

# Americans' Attitudes Toward Walking and Creating Better Walking Communities

April 2003

## Introduction

As policymakers and the public debate the different aspects of transportation issues, the Surface Transportation Policy Project asked Belden Russonello & Stewart to measure the public's attitudes toward one aspect of this debate - walking.

In October 2002, Belden Russonello & Stewart conducted a national random sample telephone survey of 800 adults, age 18 and older from October 23 through 30, 2002. The survey used a random digit dial (RDD) sample of households across the U.S. The margin of sampling error for the entire survey is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points at the 95% level of tolerance. The following report contains key charts of findings.

## Overview

The survey finds that Americans would like to walk more than they are currently, but they are held back by poorly designed communities that encourage speeding and dangerous intersections and whose design is inconvenient to walk to shops and restaurants. More than half of Americans say that their communities lack shops and restaurants within walking distance and a third of the public sees changing to less drive-necessary communities as the answer to traffic.

The survey documents public support for better walking communities and specific policies such as designing streets for slower traffic speeds; using more federal dollars to make walking safer from traffic; and creating walking-friendly routes to school for children.

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The Walking Survey uncovers five main points on the public's attitudes toward walking and the walkability of communities:

- More than half (55%) say they would like to walk rather than drive more throughout the day either for exercise or to get to specific places.
- Why are more Americans not walking? Distance to stores, restaurants, and schools is the main reason offered by Americans as to why they more often opt to take their car instead of walk.
- The type of walking Americans would like to do more of is walking for exercise or fun, followed by walking to a specific destination. Majorities associate walking with exercise, relaxation and fun.
- Large majorities of Americans support policies to ensure the safety of walkers and to make their communities more walkable. The most popular policies focus on reducing speeding – tougher enforcement of the speed limit and designing streets with more sidewalks and safe crossings to reduce speeding.

We also find majorities favor making it easier for children to walk to school, improving public transportation, and increasing federal spending on pedestrian safety.

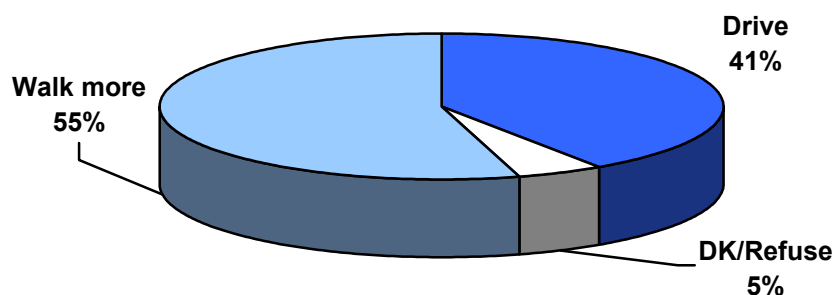
- As commute times lengthen for many Americans and traffic becomes ever more a part of daily life, Americans are looking for alternatives and that may be why 66% choose alternatives to new roads when offered possible solutions to the traffic dilemma: Improved public transportation (35%); developing communities where people do not have to drive long distances to work or shop (31%), and then new roads (25%).

## Findings

### 1. *Many Americans would like to walk more in their communities*

More than half of the American public (55%) says it would like to walk more throughout the day either for exercise or to get to specific places. Four in ten (41%) Americans would choose driving over walking for wherever they need to go.

**Chart 1: Americans Would Prefer to Walk More**



Q38. Please tell me which of the following statements describe you more: A) If it were possible, I would like to walk more throughout the day either to get to specific places or for exercise, or B) I prefer to drive my car wherever I go?

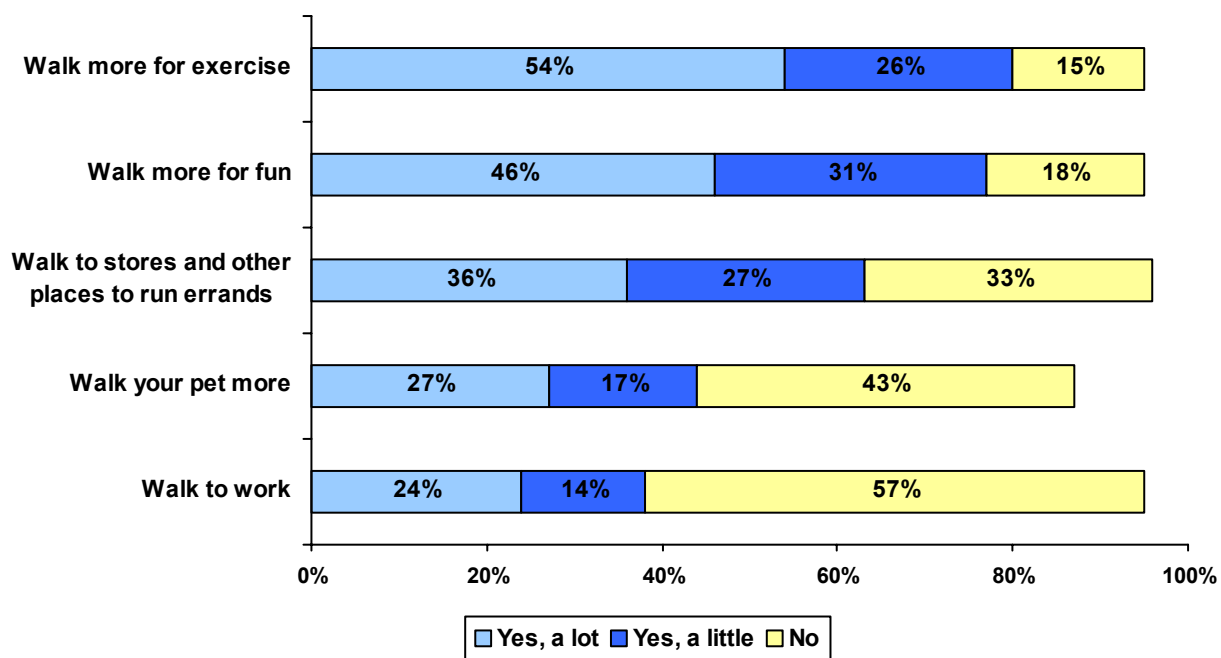
What types of walking would Americans like to do more of?

Eight in ten Americans (80%) would like to walk more for exercise, with over half (54%) saying they would like to walk “a lot” more for exercise.

Similarly, 78% would walk more for fun (46% “a lot” more).

And, nearly two-thirds (63%) say they would like to walk more to stores and other places to run errands (36% “a lot” more).

**Chart 2: Walk More for Exercise, Fun**



Q47-Q51. If you had a chance, would you... Would that be a lot or a little?

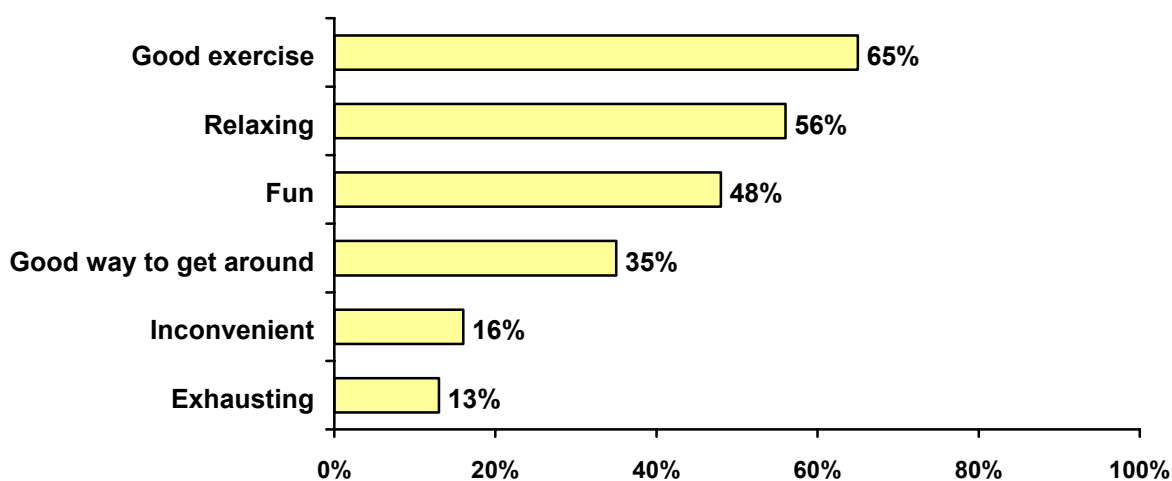
2. *Walking is associated with good health and “fun” but less as “a way to get around”*

Majorities of the public associate walking with good exercise (65% say this describes walking “very well”), relaxation (56%), and fun (48%). Walking is considered “fun” more often by women than men.

To a lesser degree, walking is viewed as a “good way to get around” (35%). The public, however, does not associate walking with being inconvenient (16%) or exhausting (13%).

**Chart 3: Describing Walking**

% saying “very well”



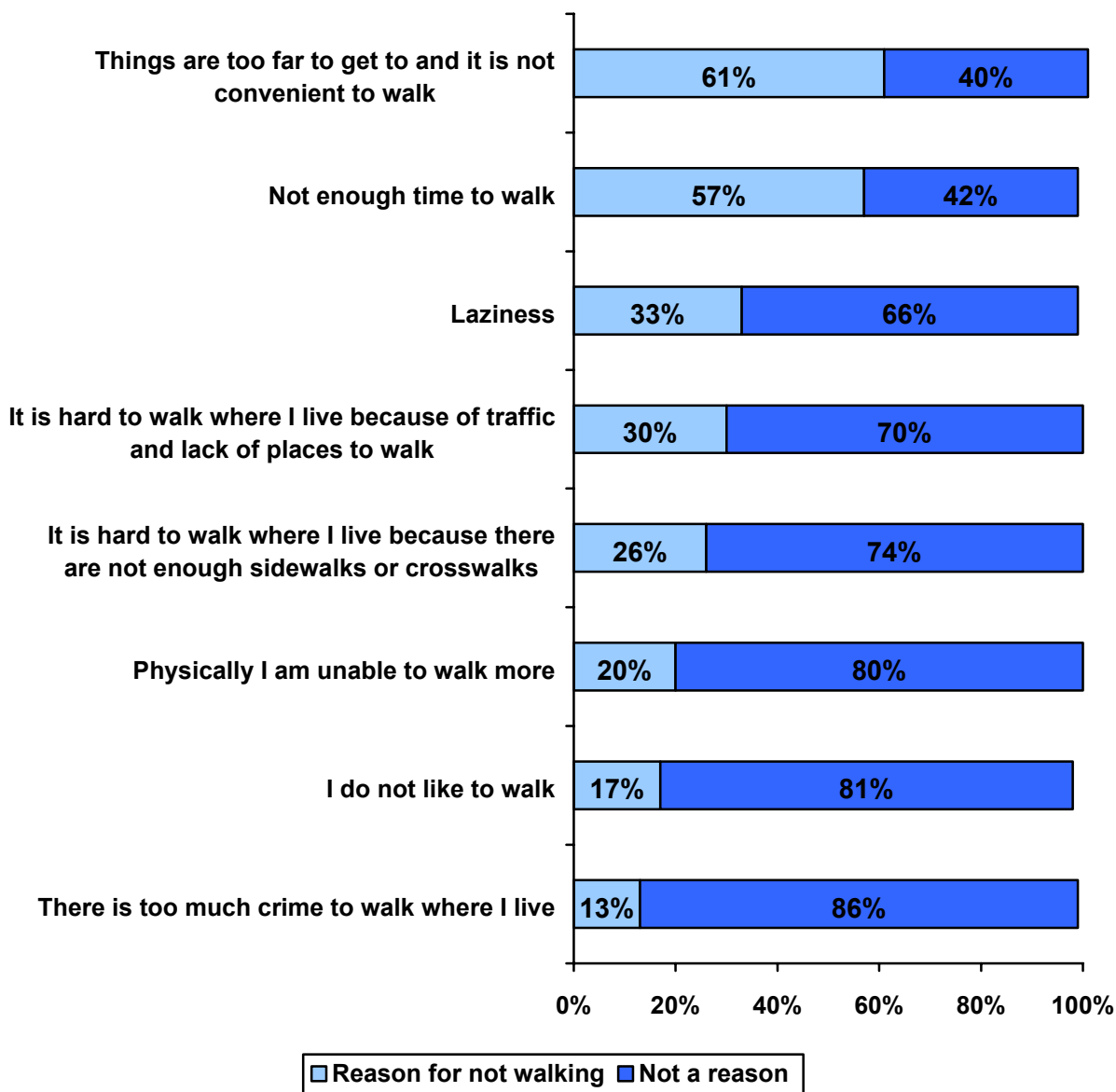
Q32-Q37. Please tell me if each of the following words or phrases describes walking for you personally very well, somewhat, not very well, or not at all?

One of the reasons walking may not be so closely related to getting around is a lack of access to stores, restaurants and other areas within walking distance of people’s homes. Over half of Americans (54%) say there are too few shops or restaurants within walking distance of their home.

### 3. *Distance and time are seen as main barriers to people walking more*

The main reasons Americans report not walking more are that “things are too far to get to” (61% a reason for not walking more) and that they “do not have enough time” (57%). Fear of crime, a dislike of walking, or laziness, however, are not reasons that Americans point to for why they do not lace up their walking shoes more often.

**Chart 4: Reasons for Not Walking More**

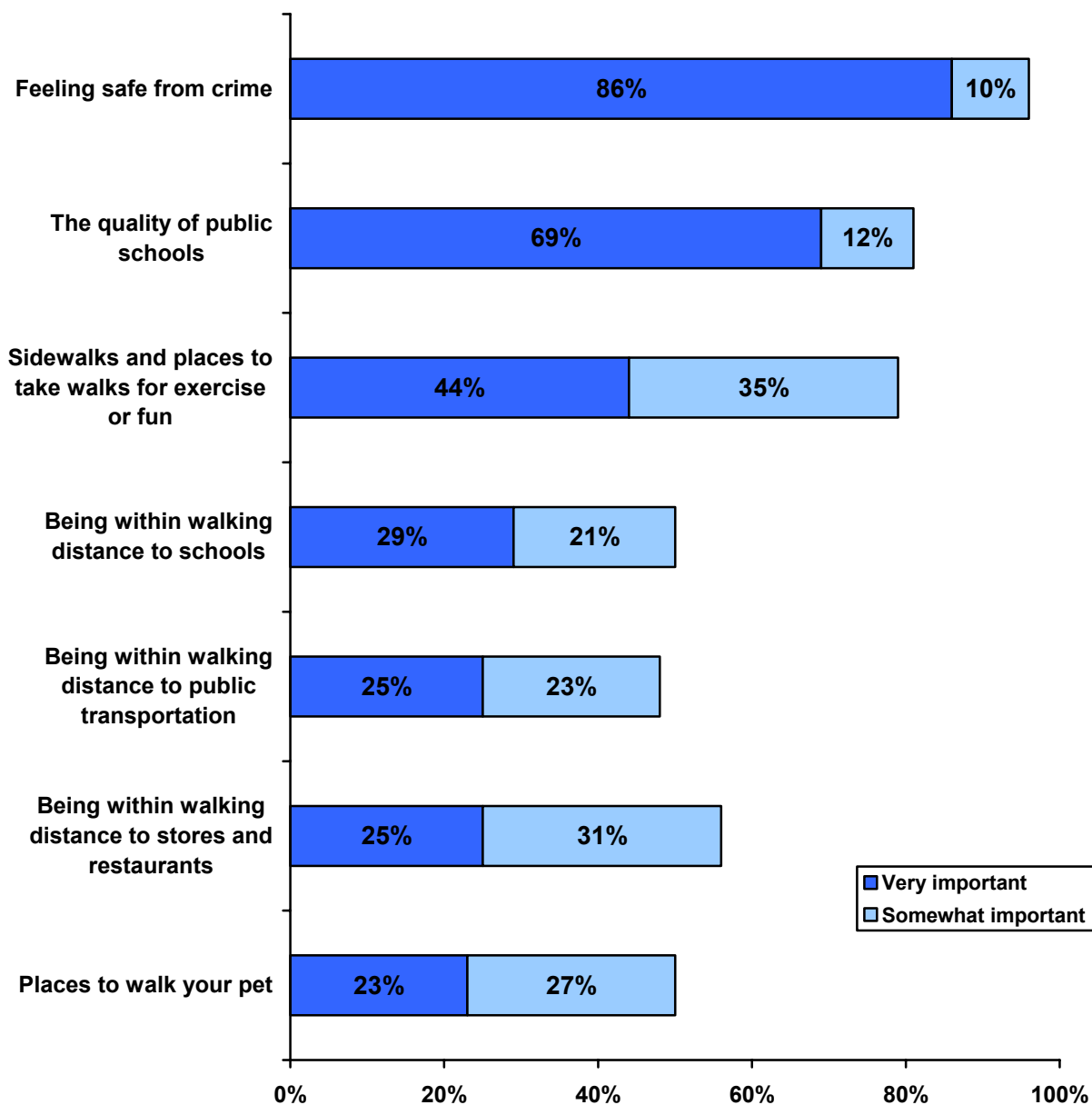


Q39-Q46. How much of a factor is each of the following in why you do not walk more right now: a major reason, somewhat of a reason, not much of a reason, or not a reason at all:

#### 4. *Americans value having places to walk in their communities*

When thinking about deciding where to live, having sidewalks and places to take walks for exercise or fun is important to nearly eight in ten Americans (79%), and “very” important to four in ten (44%). Having areas to walk in the neighborhood rates third on a list of seven items asked in the survey, behind feeling safe from crime and the quality of the public schools.

**Chart 5: Importance in Deciding Where to Live**



In deciding where to live, please tell me how important each of the following would be to you: very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important:...

5. *Americans broadly support policies to make walking safer and easier*

Americans broadly support policies to make walking safer and easier.

86% favor better enforcement of traffic laws, such as speed limits (57% strongly favor).

Over eight in ten (84%) favor using part of the transportation budget to design streets with sidewalks, safe crossing and other devices to reduce speeding in residential areas and make it safer to walk, even if this means driving more slowly (48% strongly).

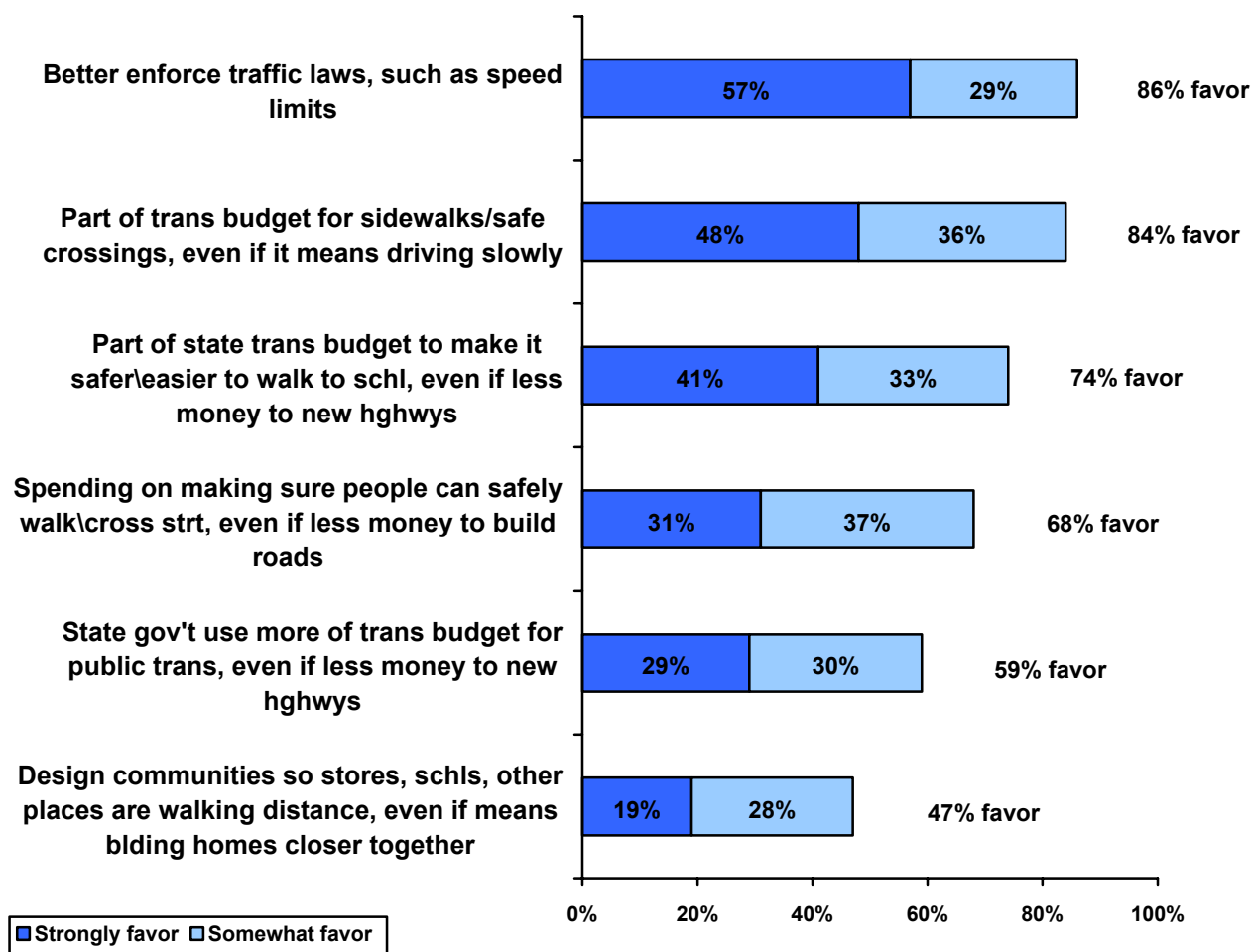
Three-quarters (74%) favor using part of the state transportation budget to create more sidewalks and stop signs in communities, to make it safer and easier for children to walk to school, even if this means less money to build new highways (41% strongly).

Seven in ten (68%) favor increasing federal spending on making sure people can safely walk and cross the street, even if this means less tax dollars go to building roads (31% strongly).

Six in ten (59%) support their state using more of its transportation budget for improvements in public transportation, even if this means less money to build new highways (29% strongly).

Close to half of the public (47%) favors designing communities so that more stores, schools, and other places are within walking distance of homes, even if this means building homes closer together (19% strongly).

### Chart 6: Proposals to Create More Walkable Communities



Please tell me if you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose each of the following proposals:

Q28. Better enforce traffic laws such as speed limit

Q27. Use part of the transportation budget to design streets with sidewalks, safe crossing, and other devices to reduce speeding in residential areas and make it safer to walk, even if this means driving more slowly.

Q25. Use part of the state transportation budget to create more sidewalks and stop signs in communities, to make it safer and easier for children to walk to school, even if this means less money to build new highways.

Q30. Increase federal spending on making sure people can safely walk across the street, even if this means less tax dollars go to building roads.

Q26. Have your state government use more of its transportation budget for improvements in public transportation, such as trains, buses and light rail, even if this means less money to build new highways.

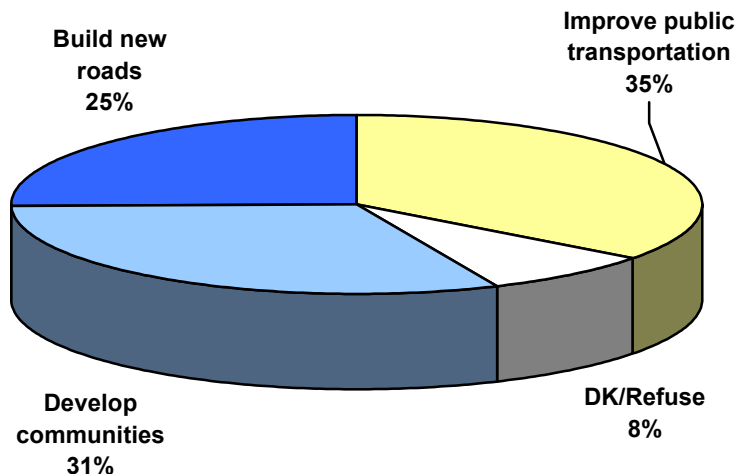
Q29. Design communities so that more stores and other places are within walking distance of homes, even if this means building homes closer together.

**6. Improved public transportation and community design top new roads as answers to traffic problems**

About half of the public (49%) reports that traffic where they live is a problem and just over half (51%) say it is not a problem. We hear that traffic is a problem more among those Americans living in the South Atlantic and West than other regions.

When given three options to solve long-term traffic problems, a plurality (35%) chooses “to improve public transportation” and three in ten (31%) choose “develop communities where people do not have to drive long distances to work or shop.” Only a quarter (25%) select “to build new roads” as the best long-term solution to reducing traffic.

**Chart 7: Long-term Solution to Reducing Traffic**



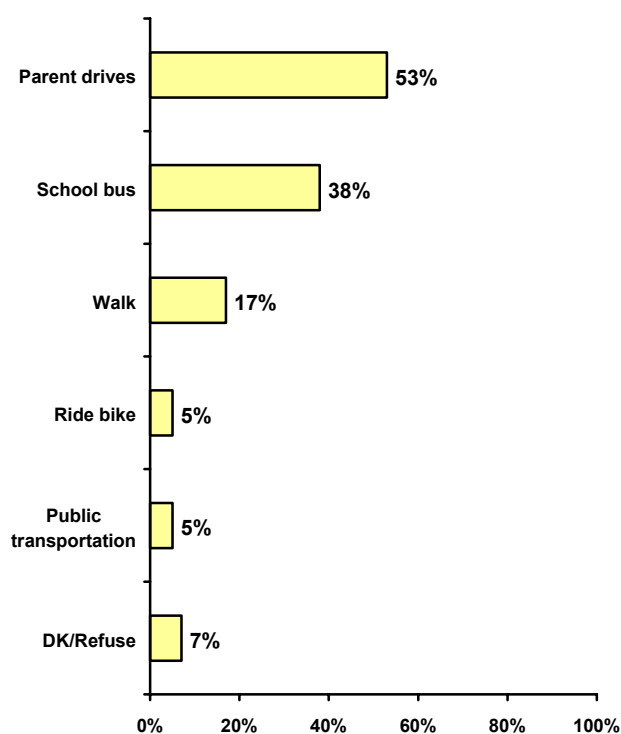
Q31. Which one of the following proposals is the best long term solution to reducing traffic in your state: build new roads, improve public transportation, such as trains , buses, and light rail, or develop communities where people do not have to drive long distances to work or shop?

## 7. Youth are not walking to school

Seven in ten Americans (71%) say they walked or rode a bike to school when they were a child. But, today most school-aged children (7 to 17 years old) are either driven by a parent (53%) or a school bus (38%). Less than two in ten (17%) walk.

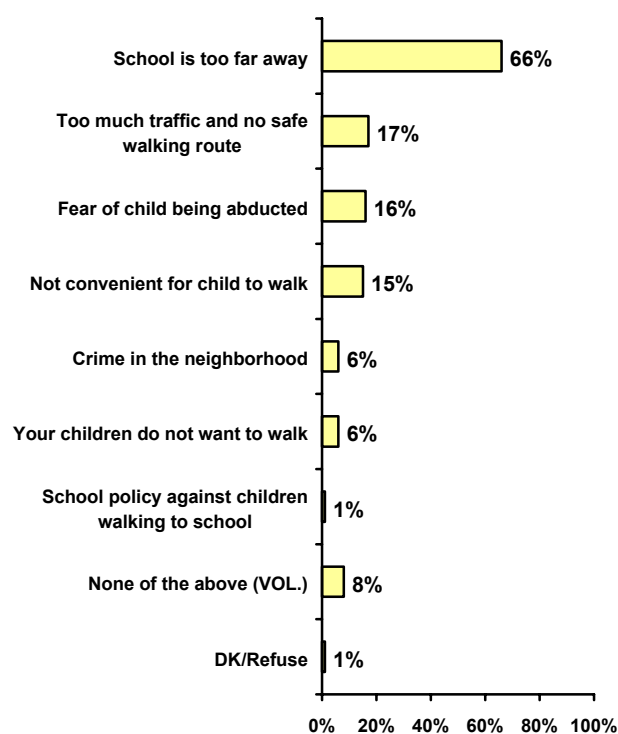
Parents report the main reason their children do not walk or bike is because the school is too far away (66%). Other concerns take a backseat to distance – too much traffic, no safe route (17%), fear of abduction (16%), crime in the neighborhood (6%), lack of convenience (15%), and finally, children not wanting to walk (6%).

**Chart 8: Ways Children Get to School**



Q54. For each one of the following, please tell me if this is how your child or children get to school: Walk, ride bike, school bus, public transportation, or a parent or other adult drives them to school? (Base: N=198 who have children ages 7-17) [MULTIPLE RESPONSES ACCEPTED]

**Chart 9: Reasons Children Do Not Walk to School**



Q55. Are any of the following a reason your child(ren) do not walk to school: School is too far away, there is too much traffic and not a safe walking route to the school, fear of child being abducted, not convenient to have child walk – drop them off by car on the way to work, crime in the neighborhood, your children do not want to walk, or there is a school policy against children walking to school? (Base: N=166 whose children ages 7-17 do not walk or bike to school) [MULTIPLE RESPONSES ACCEPTED]