30 times more likely to die in a traffic crash, compared to motorists.
- **Bad sidewalks are a public health issue:** Communities with higher rates of chronic disease and childhood obesity often do not have access to safe, accessible sidewalks.
- **Sidewalks are a top priority for many community members:** The majority of Americans say that sidewalks and places to walk are very important factors in deciding where to live.



WalkDenver's original Denver Deserves Sidewalks campaign, launched in 2015, garnered 2,780 petition signatures and support letters from partner organizations, and produced some initial successes:

- Average of \$2-3 M per year since 2017 in City's Annual Budget for new sidewalk construction
- \$47.7 M for new sidewalks in 2017 GO Bond
- New neighborhood sidewalk repair program launched in 2017
- Criteria for prioritizing the buildout of sidewalks, and cost estimate for doing so - approximately \$1.1 billion - established by the 2017 Denver Moves Pedestrian and Trails Plan
- Targets for building at least 18 miles of new sidewalks per year in 2018 and 2019, and 20 miles per year in 2020-2022 established by the 2017 Vision Zero Action Plan.

At current funding levels, it would take nearly 400 years to build out a complete sidewalk network to serve all Denverites.

Denver has consistently fallen short of these goals, however, building less than half of the target miles of sidewalks from the Vision Zero Action Plan for each year. At current funding levels, it would take nearly 400 years to build out a complete, integrated sidewalk neighborhood. The sidewalk repair program is also proceeding much more slowly than originally planned, with 80% of sidewalks inspected so far requiring repairs.



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The Denver Auditor’s assessment of the Neighborhood Sidewalk Repair Program released in November 2020 concluded that “The original flawed design of the [Program] means Denver residents have unequal access to safe and accessible sidewalks as well as affordability options for repairs.” The report recommended that Denver’s Department of Transportation and Infrastructure should, by the end of 2021, review city ordinance and assess whether the property owners’ responsibility and liability to maintain and repair sidewalks is the best approach to address Denver’s needs. Meanwhile, the City still has no plans for addressing the 30% of Denver’s streets with sidewalks that are too narrow to meet ADA standards.



City policies that tie sidewalk repairs and construction to property improvements such as the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) can also considerably increase the cost of these projects, exacerbating efforts to create more affordable housing and prevent displacement in vulnerable neighborhoods. Fundamentally, Denver is failing to live up to its own stated priorities. Blueprint Denver and numerous other planning documents assert that pedestrians should be

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prioritized, stating that “Complete multimodal networks prioritize the most efficient modes first. People walking and rolling are the heart of the transportation system as everyone is a pedestrian some point in their trip.”

Denver’s current sidewalk policies and funding mechanisms are in direct conflict with these community values. The way Denver manages

sidewalks - by placing the bulk of responsibility for construction and maintenance on private property owners - is arbitrary and differs from other forms of basic infrastructure. For example, the City’s Annual Street Maintenance program is funded through property taxes, in the amount of \$44.4 million 2021. Similarly wastewater infrastructure is funded through sanitary and stormwater fees assessed to property owners, in the amount of \$51.1 million in 2021.



Other cities in Colorado and across the U.S. have adopted policies and funding mechanisms for the purpose of building and maintaining a comprehensive sidewalk network. It’s time for Denver to do the same. Because Denver Deserves Sidewalks! Get involved at denversidewalks.com