

## Close-to-Home Parks: A Half-Mile or Less

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We have identified a half-mile, or 10-minute, walk to a park as a common national standard.

As cities vie to attract talented college graduates and sustain population growth, they are focusing attention on parks to increase livability and support a strong economy. Since parks must be convenient if they are to provide their benefits, many places have set goals for the maximum distance any resident should be from the nearest park. Although individual cities' goals vary with population density, from a remarkable eighth of a mile in Chicago to two miles in Atlanta, our data supports a standard of no more than a half-mile as a reasonable distance to walk to a park.

Among the 100 largest cities in the U.S., 70 have explicit distance goals, with 43 (61 percent) using a half-mile standard. Of the remaining 27 cities, 12 have a standard of less than a half-mile (many using a quarter-mile), and 15 have a standard greater than a half-mile.

We identified several studies suggesting that most people are willing to walk half a mile to a park. The largest, the U.S. Department of Transportation's 2012 *National Survey of Bicyclist and Pedestrian Attitudes and Behavior*, surveyed almost 10,000 people about their general walking habits.<sup>1</sup> The average trip length was 1.3 miles—roughly equivalent to the round-trip walk to a park located a half-mile from home. Of the walking trips reported in that study, 61 percent were for exercise, recreation, or walking the dog, with the remainder of trips split between commuting and errands.

A study of the Bay Area transit system found that 80 percent of transit riders who walked to the station lived within a ten-minute walk, or approximately a half-mile.<sup>2</sup>

Converting these distance standards to time standards hinges on how fast different people walk. The *National Survey of Bicyclist and Pedestrian Attitudes and Behavior* assumes an average walking speed of 0.53 miles in 10 minutes. The Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices guidelines, which are calculated to ensure that slow walkers can safely cross streets, uses an average walking speed of 0.45 miles in 10 minutes.<sup>3</sup> By any of these estimates, a 10-minute walk is a half-mile or close to it.

Based on all of this, we have established the half-mile, 10-minute walk as our mission goal and encourage others to adopt it as a standard for providing nearby access to parks and open space.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, *National Survey of Pedestrian and Bicyclist Attitudes and Behaviors*, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> California DOT, *BART's First Five Years: Transportation and Travel Impacts* (DOT-P-30-79-8), 1979.

<sup>3</sup> LaPlante, J. and T. Kaiser, "A history of pedestrian signal walking speed assumptions," 3<sup>rd</sup> Urban Street Symposium (Seattle, WA), 2007.