

WORK IN PROGRESS: ACHIEVING WALKABILITY IN THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

Benefits, Guiding Principles & Healthy Community Designs

An initiative of the USVI Walkability Institute



USVI Walkability Institute
September 2018

The Institute is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in partnership with TEPHINET, a program of The Task Force for Global Health and the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Health.

Benefits of Walkability in a Community

- The population can engage in **more physically active modes of transportation** (walking, bicycling, and transit use), which can help reduce chronic disease risk (e.g., cardiovascular disease, Type II diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, clinical depression, dementia, cancer) and associated social and economic burdens. Improved health offers improved quality of life—with less financial burdens.
- Healthy design principles lead to more **economically robust and vibrant retail and mixed-use districts**, in part by shortening the distance people need to travel for goods, services, work, and recreation. For example, more walkable districts generate more revenue per retail square foot than lower density (spread out) “box” stores.
- More mixed and localized economies (e.g., **neighborhood retail near housing**) allows for easier access to critical goods and services immediately following a severe weather event. Mixed neighborhood clusters will become natural focal points for recovery efforts and the delivery of critical needs and materials and may be more easily served than a population that has to access services in suburban-style retail malls.
- **Reduced dependence on motor vehicles** can lead to less paved surface areas dedicated to roadways and parking, and commensurate reductions in impervious surfaces and storm water run-off, especially during heavy rain events. More natural surfaces, including the use of Low Impact Development (LID) principles in transportation design (such as natural swales and rain gardens), can aid with natural storm water infiltration and reduce localized flooding.
- From a broader environmental perspective, this can help **reduce the territory’s contribution to greenhouse gas emissions**, which is a critical goal given the territory’s vulnerability to severe weather events and sea level rise accompanying global warming.
- A transportation system that includes **opportunities for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit users will increase resilience by reducing dependence on motor vehicles** and providing alternate travel options if roads become impassable for cars or fuel becomes limited.
- **Reducing the number of vehicular and pedestrian fatalities**, especially among vulnerable populations like children, the elderly, and low-income communities, will contribute significantly to a healthy community design.

Guiding Principles

To achieve the benefits above, the following guiding principles should serve as a reference to be reflected in any long-term infrastructure or land use plans developed during the recovery process:

- **Institutionalize Complete Streets.** Formally embrace a territory-wide Complete Streets policy that requires the consideration of all users of all ages, incomes, abilities and disabilities, and all modes (walk, bike, transit, motor vehicle) during all roadway work, from routine painting and maintenance to new construction. The AARP has begun this process by compiling a Complete Streets vision for the territory. The AARP *Complete Streets* vision states a community's commitment is to integrate a Complete Streets approach into their transportation practices, policies, and decision-making processes. A complete street is a transportation approach that ensures all future streets projects will consider needs of all travelers. This means that people can travel to and from their destinations in a reasonable amount of time and in a safe, reliable, comfortable, convenient, affordable, and accessible manner using whatever mode of transportation they choose or rely on. It requires decision-makers to consider the needs of diverse modes that use the transportation system, not limited to, but including walking, biking, driving, wheeling/rolling, riding public transit, car sharing/carpooling, paratransit, taxis, delivering goods and services, and providing emergency response transportation.
- **Adopt NACTO guidelines.** Adopt by reference or otherwise formally incorporate elements from the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) *Urban Street Design Guidelines* and *Urban Bikeway Design Guidelines* for creating safer, more efficient, and functional streets when constructing and maintaining all transportation infrastructure.
- **Adopt FHWA multi-modal guidelines.** Adopt by reference or otherwise formally incorporate the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) *Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks* (October 2016) for creating safer, more efficient, and functional streets when constructing and maintaining all transportation infrastructure. Many of the simpler, low-cost treatments are appropriate for the territory's more rural and village roadways.
- **Plan and build a multi-modal network.** Develop a comprehensive and connected network throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands for pedestrians and bicycles, using tools ranging from local pathways to longer multi-use trails, and from small alleyways to roadways, boulevards, and parkways with pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.
- **Create a comprehensive transit system.** Institute and fully support a reliable, affordable, and well-connected public transit system with adequate bus and rest stops to encourage non-vehicular travel and provide active transportation options for those who do not drive.
- **Create mixed-use village and town clusters.** Update zoning codes to support mixed land use, where feasible, so that residences are located close to everyday destinations; in village centers, wherever possible, reward (or require) development to allow for residential above retail and commercial uses.

- **Alter building codes to support active transportation.** Change policies and building codes to require newly built commercial establishments to have more pedestrian-oriented designs, with features such as buildings closer to sidewalks with parking on the street or behind structures, required pedestrian access, transit stops, and bicycle parking.
- **Require quality pedestrian-, bicycle-, and transit-oriented design features.** Make streets safe, accessible, and inviting by adding features that encourage walking, bicycling, and transit use, such as adequate lighting, street trees, benches, building awnings, shaded transit structures, and where possible and appropriate, traffic calming features such as narrower travel lanes, curb extensions, median islands, raised crosswalks (speed tables), and roundabouts.
- **Build community support and safety skills.** Educate the community on pedestrian and bicycle safety and the benefits of walking, cycling, and transit use.
- **Create Safe Routes to Schools and Parks.** Focus especially on the built environment near schools and parks to assure safety for young people walking and cycling to school, parks, and recreational facilities.
- **Engage the community in the healthy design process.** Encourage the public to provide input when new road infrastructure projects are being proposed, so that all Virgin Islanders have a voice in how our communities are designed.

US Walkability Institute Island Teams Proposed Projects

Given the guiding principles, each island team has created a list of proposed projects that encourage healthy community design:

ST. CROIX

Department of Public Works / Federal-Aid Project currently in design:

- Spring Gut Road Route 85 – 2-mile roadway with separate multi-use pathway
- Clifton Hill – Phase II – Roundabout at La Reine Intersection
- St Croix Bike Path – 14-mile South Shore multi-use pathway
- Improvements to Christiansted and Frederiksted town streets

Other projects:

- Spring Gut Hazard Mitigation – Flood mitigation project that incorporates recreation and green space as well as trails.
- Scenic Road Trail Improvements – Improve the condition of existing trails including grading, enhanced lookouts, signage, and safety improvements.

ST. THOMAS

Department of Public Works / Federal-Aid Project in design:

- Veterans Drive / Waterfront – Major expansion of the Charlotte Amalie Waterfront that includes roadway, pedestrian, transit, and recreational improvements.
- Raphune Hill – Expansion of the main arterial route through the island that includes considerations for multimodal transportation (pedestrian and transit).

Other projects:

- St. Thomas Perimeter Road Walkability and Stormwater Management: Healthy & Resilient Neighborhoods – Create a Complete Streets environment in the area behind the hospital that suffered damages in the recent hurricanes.

The following locations were identified by the USVI Walkability Institute's St. Thomas team as potential sites for future improvements. These sites lack the infrastructure that encourages healthy activity and can impact community development:

- Magens Bay Road – From the beach up to the residential housing communities
- Weymouth Rhymer Highway – Top of Raphune Hill to Donoe intersection
- Tutu Area
- Lindberg Bay Road – Airport up Route 303
- Brookman Road – Tutu to Turpentine Run Bridge
- Smith Bay Road – Cassi Hill to Baseball field
- Red Hook to Smith Bay Park

ST. JOHN

The following locations were identified by the USVI Walkability Institute's St. John team as potential sites for future improvements. The sites create opportunity to encourage healthy activity and can impact community development:

- Fish Fry Road (from roundabout to Grave lot)
- Gade Strand (OLMC\ Grande Bay\ Gallows)
- Arrival dock loop
- Customs to Mongoose
- Cruz Bay Town Misc.
- Coral Bay Historic and Cultural Walking Path
- Centerline Road to Coral Bay

As the awareness of walkability increase in the community, many new and on-going opportunities for walkability is created. Please reference the following link for current and existing projects. <https://drive.google.com/open?id=13lKuXFCHobBpjFYRSQiDPyZm3WUxTwrL>

Partners



TEPHINET

Training Programs in Epidemiology and
Public Health Interventions Network

AARP® Real Possibilities
The Virgin Islands