

# SAFE STEPS

PROMOTE WALKING AND  
WALKABILITY IN NATICK FOR  
HEALTH AND WELLNESS

July 26, 2012

overview and training session #1

# Agenda

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1. Overview of Safe Steps grant
2. Preliminary survey results
3. Current process for pedestrian improvements
4. Blueprint for making improvements
5. Assessment challenges
6. Pedestrian Advocacy 101
7. Walking Audit
8. Regroup

# 1. Safe Steps grant outline

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- Funded by MetroWest Health Foundation for \$65,000
  - ▣ Assessment of conditions and activity
    - Behavior, perceptions, infrastructure
  - ▣ Engineering estimates to inform capital planning
    - Define priorities and develop solutions/estimated costs
  - ▣ Program development to encourage walking
    - Activities and communications
- Grant does not fund construction and repair

## 2. Preliminary survey results

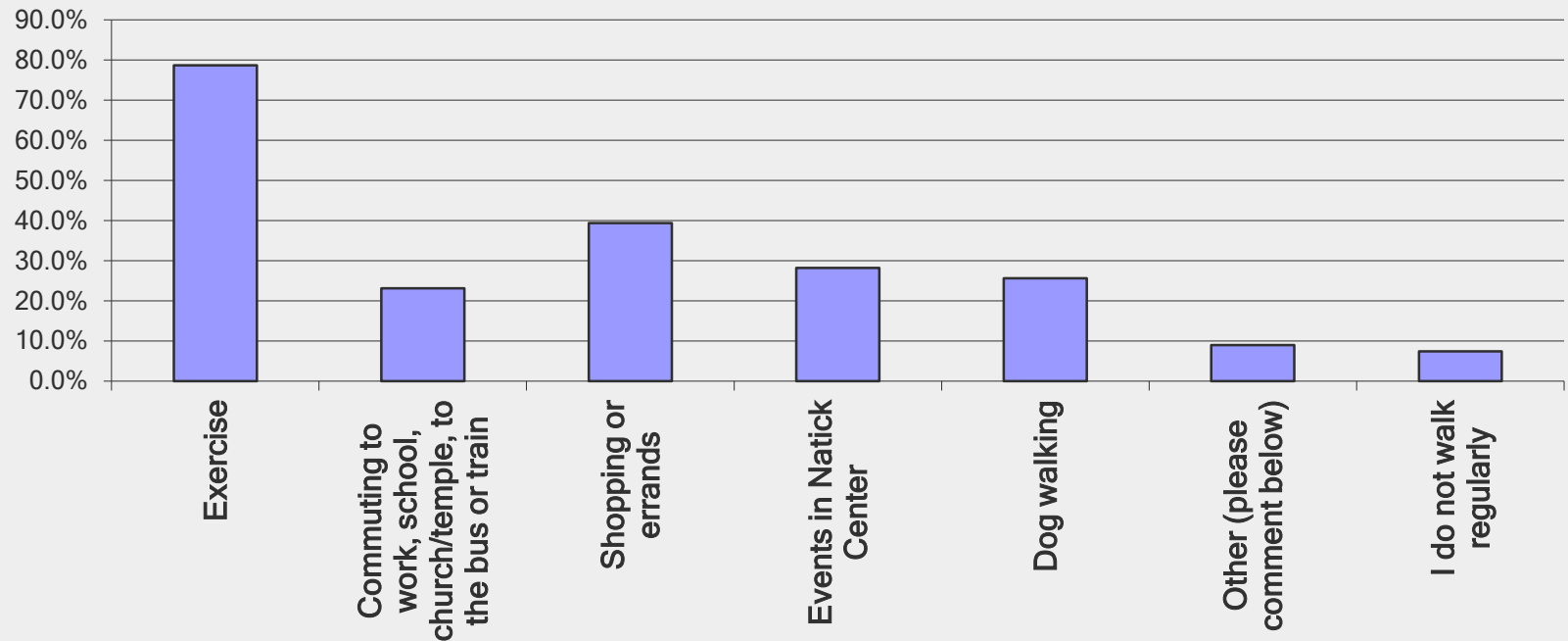
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- 1700 participants
- Survey alert mailed to all Natick addresses
- 1650 online, 50 paper surveys
- Likely response bias:
  - ▣ Assumed that more enthusiastic/concerned people will participate
- Average age of respondent = 59
  - ▣ Average of 2012 resident file = 50

# Most respondents walk for exercise

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First, we have questions about whether you walk regularly for exercise, commuting or errands, where walking is part of your regular routine . For which of these reasons do you walk at least once per week? (Please check all that apply.)



# Distance is the top impediment

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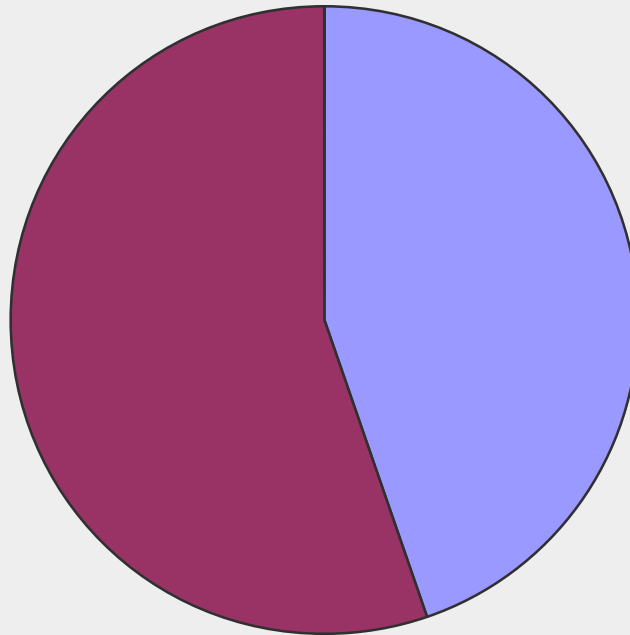
If you personally do not walk regularly, why not? (Please check all that apply.)



# 45% have school age children

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Do you have school-age children in grades K-12 in your household?

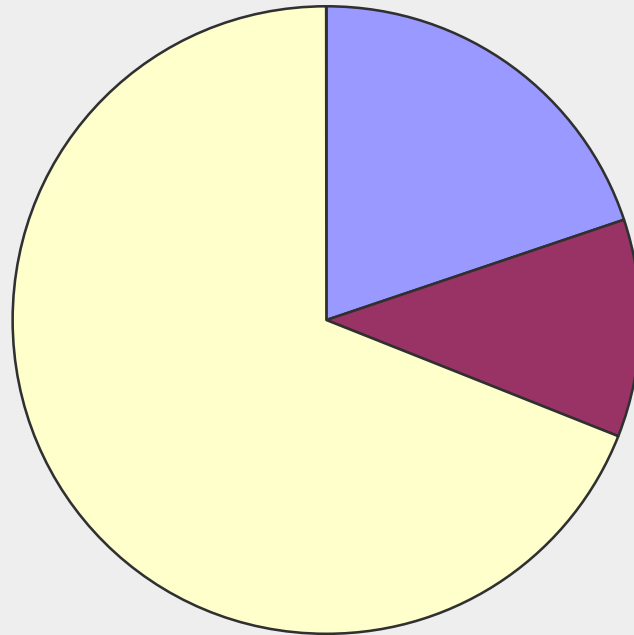


■ Yes  
■ No

# 31% of K-12 respondent parents' children walk/bike to school

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In general, how often do your children in grades K-12 walk to school?

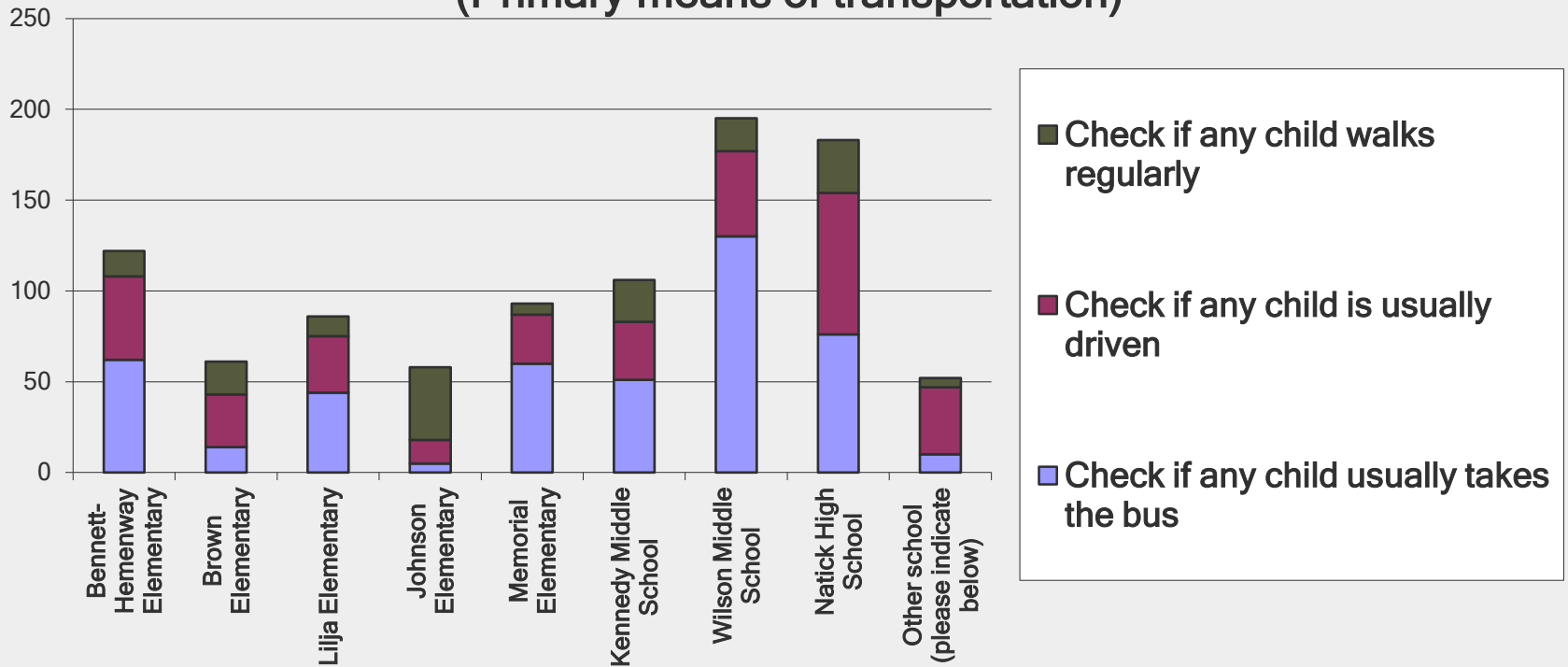


- Frequently or most of the time
- Occasionally, at least once per week
- Never or almost never



# Most students are driven or use the bus

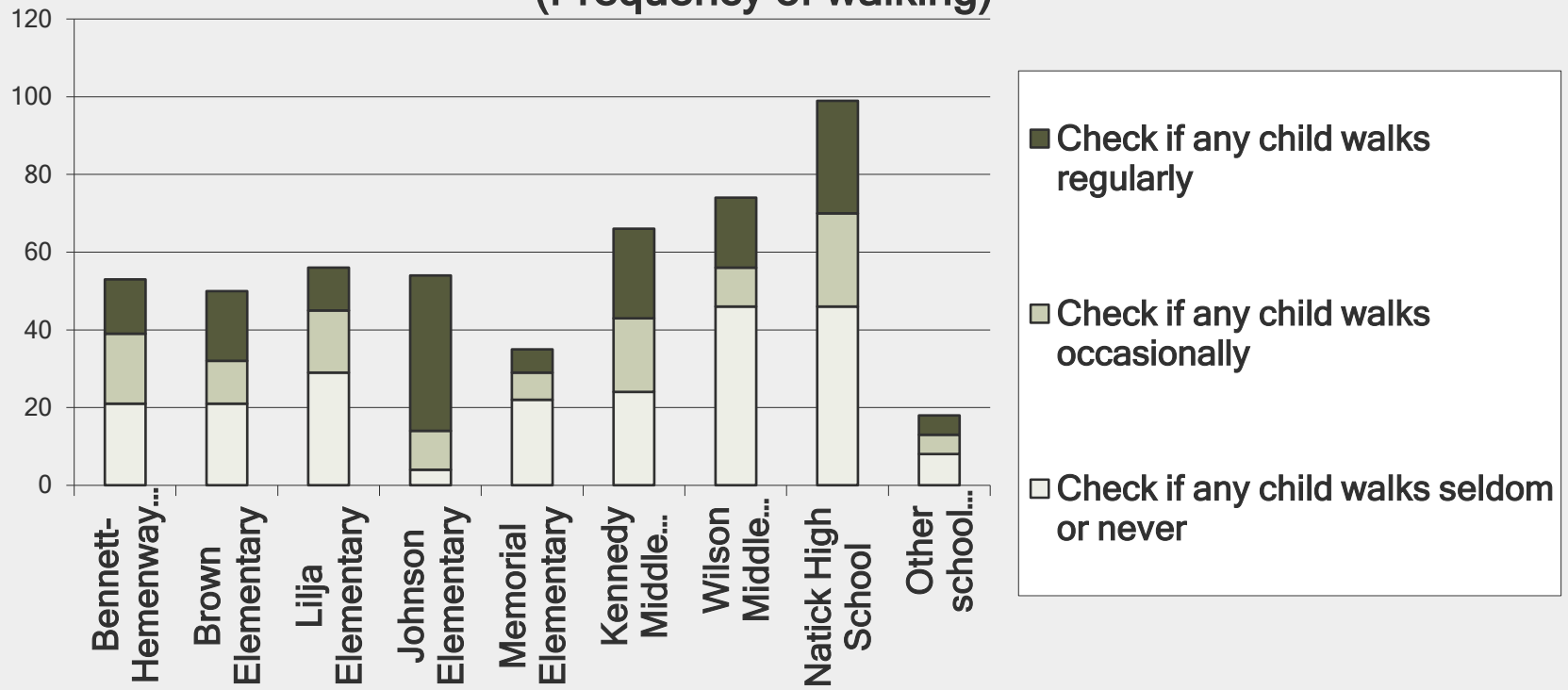
We would like to know how your children in grades K -12 usually get to school.  
(Primary means of transportation)



# One school is primarily walked to

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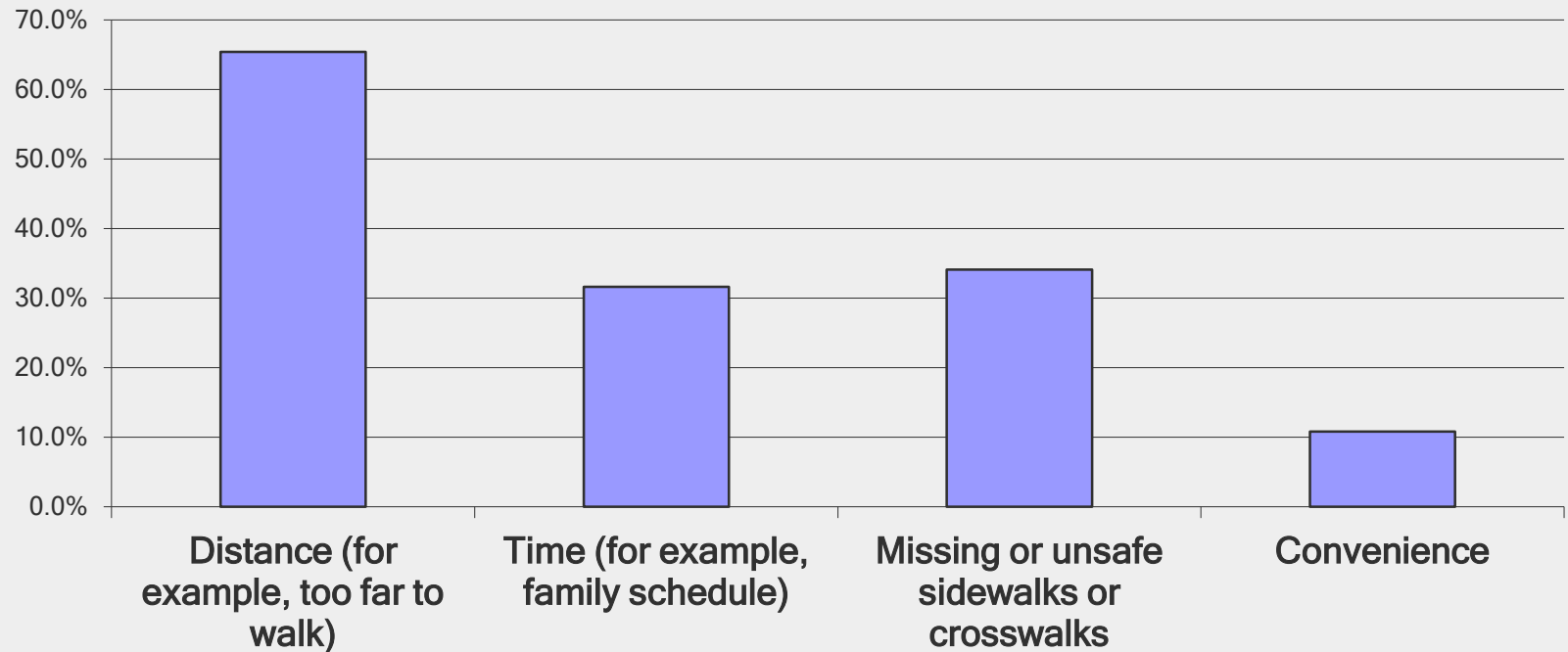
We would like to know how your children in grades K through 12 usually get to school.  
(Frequency of walking)



# Distance is most common impediment

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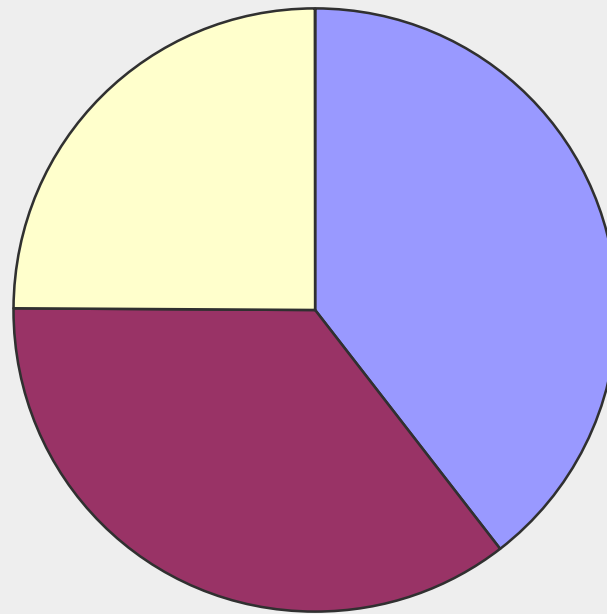
If any of your children do not walk (or ride a bike) to or from school regularly, please indicate the reasons why not. (Please check all that apply.)



# 40% would definitely walk more often in a structured program; 25% might

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Would any of your children in grades K-12 be more likely to walk to or from school, if there were an organized program to encourage safe walking to and from school?

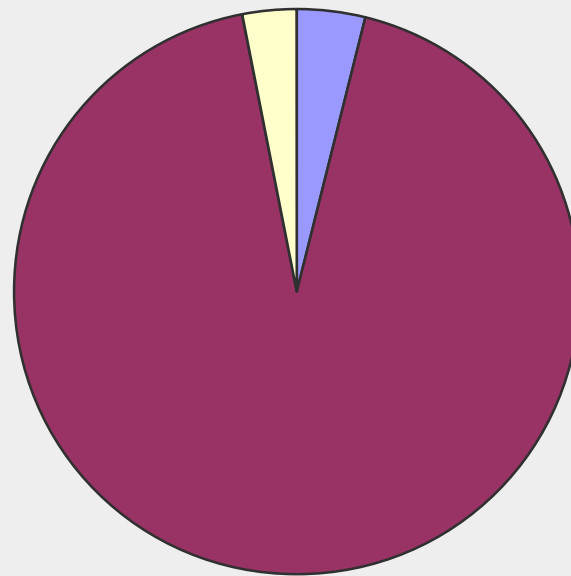


■ Yes  
■ No  
■ Not sure

# 4%+ report a physical disability that is an impediment to walking

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We are interested to learn if people with physical limitations or disabilities are using the town's sidewalks, crosswalks and trails. Do you have a physical limitation or a disability that restricts your mobility?

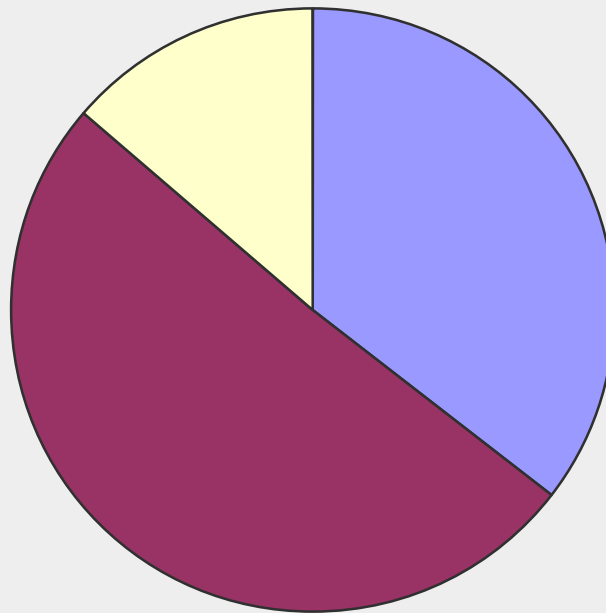


- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

# 35% report that conditions are an impediment to walking

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Next, we would like to know if the condition of sidewalks, crosswalks, trails and paths in Natick prevent you personally from walking as often, as far or as safely as you would prefer.

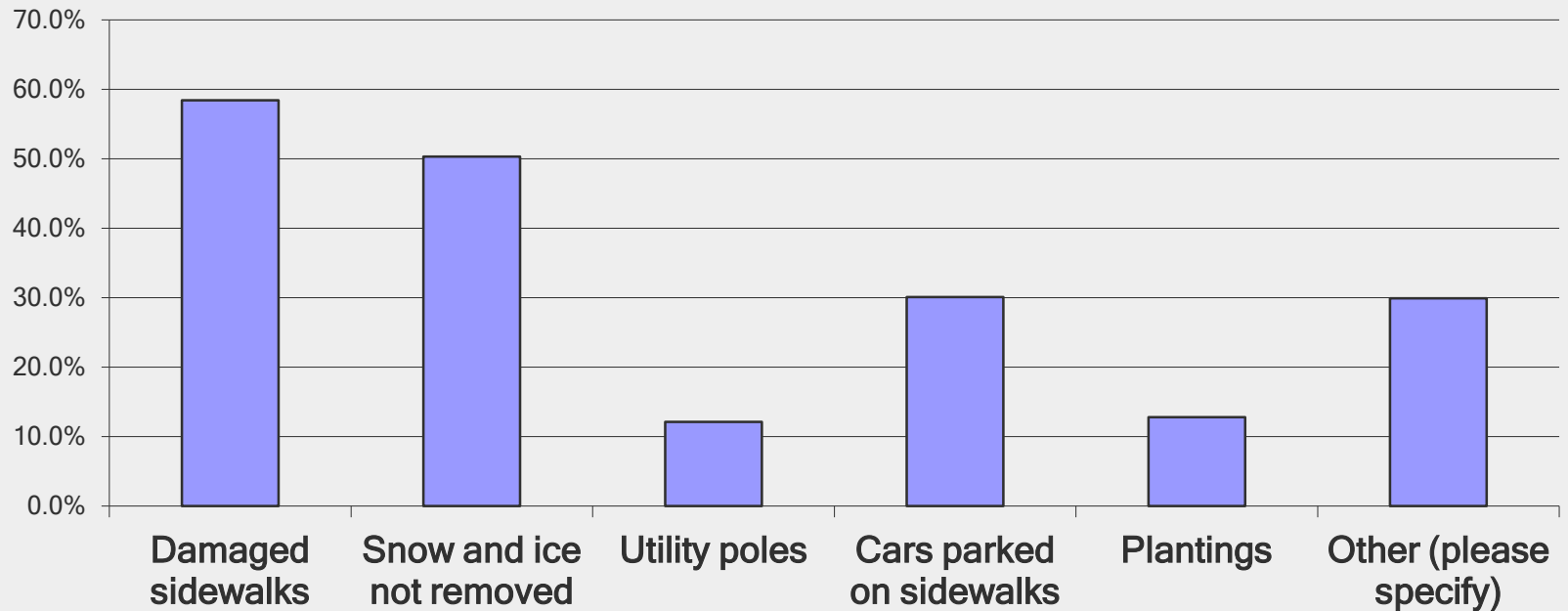


- Yes, the condition of sidewalks, crosswalks and/or trails prevents me from walking as often, or for as long, or as safely as I would prefer.
- No, these conditions do not prevent me from walking as often, or for as long or as safely as I would prefer.

# Damaged sidewalks, snow/ice, obstructions are top concerns

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We would like your opinion about obstructions on existing sidewalks. Which of these are of concern to you personally?  
(Please check all that apply.)



# Missing/inadequate sidewalks/crosswalks

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- 906 responses: main roads, neighborhood streets
- Top mentions:
  - ▣ North Main Street
  - ▣ Pine Street
  - ▣ Cottage Street
  - ▣ Woodland Street
  - ▣ Rockland Street
  - ▣ Everett Street
  - ▣ Eliot Street
  - ▣ Oak Street (sidewalks now under construction)



# Sidewalks in need of maintenance/repair

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- 552 responses: trails, main roads, neighborhoods
- Top mentions:
  - ▣ North Main St
  - ▣ Various town trails
  - ▣ Sherwood neighborhood
  - ▣ Wethersfield neighborhood
  - ▣ Pond Street

# Streets with speeding/unsafe traffic

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- 804 responses
- Diverse responses: major roads and neighborhoods alike
- “seriously? every street. traffic is out of control”

# Top Natick destinations that are difficult to reach on foot

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- 513 responses
- Diverse responses – schools, commercial centers
- Top mentions:
  - ▣ Crossing route 9 / Route 9 destinations
  - ▣ Natick Center
  - ▣ West Natick T station
  - ▣ Most schools
  - ▣ Major markets (Roche Bros, Stop & Shop, Mall)
  - ▣ Parks, farms

# Other issues raised in survey

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- 537 responses – many concerns
- Top mentions:
  - ▣ Snow/ice removal
  - ▣ Parking/obstructions/vegetation on sidewalks
  - ▣ Driver behavior/enforcement
  - ▣ Lighting and visibility
  - ▣ Length of walk phases
  - ▣ Safer biking lanes
  - ▣ Inconsistent/unpredictable sidewalks

# 3. Pedestrian improvements today

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1. New developments built to current standards
2. Chapter 90 program replacing “like for like”
  1. Sidewalks are usually replaced if they already exist
3. Safety Committee process
4. Major transportation projects
5. Unaccepted and Scenic roads have limited options
  1. Unaccepted = private (e.g. Cottage until recently)
  2. Scenic = can't disturb trees/stone (e.g. Woodland)

# Bring sidewalk maps up to date

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# 4. Future improvements:

## A. Infrastructure

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- Staff capacity
- Bringing maps up to date
- Considering program for annual improvements (we now pair roads/sidewalks)
- Prioritize ongoing maintenance
- Resolving engineering issues
  - ▣ drainage, dimensions, topography
- Setting priorities based on need, feasibility, cost and funding

# Improving walkability:

## B. Behavior

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- Challenges:
  - Motorists not knowing/obeying laws
  - Obstructions (structures, plantings, snow/ice)
  - Other sidewalk users
- Solutions:
  - Education
  - Enforcement
  - Penalties
  - Bylaws



# Promoting walking:

## C. Programs

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- “Walking clubs”
  - ▣ General and targeted by neighborhood/need
- School-based programs
- Communications

# 5. Assessment challenges

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- Objectivity and Consistency
  - ▣ Standard framework to indicate conditions/issues
- Scope
  - ▣ Must be town-wide and block by block
- Information management
  - ▣ Meaningful to engineers and planners; limited town resources
- Personnel
  - ▣ Use 100+ volunteers effectively

# Walking Audit

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- Need a lot of walking auditors
- Limited number of slots today
- 50+ people want to attend a future session
- Focus now is on “training the trainers”
- Need to standardize information
  - ▣ Sidewalk segments
  - ▣ Coding
- Working with engineering firm to optimize input

# WalkBoston: Pedestrian Advocacy 101

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- (separate presentation)