



The Imagining Livability Design Collection

A visual portfolio of tools and transformations

A Publication of



About Us

With all members of the boomer generation now age 50-plus, the U.S. population consists of more older adults than ever before. By 2030, one out of every five people in the United States will be 65 or older, and the vast majority will want to remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. **AARP** is working to raise awareness about livability and help communities provide safe, walkable streets; age-friendly housing and transportation options; access to needed services and opportunities for residents of all ages to participate in community life. Learn more at aarp.org/livable.



aarp.org/livable



The **Walkable and Livable Communities Institute (WALC)** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a vision to create healthy, connected communities that support active living and advance opportunities for all people through walkable and bike-friendly streets and livable cities. With a volunteer board, a small staff and an extensive network of partners across the country, the WALC Institute seeks to inspire, teach, connect and support communities in their efforts to improve health and well-being through better-built environments. Learn more at walklive.org.

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Dan Burden, the WALC Institute's co-founder, inspired many of the photovisions shown in this book.

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Uncredited photographs in the Transformations section were provided by the WALC Institute.

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AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of nearly 38 million, that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities, strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as health care, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse.

Photovisions: Using Imagery to Advance Livability

AARP and the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute support the efforts of neighborhoods, towns and cities to become great places for people of all ages.

The two organizations regularly work together to provide inspiration and technical assistance to communities throughout the United States and to develop educational tools and resources, such as an award-winning 11-part Livability Fact Sheets series and *The Imagining Livability Design Collection* presented here.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

In the work we do, nothing beats the power of being able to see into the future. Since that's not possible (at least not yet!), an effective way to show the potential of a street is to create a "photovision," which is a set of two or more images that show how communities can change the built environment to become more livable for people of all ages.

We start with a "before" image of a place that needs improvements to make it more walkable, bike friendly and livable. From there, we create a vision for how the location *could* look. Doing so creates a striking new view.

Sometimes we phase in the changes by showing two or more iterations of the photovision; each phase adds new elements, progressively increasing the transformation of the street. A slow but steady approach can help local leaders see how effective change can happen incrementally. Some changes are as simple as adding sidewalks, bus stops, lighting and bike lanes, while others include reconfiguring intersections and constructing new buildings.

Tools and Transformations

The Imagining Livability Design Collection describes some of the most common tools and treatments for creating age-friendly environments — from the least-expensive, short-term wins to dramatic changes and long-term initiatives. All of the proposed

transformations are expected to create a return on investment by increasing business income, property values and new development; decreasing vehicle crashes, pedestrian injuries and fatalities; reducing medical costs; and improving air quality and overall public health.

Photovisions such as those in this collection help community members and local leaders imagine what's possible, develop a shared vision for the future and act upon that vision.

A visual glossary of **Tools** begins on page 4 and an album of **Transformations** starts on page 16.



AARP and the WALC Institute help communities nationwide become more livable.

The Tools

Local leaders, planners, engineers and visionaries of all kinds use a range of innovative and tested techniques to make a community more walkable, welcoming and livable. The tools listed here

are among those that can help towns, cities and neighborhoods achieve both subtle and spectacular transformations. Each is defined on the following pages.

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Short-Term Projects

Communities can get started by simply relocating the paint (or, in some places, *removing* the paint) on existing streets. Short-term and low-cost improvements can typically be implemented in less

than a year — sometimes as quickly as a few weeks — and cost anywhere from a few hundred to several thousand dollars. Here are a few tools of the trade.



Bicycle Lanes (including Protected Bike Lanes)

When done well, bicycle lanes are 6 feet wide or more and marked with a white stripe. A protected bike lane (or cycle track) is an exclusive lane that is physically separated from motor vehicle traffic by bollards (short, vertical posts), parked cars or other barriers that provide elements of a separated space and an on-road bicycle pathway. Cycle tracks may be one-way or two-way paths that are placed at road level, at sidewalk level or at an intermediate level. For more about bicycling and bike facilities, read the *Livability Fact Sheet: Bicycling* at aarp.org/livability-factsheets.

◀ BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Photo by Melissa Stanton, AARP Livable Communities



Chicanes

A chicane is a traffic safety treatment that slows vehicles by using landscaped curb extensions, planters, tree wells, bollards or other barriers to create short curves on a straight segment of roadway. For example, one form of a chicane is an S-shaped turn that is created by the placement of two closely sequenced curb extensions on opposite sides of the street. Because the result is a curved roadway that requires the driver to turn slightly left and then right again, the chicane helps reduce vehicle speeds.

◀ BRIGHTON, MICHIGAN

Photo by Dan Burden, WALC Institute co-founder

THE TOOLS



Crossing Islands

Also called a pedestrian refuge island or median island, a crossing island is a traffic-calming measure that's used when a roadway is very wide or when no traffic light exists. The "island" provides pedestrians with a safe harbor after having navigated across one direction of traffic before taking on the next. This crossing island features a "Z" crossing, which helps ensure that pedestrians are looking in the direction of oncoming traffic as they prepare to step into the vehicle lane. By reducing the crossing distance, an island also increases pedestrian visibility and safety. Another benefit: Crossing islands can feature signage and attractive landscaping.

◀ ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Photo by the WALC Institute



Curb Extensions

A curb extension (sometimes called a "neckdown" or "bulb-out") is a traffic-calming measure that's primarily used to extend the sidewalk to the outside edge of the vehicle travel lane. Doing this reduces the distance a person must cross, which in turn increases pedestrian visibility and safety. Curb extensions are especially helpful to the most vulnerable roadway users, including children, older adults and people with disabilities. Curb extensions can also include landscaping, signs, seating and bicycle racks. Learn more by reading the *Livability Fact Sheet: Traffic Calming* at aarp.org/livability-factsheets.

◀ HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS (the present and the possibilities)

Photo by the WALC Institute / Photovision by the WALC Institute, TDC Design Studio and the Hot Springs Area Metropolitan Planning Organization



THE TOOLS



Directions (or “Wayfinding”)

Wayfinding is a term that describes the use of signs and connected walkways and bicycle routes to help travelers navigate through neighborhoods, towns and cities. Directional (or wayfinding) signage should be highly visible — preferably with a standardized, decorative color and style — and placed to guide users through a network of routes that connect destinations and neighborhoods.

◀ CEDAR FALLS, IOWA

Photo by the WALC Institute



Head-Out Diagonal Parking

Parallel parking, in which parked vehicles line up single file flush and parallel to the side of the street, is a common parking configuration. An even safer approach is to convert to head-out diagonal parking, which allows a vehicle to back into a parking space at a slight angle so the front or “head” of the vehicle faces the street. In such a scenario people are protected from moving traffic when they get into or out of a car. Also, when leaving the spot, the driver’s visibility of the road is improved. Another bonus: Head-out diagonal parking can yield more parking spaces than parallel parking. Learn more by reading the *Livability Fact Sheet: Parking* at aarp.org/livability-factsheets.

◀ SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Photo by Dan Burden, WALC Institute co-founder

THE TOOLS



▲ **MONETT, MISSOURI** (the present and the possibilities)

Photo by the WALC Institute / Photovision by the WALC Institute, TDC Design Studio and CoxHealth Monett



◀ 1



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Lane Narrowing

Many traffic lanes are unnecessarily wide, which encourages high vehicle speeds and increases the chance and severity of collisions. Narrowing lanes from 12 or 15 feet wide to 10 or 11 feet wide encourages lower, safer vehicle speeds and increases safety for all users — especially for people who are walking and bicycling. The narrowing of lanes rarely disrupts the normal traffic flow, even for trucks and emergency vehicles.

In the photo-vision evolution of Hato Rey, Puerto Rico (below left), vehicle lanes are made narrower and “sharrow” markings are added. (Sharrows are shared bicycle and vehicle lanes.) Crosswalks and street parking also help to naturally slow down vehicles, create a safety buffer between cars and pedestrians and increase livability. Landscaping, bicycle parking, colorized parking spaces and a sidewalk parklet all help create a new sense of place.

“Lane widths should be considered within the assemblage of a given street delineating space to serve all needs, including travel lanes, safety islands, bike lanes and sidewalks. Each lane width discussion should be informed by an understanding of the goals for traffic calming as well as making adequate space for larger vehicles, such as trucks and buses. Lane widths of 10 feet are appropriate in urban areas and have a positive impact on a street’s safety without impacting traffic operations.”

— From the *Urban Street Design Guide*, published by the National Association of City and Transportation Officials

◀ HATO REY, PUERTO RICO

Photo by the WALC Institute / Photovisions by the WALC Institute, TDC Design Studio and AARP

THE TOOLS



▲ SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Photos by Jack Verdon Architecture (left) and sbetterstreets.org (above)

Parklets and Pocket Parks

A parklet (far left) is a small space that serves as an extension of the sidewalk, providing amenities and green space for neighborhood retail streets and commercial areas.

A pocket park (near left) is a tiny park, often located within curb extensions or in alleyways, parking lots, empty building lots and other underused spaces that create places where people can rest, gather and socialize.

Parklets and pocket parks both accommodate an unmet demand for public spaces and often have a distinctive design that incorporates seating, landscaping, bicycle parking, signage, play structures and even artwork.



Pedestrian-Scaled Lighting

In many communities, lighting is installed on very high poles in order to light the street for the safety and visibility of motor vehicles. Pedestrian-scaled lighting illuminates sidewalks, bus stops, seating areas, paths and other walking and bicycling features.

◀ TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

Photo by Dan Burden, WALC Institute co-founder

THE TOOLS



Rain Gardens

A rain garden or “bioswale” is a landscaped depression or hole that allows rainwater runoff from roofs, streets, driveways, sidewalks, trails, parking lots and compacted lawn areas to soak into the ground as opposed to flowing into storm drains and surface waters. Such landscape features help prevent erosion, water pollution, flooding and diminished groundwater quality.

◀ PORT TOWNSEND, WASHINGTON

Photo by the WALC Institute



Safety Buffers

A buffer is a painted or physically separated area that provides a safety zone between people walking or bicycling and moving vehicles. For instance, a line of paint creating a 3-foot-wide gap on a road to the right of a bicycle lane creates a “door zone” between people on bicycles and the parked cars, thereby removing the threat of a bicyclist colliding with an opening car door.

Other buffer examples include parked cars, bicycle lanes and crossing islands that act as protective buffers between pedestrians and passing vehicles. In the image at left a crossing island protects pedestrians who are crossing the street. A bicycle lane acts as a buffer for a driver getting into and out of a parked car. People walking on sidewalks are buffered by trees, parked cars, a bike lane and street furnishings such as benches and informational kiosks that are placed next to the sidewalk.

◀ BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Photo from the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guide

THE TOOLS



Sharrows

A sharrow is a shared-lane marking that's placed in the middle of a travel lane to indicate that bicyclists are permitted to use the full lane. Such a marking helps establish a shared understanding between drivers and bicyclists that they can each use the lane, so they'd best keep an eye out for one another.

◀ ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

Photo courtesy Arlington County, Virginia



Street Trees

In a neighborhood setting, street trees provide shade, safety, greenery, storm mitigation, energy savings, fresh air and a haven for songbirds and squirrels. Trees visually screen utility poles and concrete sidewalks, and they help to quiet street noise. Trees can be planted in (among other streetscape locations) tree wells, between sidewalks and streets and in curb extensions and refuge islands. Learn more by reading the *Livability Fact Sheet: Street Trees* at aarp.org/livability-factsheets.

◀ LAKE OSWEGO, OREGON

Photo by Dan Burden, WALC Institute co-founder

Mid-Range Projects

Mid-range improvements, which tend to take anywhere from a year to several years to complete, can cost from \$10,000 to a half-million dollars to implement. Such mid-range efforts may need

to be prioritized as to the order in which they are pursued. The projects can be proposed and discussed as part of new plans or as additions to existing undertakings.



▲ DES MOINES, IOWA (the present and the possibilities)

Photo by the WALC Institute / Photovision by the WALC Institute, TDC Design Studio and AARP

Modern and Mini Roundabouts

A modern roundabout (left) or mini-roundabout (bottom) is a circular intersection that moves traffic counterclockwise around a central island. In doing so, vehicle speeds slow down to safer speeds, reducing injuries and deaths by up to 90 percent. Roundabouts also reduce noise and air pollution and can handle 30 to 50 percent more traffic than conventional intersections.

A splitter island at the center of the roundabout (see the image at near left) helps people cross the street more safely by allowing them to cross only one direction of traffic at a time. In addition, landscaping and bicycle lanes help to inspire a revitalization of the neighborhood. Learn more by reading the *Livability Fact Sheet: Modern Roundabouts* at aarp.org/livability-factsheets.



◀ SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Photo by Dan Burden, WALC Institute co-founder

THE TOOLS



Road Diets

This traffic-calming technique reduces the number of travel lanes or the effective width of a roadway to improve safety and provide space for amenities or other modes of travel. The most common road diet is a four-to-three conversion, where two lanes in each direction are converted to one lane in each direction plus a center turning lane or median. This technique rarely increases congestion, but it does reduce dangerously high vehicle speeds and the chance and severity of collisions. Learn more by reading the *Livability Fact Sheet: Road Diets* at aarp.org/livability-factsheets.

◀ CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Photo courtesy City of Charlotte, N.C.



Shared-Use Paths

A shared-use path (also called a multiuse path or trail) is a paved or natural surface for walking and bicycling that is fully separated from motor vehicles. A shared-use path can be as narrow as 6 feet wide, but the ideal path is 12 feet wide for people walking in both directions, plus a striped or separated path 12 feet wide for biking in both directions. Painted stripes and other wayfinding signage indicate each type of travel and travel direction.

◀ DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Photo courtesy Detroit Greenways Coalition



Sheltered Bus Stops

In many communities, a bus stop is simply a sign on a utility pole. The signage is sometimes so small it can be difficult for riders to even determine the location of the stop, and people waiting for the bus are forced to endure wind, rain, sun and snow. At night, they stand and wait in complete darkness. A sheltered bus stop is a covered off-street structure, with at least three glass sides and a roof. The shelter provides seating and lighting, includes a transit map and schedules, and is set back from the roadway enough to allow for a person to enter and exit the bus stop area from a sidewalk rather than from stepping into the street.

◀ MADISON, WISCONSIN

Photo by Dan Burden, WALC Institute co-founder

Long-Range Projects

With short-term and mid-range treatments in place, the area becomes safer and more attractive to residents and others, including developers. When that happens, new policies and mixed-use development can help transform a street or entire

neighborhood into a more livable and prosperous place. Long-range initiatives can be relatively low-cost, especially if they're focused on policy change, but the efforts generally take several years to fully implement.



Liner Buildings

Sprawling development and “strip malls” commonly feature buildings that are set back from the street with large surface parking lots in front. Liner buildings help convert this type of development into a pedestrian-scaled area by replacing a part of the surface parking with buildings that “line” the edge of the former parking lot and are close to the street and adjacent to sidewalks. Transparency (i.e. the amount of window space) is an important feature and benefit of liner buildings, which, when located in retail areas, should be at least 70 percent “transparent” on the street-facing side. Liner buildings create a sense of place, enhance the liveliness of a community and, as “eyes on the street,” its safety. Over time, the old strip mall-style buildings can be redeveloped so the entire area becomes more of an urban village.

◀ KINGSTON, WASHINGTON

Photo by the WALC Institute



Mixed-Use Development

Buildings that are designed for mixed uses are more efficient than single-use and single-floor buildings, and they contribute to a more prosperous, people-friendly environment. A building of two to eight stories, with retail on the bottom floor facing the street and office or residential uses on the upper floors, creates a much higher return on investment, with greater long-term tax revenue and a more walkable and healthy community.

◀ DAVIS, CALIFORNIA

Photo by Dan Burden, WALC Institute co-founder

Planning & Policies

Complete Streets Policies

Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and enable safe access for all users. In doing so, the community becomes a better place to live. A Complete Street may include sidewalks, bicycle lanes (or wide, paved shoulders), special bus lanes, comfortable and accessible public transit stops, frequent and safe crossing opportunities, median islands, curb extensions, narrower travel lanes, modern roundabouts and more. A Complete Street in a rural area will be different from a Complete Street in an urban area, but both are designed to balance safety and convenience for everyone using the road.

Form-Based Codes

Traditional zoning tends to promote a separation of land uses, which typically leads to low-density development, “one-size-fits-all” housing choices and excessive automobile dependency. By using the physical form rather than the separation of uses as an organizing principle, form-based codes offer a powerful alternative to conventional zoning. Form-based codes maximize the relationships between buildings and the street, pedestrians and vehicles, public and private spaces and the size and types of roads and blocks. Instead of dictating or limiting activities, the code focuses on such elements as parking locations and limits, building frontages and entrances, window standards, streetscaping and building elevations. Form-based code can be customized to fit a community’s vision, be it to preserve and enhance a neighborhood’s character or to dramatically change and improve it. Learn more by reading the *Livability Fact Sheet: Form-Based Code* at aarp.org/livability-factsheets.

Health Impact Assessments

When public health is considered among the goals of transportation policy and land-use planning, the results can help reduce air pollution, prevent traffic injuries and deaths and lower the rates of chronic disease. Transportation health impact assessments (HIAs) help policy makers evaluate and address the potential health effects of a proposed transportation project and plan a policy before it’s built or implemented. A transportation HIA can ensure that all people, regardless of age, income or ability, are able to move about their community easily and safely.

Placemaking

Placemaking is both an overarching concept and a hands-on tool for improving a neighborhood, city or region. It combines the art and science of planning, designing and managing public spaces to attract people, build community and create a local identity. Transportation systems contribute to placemaking when they encourage walking and bicycling, which are activities that help to create public spaces that promote health, happiness, and well-being. Placemaking can be used to improve all of the spaces that comprise the gathering places within a community — its streets, sidewalks, parks, buildings and other public spaces — so they invite greater interaction between people and foster healthier, more social and economically viable communities.

Now that you know some of the tools of the trade, see how they can be used to create great transformations. ►

Transformations

It can be inspiring to see how a place has been renovated, restored or rebuilt for the better. When a change hasn't yet occurred, it's both fun and useful to imagine the ways various improvements might transform a location. In such scenarios it's even more useful to show — through imagery — how a particular community or location really could be transformed.

The transformations on the following pages show real locations as they appeared during our visits between 2010 and 2015. We helped each community develop a vision for the future, and we created photovisions to reflect those changes and how each place could be made better.

Rural and Local Roads (pages 17-20)

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- Honoring the Past, "Placemaking" for the Future
- A Better Intersection for Beachgoers
- Traffic Calming a Mixed-Use Street

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- Making Downtown a Destination

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- Connecting a Neighborhood and its Surroundings
- Putting Crosswalks Where People Need Them
- Making Parking More Productive
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- Bringing an Alley to Life
- Connecting the Community to a Key Asset
- Creating a Trail for Recreation and Evacuation



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Getting People Across a Bridge

in Underhill Flats, Vermont



The Present

This bridge leads to a village in northern Vermont that serves as a regional center of culture, commerce and community. The village is taking steps to become an attractive, vibrant area that encourages active transportation, increases economic development and enhances health, well-being and overall quality of life. However, although more than 15,000 commuters from the surrounding area pass through the village on this route, there is little to signal to the drivers that they're arriving at and passing through a place where they should slow down and even visit for a while.

The Challenges

- Due to high traffic volumes and fast vehicle speeds, the route is not a desirable place to walk.
- Drivers coming into the town are not slowing for pedestrians.
- At the bridge location, people using any form of transportation other than a motorized vehicle are left completely unsupported.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- The existing bridge becomes a gateway and an entry cue that motorists should be slowing down prior to entering a pedestrian-friendly village.
- People walking or biking have a protected space in which to cross the bridge.
- The gateway structure, landscaping, signage and lighting embrace the heritage of Vermont.
- Vehicle lanes are narrower, which helps to calm traffic and enable the leftover space to be used as a protected path.

Honoring the Past, Placemaking for the Future in Clarksdale, Mississippi



The Present

This neighborhood district in Clarksdale — the “Birthplace of the Blues” — is no longer the walkable, vibrant community hub it once was. Until recent decades, residents had everything they needed within walking distance, including a post office, a doctor’s office, a grocery store and the Myrtle Hall School. Now, the school building stands empty. The northern boundary of the neighborhood is a major state highway accented by strip malls. There’s very little support for people walking or bicycling, and an “adult” motel in the neighborhood conflicts with the community’s values. But residents are ready to restore the area into a place that reflects the community’s pride.

The Challenges

- Through a combination of inappropriate land uses, numerous vacant buildings, an absence of lighting and a lack of infrastructure for people walking, bicycling or enjoying the park, there are no “eyes on the street” to enhance livability and security.



The Possibilities

- The area isn’t accessible for people with disabilities.
- The roads and intersections are overly wide, which encourages speeding and makes crossing difficult for pedestrians.

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- Sidewalks, curb extensions, crosswalks and street parking make the corridor more walkable.
- Parking is convenient, helps calm traffic and supports retail success.
- Ramps comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- The park becomes a place people want to visit, with a water feature, seating, a playground and other spaces for enlivening the area.
- A market offers outdoor seating, which entices people to linger a bit.
- Narrowing the roadway reduces vehicle speeds and crossing distances, making the location more appropriate for the neighborhood, better for businesses and more comfortable for pedestrians and bicyclists.

A Better Intersection for Beachgoers in Kailua, Hawaii



The Present

The main thoroughfare of this scenic Hawaiian town leads to a grocery store and the famous soft sands of Kailua Beach Park. In some places along the street, trees, mid-block crossings and new buildings have created a place that encourages walking. Along certain sections people are seen on foot (often barefoot) shopping, eating and using transit or the state's first bike-sharing program. However, at this triangle intersection — which provides access to the market and the beach — crossing on foot or bicycle is difficult. Also, vehicle traffic sometimes backs up for more than a mile.

The Challenges

- The intersection is complex, with a high volume of cars turning left and people on foot or bicycle trying to cross the street to get to the market and the beach.
- A foot-worn path shows that improved support for all modes of transportation is needed.



The Possibilities

- People renting kayaks cross mid-block instead of at the intersection because the intersection is too daunting. (However, since there isn't a clear mid-block crossing, the street is confusing to both pedestrians and drivers.)

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- A modern roundabout slows vehicles to a safer speed while still moving traffic efficiently.
- Since such a roundabout also simplifies the intersection, it eliminates the conflicts created by left turns and makes crossing easier for people who are walking, bicycling or pulling a kayak.

Traffic Calming a Mixed-Use Street in Burlington, Vermont



The Present

This South End neighborhood is a key connector between residences and the downtown area of Burlington. There is a lot of traffic, and congestion has become a problem. This street, in particular, is a truck route, although the possibility of moving trucks to an alternate route is being discussed.

The Challenges

- The four-way-stop intersection creates congestion during rush hour and is prone to collisions, including high-speed crashes due to driver error.
- The constant starting and stopping of cars and trucks wastes fuel and is noisy for nearby residents.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- A domed “mini roundabout” reduces collisions, congestion, pollution and noise while also helping to beautify the neighborhood. The intersection is still traversable by even the largest trucks, since the low-profile dome functions as a “truck apron,” enabling turning movements right over it.
- Due to a limited right-of-way, there isn’t room enough for both a bike lane and parking on both sides of the street, even with narrower 10-foot travel lanes. Therefore, street parking is placed on the downhill side, and a bike lane is added on the uphill side.
- Cyclists “take the lane” while traveling downhill.
- Sharrow markings in the downhill lane let everyone know that bicyclists are allowed in the lane.

Inspiring Redevelopment in Kingsport, Tennessee



The Present

This corner on the edge of the downtown provides great potential for an underperforming area that's dominated by a dusty parking lot and strip-format buildings. Across one street, the city has constructed a multiuse path that will connect to a "greenbelt" trail for walking and bicycling. Nearby, a new building houses medical offices and the Chamber of Commerce.

The Challenges

- Although this is an underperforming area, nearby development creates a demand for services and people are frequently seen crossing midblock.
- The intersection is somewhat chaotic, with drivers "shooting the gap" to make left turns and with two legs of the intersection lacking crosswalk markings.
- The road is overbuilt for cars and is a great candidate for a road diet.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- The street is retrofit to be more supportive of people and a mix of land uses makes it a premier destination.
- Greater density and multistory buildings are allowed.
- Blocks are about 300 feet long and rows of buildings front the streets, creating an interior courtyard within them.
- On-street parking reduces the need for off-street parking, which simultaneously improves walking conditions by helping to calm traffic and to create a buffer between vehicles and pedestrians.
- Any new off-street parking is placed behind the buildings.
- Where existing parking lots meet the sidewalk or street, they are given "edges," such as attractive landscaping, transparent fences or low walls.
- A modern roundabout moves vehicles safely and more efficiently while also making crossings easier and safer for pedestrians.

Revitalizing Main Street in Batesville, Arkansas



The Present

About 50 years ago, a one-way street system was imposed in Batesville's Main Street area, forcing traffic on one street to head in one direction and the vehicles going the other way to do so on another street. The resulting fast-moving traffic, combined with a lack of investment in the downtown core, set the stage for the street to languish. Occupancy rates dropped to 50 percent, and many of the remaining businesses opened for only limited hours. A beautiful stream that flows parallel to Main Street wasn't maximized as an asset. More recently, the community adopted a plan that envisions a walking trail along the stream. Also, a citywide effort was initiated to build parks, trails, recreational opportunities and community events. These successes, combined with a compact street grid, attractive commercial buildings and strong community and political support prime Main Street Batesville for a revitalization success.



The Possibilities

The Challenges

- As is true of many communities throughout the United States, streets are focused on emptying the downtown of its occupants as quickly as possible. (A downtown's after-hours life, retail sales, social capital and overall sense of place suffer as a result.)
- With a 40-foot-wide roadway, drivers accelerate to 30 mph or more between signals and abruptly stop for red lights.
- The location is unwelcoming for pedestrians and cyclists.

Continued ▶▶

Revitalizing Main Street in Batesville, Arkansas

◀ Continued from the previous page

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- With the goals of revitalizing Main Street and better connecting people to the nearby stream, the street is traffic-calmed and the environment made to fully support people walking and bicycling.
- The street is narrowed to one 10-foot vehicle travel lane and the remaining pavement is reallocated: 17 feet for diagonal parking spots, 8 feet for parallel parking spots and 2.5-foot buffers on each side of the travel lane. These changes, applied along two blocks, decrease the road's speed to about 15 mph and increase the amount of available street parking from 40 spots to 65.
- Removing the traffic signal saves the city \$15,000 to \$30,000 per year in operation costs.
- Curb extensions narrow the intersection, making pedestrian crossings only 14 feet across.
- Moving the diagonal parking and parallel parking from one side of the street to the other at each block shifts the vehicle travel lane about 10 feet as it goes through the intersection. This change creates a traffic-calming "chicane."
- Suburban-style "cobra head" street lights are replaced with smaller, attractive, pedestrian-scaled lamps that illuminate the sidewalks.



▲ A WORK IN PROGRESS

Photo courtesy of Main Street Batesville

Change is underway in Batesville. The community, led by Main Street Batesville, has rallied around its new vision and developed plans to revitalize five blocks of the downtown area. The first block of the new vision (pictured) was pilot-tested and built within a year of the vision being set. Merchants have reported increased business, a farmers' market opened and the downtown area is becoming an overall better destination.

Making Downtown a Destination in Avondale Estates, Georgia



The Present

A strong sense of place and identity is created in Avondale Estates through its unique architecture, including many Tudor-style buildings. The central business district certainly benefits from these attractive buildings, as well as from on-street parking that sends the visual cue for drivers to slow down. Unfortunately, the downtown area has become a place for residents and visitors to pass through rather than stay.

The Challenges

- The posted speed limit and actual vehicle speeds are too fast for a place that should be focused on people, not just on cars.
- The intersection is complex, with many potential points of conflict.
- Pedestrian crossings are missing.
- Street corners have overly wide “turning radii.”
- The area lacks street furniture and other amenities such as bicycle racks, landscaping, wayfinding signage, and trash and recycling bins.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- A sense of arrival is enhanced by converting the intersection to a modern roundabout with a mini roundabout preceding it. (This combination of tools slows cars while keeping traffic flowing. It also reduces noise and makes it easier to get into and out of a parking spot.)
- The increased quiet makes the area more suitable for outdoor dining.
- Large vehicles can make turns without encroaching on the corners.
- A colored surface is added to the intersection to further calm traffic and reinforce the community’s character and identity.
- Overhead wires are removed.

Improving Community Access in Winter Garden, Florida



The Present



The Possibilities



... and more Possibilities

Located in a suburban area dominated by single-family housing, this Winter Garden roadway is an important connector for kids walking and biking to school as well as for workers getting to their commuter routes. Vehicle congestion has increased as the surrounding areas have developed and commercial and retail establishments have flourished. On one corner of the intersection is a municipal baseball park. The remaining three corners are slated for commercial development. Instead of widening the roadway and intersection to allow for more vehicles at faster speeds, the community envisions a safer intersection that creates better access for everyone and attracts high-quality commercial development.

The Challenges

- The intersection, which is a critical access point for schoolchildren, is becoming more congested with vehicular traffic as the area develops.
- The speed limit (40 mph on one of the approaches) is fast and dangerous.
- Drivers take risks to get through the intersection before the light turns red.
- Crashes have occurred, including one in which an elementary school student riding a bicycle was hit by a left-turning car.

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- A modern roundabout slows vehicles to a safer speed while still moving traffic efficiently. Since such a roundabout also simplifies the intersection, it eliminates the conflicts created by left turns and makes crossing easier for people who are walking or bicycling.
- Adjacent landowners donate corner clips of their properties to allow for the roundabout, which will ultimately enhance property values.
- The bicycle lane allows a cyclist to use the roundabout as a car would or to exit the protected lane, dismount and cross the roundabout as a pedestrian.
- Having made a quality public investment into the area, quality private investment follows (as depicted by the last photovision, above).

Connecting a Neighborhood and its Surroundings in Fort Worth, Texas



The Present

This Fort Worth road is both a commuter route and a primary access point for a residential neighborhood, a commercial area, an emerging arts district and several schools. Violent crime is a notable problem in the general area, and people, including children and senior citizens, are seen walking along and crossing the four-lane roadway, which measures about 44 feet from curb to curb and carries more than 20,000 vehicles a day.

The Challenges

- A mixture of housing, churches, late-night establishments, schools, stores and more creates a demand for safe places where people can cross.
- Proper crossing areas are about a half-mile from one other, leading to pedestrians crossing mid-block in unmarked locations.
- The road is overly wide and fosters fast vehicle speeds.
- Sidewalks are missing in some sections, are blocked by vehicles in others and in too many places are too near the edge of the road.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- A road diet makes the street safer and more welcoming.
- On-street parking, a bike lane and a colored center-turn lane are added.
- A modern roundabout slows vehicles to a safer speed while still moving traffic efficiently. Since such a roundabout also simplifies the intersection, it eliminates the conflicts created by left turns and makes crossing easier for people who are walking or bicycling.
- Curb extensions serve to (1) narrow the crossing distance for pedestrians, (2) create a tighter and slower turn for vehicles entering the main street, and (3) provide spaces for parklets, street furniture and bike racks.
- Pedestrian-scale lighting supports walking and bicycling after dark.
- Liner buildings convert previously unused parking lots into productive retail space that generates revenue and locates buildings where they help provide security and “eyes on the street.”
- Covered bus shelters protect transit riders from the sun and rain.

Putting Crosswalks Where People Need Them in Detroit, Michigan



The Present

A sprawling, car-focused corridor in Detroit feeds too-fast vehicle speeds and lacks a sense of place. Along the corridor, land uses create mid-block “desire lines,” or places where pedestrians want to cross the street to get from one destination to another. Indeed, many people routinely cross mid-block in this area. Residents want and need active modes of transportation to access their daily destinations, including schools, stores and places of employment.

The Challenges

- Long blocks create long distances between intersections and crosswalks.
- With no mid-block crossings, pedestrians must either walk far out of their way to an intersection or take their chances during a lull in the traffic.
- Crosswalk markings are faded, making them difficult for drivers to see.
- The roadway is overly wide, which leads to increased vehicle speeds and makes the crossing distances long — and dangerous — for pedestrians.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- The street remains a multilane arterial roadway, except it now includes mid-block crossings with on-demand call buttons that allow pedestrians to activate a crossing signal.
- Crosswalk markings are highly visible and at least 12 feet deep.
- Vehicle lanes are 10 feet wide.
- Bicycle lanes have been added and bicycle parking is placed at storefronts.
- Shelter is provided at all transit stops.
- The posted speed limit is lowered to 30 mph.
- Street parking is converted to head-out diagonal parking.
- Mixed-use, in-fill development creates a destination. Property values rise.
- This “Complete Street” now offers transportation options.

Making Parking More Productive in Tupelo, Mississippi



The Present

This area of Tupelo connects residents to prized schools, as well as to churches and local stores. Unfortunately, the emphasis on moving and storing vehicles has created an environment that is hostile to pedestrians and bicyclists. Property values are diminished, and there's an overabundance of off-street parking and missed opportunities for providing on-street parking.

The Challenges

- Sidewalks and other pedestrian infrastructure are completely missing on one side of the street, which forces pedestrians to either walk in the street or to cross the street two times in order to reach their destination.
- More “eyes on the street” and pedestrian-scaled lighting are needed.
- Excess off-street parking is an inefficient and isolating use of land.
- The overly wide roadway encourages high vehicle speeds and forces pedestrians to cross long distances.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- The street is restored as a prime place for neighborhood living.
- The large parking lot is redeveloped to become a true community asset.
- On-street parking reduces the need for off-street parking, which improves walking conditions by helping to calm traffic and create a buffer between vehicles and pedestrians.
- The posted speed is lowered to 25 mph.
- Where the parking ends and the curb extension begins the crossing distance is narrower and easier for pedestrians.
- A modern roundabout slows vehicles to a safer speed while still moving traffic efficiently. Since such a roundabout also simplifies the intersection, it eliminates the conflicts created by left turns and makes crossing easier for people who are walking or bicycling.
- The placement of street trees, which also tend to reduce vehicle speeds, helps to create a buffer that protects pedestrians.

Repairing a Deadly Street in Atlantic City, New Jersey



The Present

This Atlantic City thoroughfare is a major transportation route used by pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers and public-transit users, yet it's sorely deficient in basic infrastructure and amenities. A shopping mall generates trips to and on the street, but the corridor prioritizes vehicle mobility over multimodal accessibility. The area is characterized by vast expanses of asphalt with high maintenance costs. Sadly, the corridor takes lives. The roadway is the county's most deadly street for pedestrians. There are no quick fixes here, but the area has the potential to become a prosperous village.

The Challenges

- Wide roads and large intersections encourage vehicle speeds even faster than the posted 50 mph speed limit.
- The overly wide road increases the distance pedestrians must cross.
- Buildings set back and separated from the street by underutilized parking lots force people to walk even greater distances once they're off the street.



The Possibilities

- Sidewalks are absent in many locations.
- Crosswalks are not marked and pedestrian signals do not exist.
- The lack of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, accessible transit stops and traffic-calming measures deter walking and bicycling, which increases automobile dependency for even short trips and, therefore, congestion.

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- The thoroughfare remains a multilane arterial roadway, but it now includes a frontage road with street parking, a safe and highly visible crosswalk and crossing island, a wide bike lane and covered transit stop.
- Mixed-use infill development is built to pedestrian scale.
- Adjacent land values are increased and the mall becomes a destination.

Celebrating an Arts Heritage in Exmore, Virginia



The Present

This artisans' town features an historic Main Street and is home to one of the largest employers in the county — a manufacturer of mosaic tiles. The town has chosen to invest in revitalizing its downtown and celebrating its arts heritage. However, this uninviting intersection is located just one block off Exmore's Main Street, making the connection into the downtown neighborhood both placeless and unsupportive of pedestrians and bicyclists.

The Challenges

- No sidewalks or marked crossings are provided.
- The buildings turn their stark and windowless backs onto the street.
- Street corners have wide turning radii that allow vehicles to take the turns at fast speeds.
- Trees are missing and overhead utility wires are unsightly.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- A neighborhood pocket park featuring a mural wall and mosaic blossoms better celebrates the community's connection to art.
- The intersection is calmer, with better support for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Vacant buildings are transformed into studios.
- A raised mini-circle is decorative and slows traffic.
- Freight trucks have room enough to maneuver and load and off-load materials.

Improving a Complex Intersection in Dallas, Texas



The Present

The landmark Five Points intersection is the front door to one of Dallas' most diverse and transit-oriented neighborhoods. However, the intersection is complex, with five streets connecting near three-story apartment buildings, a school and retail establishments. The number of turns made by vehicles and the intersection's high pedestrian use create numerous points of conflict and a high potential for crashes.

The Challenges

- Most development in the area is scaled for cars.
- Since the buildings don't front the street, they fail to create a sense of enclosure and security for pedestrians.
- Overly wide driveways encourage high-speed exits.
- Vast expanses of off-street parking diminish a sense of place.
- Sidewalks are "attached" to the curb with no buffer between pedestrians and the cars passing them.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- The Five Points intersection is much simpler and better managed with a modern roundabout.
- Rush-hour traffic flow moves smoothly and efficiently and at safe vehicle speeds.
- The roundabout's truck apron accommodates oversized vehicles.
- The placemaking value of the roundabout sets the stage for new buildings and businesses that honor the street and neighborhood.
- Lanes are narrowed and turn lanes are eliminated, making space for on-street parking.
- Off-street parking lots are redeveloped into more productive uses.

Redesigning a Downtown Street in Augusta, Georgia



The Present

Located within feet of the Savannah River and a riverwalk trail, this street on the edge of downtown Augusta borders a former railroad depot that's ready to be redeveloped. The plan presents an opportunity to create a stellar anchor point for the downtown, provide a destination for residents and visitors and maximize the value of the river and the depot's proximity to the water.

The Challenges

- The street, which is overly wide for a relatively low volume of traffic, allows cars to pass through at high speeds, which reduces the commercial value of the adjacent properties.
- The lack of a mid-block crossing creates a significant barrier for pedestrians.
- This "placeless" street may be suppressing opportunities to redevelop the old rail yard and surrounding parcels.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- The street becomes a shared space that better supports all roadway users at all times but can be closed to vehicle traffic for special events.
- Street trees and lighting fixtures add character and are properly scaled for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Street parking, tree wells and bike lanes fit within the existing right-of-way.
- Between 20 and 22 feet are allocated for two vehicle lanes — one in each direction, without a center line.
- Bike lanes double as "valley gutters" to help with stormwater management.
- Pervious concrete in the parking lanes also helps to manage stormwater.
- Inset parking and tree wells help keep traffic calm.
- New development doesn't turn its back on the street, but rather faces the street and provides strong connections from the street to the riverwalk.

Making a Riverwalk Approach More Walkable in New Orleans, Louisiana



The Present

Residents and tourists alike walk this intersection near the New Orleans Riverwalk. However, despite the destination's focus on pedestrian activity, there's very little support for getting to it by foot or bicycle. Also, practically nothing about the built environment announces one's arrival at this special place or draws people from the surrounding streets. Nonetheless, many people do walk and bicycle in the general area, including on the street pictured here, where vehicle traffic is relatively low most hours of most days. A sense of place and arrival can be created through some simple changes.

The Challenges

- The one-way traffic and wide lanes lead to too fast vehicle speeds.
- Sidewalks are narrow and are blocked in several places by utility poles and street trees. (In some spots two people can't walk side by side.)
- Utility wires are unsightly and at odds with the area's historic character.
- Crossings at the intersection aren't marked.



The Possibilities

- The intersection is wide, and no visual cues are given to drivers that they should expect to yield to pedestrians.
- Ramps don't meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- Traffic on the street is restored to two-way, with a lane in each direction.
- Street parking is kept on both sides of the street, but narrowing the travel lanes allows one side to be converted to head-out diagonal parking, which increases the number of spots available.
- Since New Orleans gets very hot, street trees are added to provide shade and help reduce the urban heat-island effect.
- The colored intersection draws attention to the space as a place for people.
- The intersection is raised, which makes it easier for people to cross and helps keep vehicles slow as they pass through it.
- Curb extensions shorten the crossing distance for pedestrians.

Creating a Festival Street in Birmingham, Alabama



The Present

Powell Avenue in downtown Birmingham looks and feels abandoned due to high vehicle speeds, pedestrian unfriendliness and an expanse of stark and windowless buildings.

The Challenges

- Powell Avenue occupies most of an extremely wide right-of-way that has relatively low traffic volumes.
- The conditions encourage vehicle speeding and expose pedestrians to harsh, unsheltered conditions.
- A sidewalk is available on only one side of the street, which leads to pedestrians walking in the street or crossing the street twice to get where they're going.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- Powell Avenue becomes a festival street and destination.
- A gateway entrance creates a sense of arrival.
- The roadway accommodates the traffic flow and provides parking during work hours on weekdays, but it can be closed to vehicle traffic in the evenings, on weekends and during special events.
- The bold markings in the lane remind drivers to proceed slowly.
- The street entrance is drastically narrowed with curb extensions, which help calm traffic as it enters the street and makes for shorter pedestrian crossings.
- Seating and bike racks are abundant.
- New businesses and buildings enliven the area.

Bringing an Alley to Life in Brownsville, Texas



The Present

Like similar spaces throughout the country, Brownsville's downtown alleys are used only for parking and deliveries. Due to its location, this particular alley can connect the city's downtown to the University of Texas Brownsville.

The Challenges

- The alley space is downright desolate.
- What could be maximized as a great public space and connector is instead an undesirable, underused location.

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- The alley is an inviting linear plaza.
- The buildings are brought to life by property owners who see the potential for the space and, as a result, repair the backsides of their buildings.
- Exterior walls are transformed into murals featuring the work of local artists and young people.



The Possibilities

- The fenced parking lot redevelops into a people-focused cafe and plaza.
- The impact of removing the off-street parking is offset by converting extra width in existing rights-of-way to provide on-street parking.
- Pedestrian-scaled lighting and shade help people feel welcome and watched over. (In the short term, a friendly police presence on foot or bicycle helps too.)
- As more people use the area, new private and public ventures emerge, such as a bicycle-share kiosk.
- Over time, building owners create new entrances and storefronts that turn toward the alley.
- Building transparency is high, with 70 to 90 percent of the ground-floor, outward-facing walls filled with windows.
- The surrounding area is primed for redevelopment, mixed-use buildings and a revitalized and more livable downtown.

Connecting the Community to a Key Asset in York, Pennsylvania



The Present

Dormant spaces like this one in York can be redeveloped with a mix of land uses such as apartments, retail shops, a movie theater, cafes and offices. Improving conditions in this downtown location and maximizing the value of its creek will require long-term solutions. In the short-term, though, some simple changes can lay the foundation for long-term success.

The Challenges

- Little has been done to make people feel welcome or to capitalize on the placemaking and economic value of the creek.
- By failing to provide a vista or view, this side of the creek is making the other side of the creek less appealing, too.



The Possibilities

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- While awaiting more significant redevelopment, such as a mixed-use development that celebrates and maximizes the value of the creek, work begins to build gathering places and a quality public space.
- The creek features a public walkway.
- The parking lot is replaced by a park.
- Extra width in surrounding streets is used as on-street parking to offset the removal of the parking lot.
- Placeless walls become murals featuring the work of local artists.
- A city-operated bicycle stand enlivens the space and makes people feel welcome and watched over.
- Public restrooms and wayfinding signage are provided.

Creating a Trail for Recreation *and* Evacuation in Orange Beach, Alabama



The Present



The Possibilities



... and more Possibilities

By partnering with adjacent towns, the state government and federal agencies, the Orange Beach community has an opportunity to develop a national model for evacuation routes that are eco-friendly and support active living when not being used for an emergency evacuation.

The Challenges

- The pedestrian trail in this location is needed as a link from the beach to an expressway that is a key evacuation route during emergencies.
- The desire is to keep the trail's use restricted to pedestrians and bicyclists while also having it be suitable for vehicles when needed.

Envisioning a More Livable Future

- The trail is 14 feet wide and built to support heavy loads.
- Most of the time, the trail is only for pedestrians and bicyclists and vehicles are prohibited.
- In times of emergency, the bollards preventing vehicle access are removed and the trail becomes a one-way route for vehicles during an emergency evacuation (as depicted by the last photovision, above).
- As many as 14,000 vehicles can pass through the space in a 10-hour period.
- Once the evacuation is complete, the trail is used as a route to bring emergency supplies and goods back to the coastal area.
- After the disaster or period of emergency has passed, the bollards are reinstalled and the trail is once again used for recreation and active (non-motorized) transportation.
- To support this "Eco-Evac" trail, its termination point at the nearby intersection is a gateway with a single-lane roundabout that expands to two lanes during a disaster evacuation.

Resources for Re-imagining

Have we inspired you?

With hopes that we have, here are more tools for how to re-imagine, re-create and revitalize places and spaces so they're more livable for people of all ages.

AARP Livable Communities

aarp.org/livable

Interviews, slideshows, how-to's, tool kits, case studies, report summaries, subject archives and so much more.

AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

aarp.org/agefriendly

A growing network of cities, towns and counties across the nation that are committed to being age-friendly places for older adults.

AARP Livable Communities Monthly eNewsletter

aarp.org/livable-newsletter

A multi award-winning, subscription-based, free online newsletter for elected officials, policy makers, planners, citizen activists and community leaders.

Walkable and Livable Communities Institute

walklive.org

The WALC Institute works with communities through its technical assistance program, shares free resources and disseminates news through its educational efforts, website and free newsletter.

Livability Fact Sheets

aarp.org/livability-factsheets

An award-winning series of easy-to use four-page fact sheets, published by AARP Livable Communities and the WALC Institute about the following livability features and techniques:

- Bicycling
- Density
- Economic Development
- Form-Based Code
- Modern Roundabouts
- Parking
- Revitalization Without Displacement
- Road Diets
- Sidewalks
- Street Trees
- Traffic Calming

If you have comments or questions, contact us:

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