Chinatown Walkability Report

華埠宜步行狀況研究報告

Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community
華埠更好團結聯盟
Solidarity

Created by Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (December 2017)

Introduction

Walkability is the ability for a neighborhood's infrastructure network to support people of all ages and abilities. In a walkable community, streets and sidewalks are designed to encourage safe multi-modal travel, social connections, and healthy lifestyles.

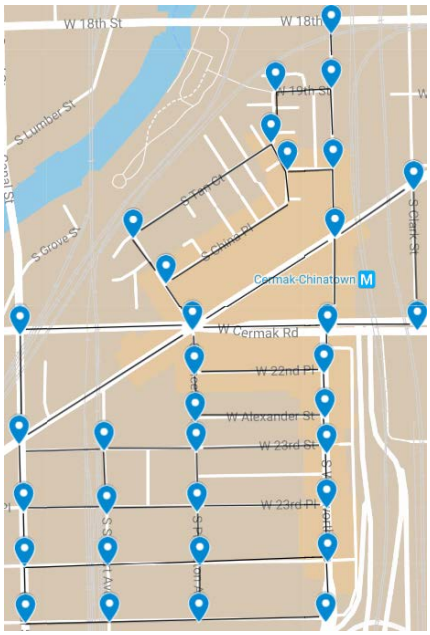
The Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC), with the Healthy Chicago 2.0 funding, engaged community members in thinking about how Chinatown's walkability impacts their health and wellbeing. With participation from high school youth, college students, seniors, ESL students, and the general public, CBCAC conducted a series of walkability audits and charrettes on safety, walking, and bicycling.

The goals of the project were:

- to identify key elements in the built environment that affect walkability;
- to recommend strategies that improve connectivity, accessibility, and safety for all road users; and
- to support the Chinatown Community Vision Plan 2015, which outlined strategies for creating a higher quality of life for Chinatown residents.

TOP: students auditing Tan Ct and Princeton intersection

The walkability audits were conducted between March and October of 2017 in the core of Chinatown. A total of 34 intersections and 51 blocks were audited. Each intersection was audited at three different time points. The boundaries of the study area are 18th Street to the north, 24th Place to the south, Canal Street to the west, and Clark Street to the east.



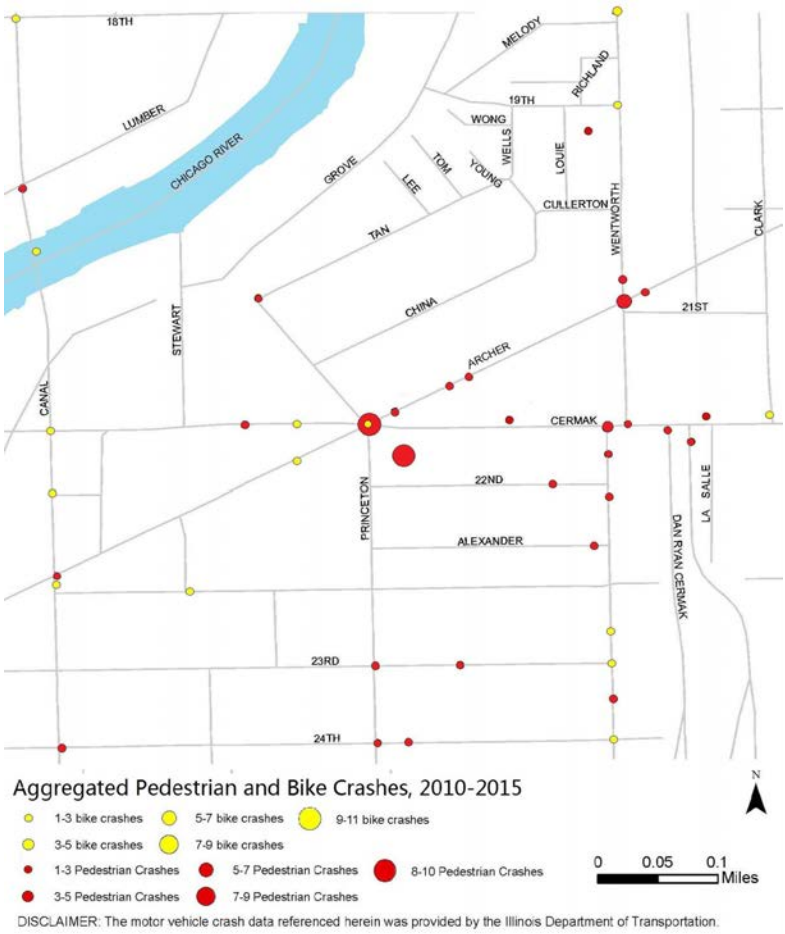
Data collection for the walkability audits was based on the Neighborhood Walkability Assessment Tool (NWAT) designed by Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC). Each audit consisted of a crosswalk observation followed by a street observation. Participants gathered data on several factors that affect walkability including sidewalk conditions, motorist and pedestrian behaviors, signage, perception of violence, neighborhood aesthetics and nearby amenities.

Chinatown Profile

Profile of Residents
Chinatown is home to a growing Chinese population with over 80% who identify as ethnically Chinese and many who are recent immigrants. It also has a higher than average population of seniors. Eighteen percent of the population is aged 65 or older, compared to 11% in Chicago[1]. Many of these seniors and recent immigrants do not have access to a car. While residents use different modes of transportation to get from place to place, public transit is the most common. Residents report typically getting around by CTA bus (37%), car (32%), walking (31%), CTA train (25%), and biking (10%).

Profile of Pedestrians
The core of Chinatown features a mix of restaurants, shops, cultural and community institutions, which attract a high volume of pedestrians during weekdays and weekends. Charrette surveys, designed to solicit feedback on walking and biking in Chinatown, revealed that pedestrians walk through or to Chinatown to complete daily routines (54%), for recreation (32%), to commute to work (30%), to exercise (23%), and to visit friends or family (18%). Chinatown also has several senior housing apartments, so many pedestrians are seniors who use walkers or other mobility aids.

Profile of Bicyclists
Although bicycling is the least common mode of transportation for Chinatown residents, bicyclists maintain a noticeable presence in the community. According to the charrette data, people ride their bicycles to complete routine errands (40%), for exercise (26%), for recreation (33%), and as part of their commute to work (19%). A majority of respondents reported riding their bicycles daily or weekly. However, safety concerns and poor bicycling infrastructure limit the use of bicycles to get around as evidenced by cyclists who ride on the sidewalks and by the number of crashes in the area.



RIGHT: The map shows locations of high crash areas for pedestrians and bicyclists in Chinatown between 2010 and 2015.

[1] Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency of Planning, 2015 Chinatown Community Vision Plan

Summary of Results

Charrettes

One hundred community members provided input on pedestrian, bicyclist, and safety improvements in Chinatown. In order to identify priority strategies for creating a safe and walkable neighborhood, participants were asked open-ended questions about walking and biking destinations, safety challenges, and recommended amenities.

Walking

People walk to: Chinatown Square, Wentworth, Chinese American Service League (CASL), Chinatown Library

What amenities or events would make Chinatown a more pleasant place for people walking?	
Clean Streets	26%
Better Lighting	19%
Public Seating	16%
More Police	14%
Improved Crosswalks	11%

TOP: Seniors fill out charrette surveys. Many seniors who live in Chinatown have limited mobility and are in the most need of safe and walkable streets.

Biking

People bike to: Chinatown Square, Wentworth, Chinatown Library, Pui Tak Center, Grocery stores

What amenities or events would make Chinatown a more pleasant place for people biking?	
Dedicated Bike Lanes	29%
Bike Parking	16%
Protected Bike Lanes	7%
Clean and Even Streets	6%
Improved Crosswalks	6%

Safety

Where people feel least safe: In viaducts and alleyways, problematic intersections (Cermak, Princeton, Archer), poor sidewalk and road conditions

What amenities would make Chinatown safer?	
Improved Lighting	18%
More Police	15%
Improved Sidewalks	13%
Regulate Traffic	10%
Improved Viaducts	6%

Walkability Audits

A total of 46 volunteers audited the streets and sidewalks of Chinatown using CLOCC's NWAT. Below is a summary of observations.

Challenges included:

Accessibility

- Narrow sidewalks
- Poorly maintained sidewalks
- Damaged or missing curb cuts/ramps
- Missing sidewalks
- Pathways obstructed by poles, signs
- Litter in streets and sidewalks

Safety

- Speeding traffic
- Misaligned, obstructed pedestrian lights
- No stop signs at some intersections
- Inadequate pedestrian scale lighting
- Long crosswalks
- Viaducts in poor condition
- Missing countdown timers
- Cars do not yield to pedestrians

Biking

- No protected bike lanes
- Not enough bike racks
- Cyclists riding on sidewalk

TOP: Youth volunteers learn how to conduct walkability audits.

TOP: Residents and tourists write down their hopes for the new year at Allen Lee Plaza on Wentworth. Place-making events like this help community members reimagine their public spaces.

Assets or elements noted as favorable to walking included:

- Countdown timers
- Curb bump outs
- Painted crosswalks
- Stop signs
- Shops/restaurants
- CTA (buses, trains)
- Benches
- Home gardens
- Landscaping
- Signage
- Parks, library
- Shade from trees
- More people

Summary of Key Findings

Pedestrian Crossings
At approximately 50% of the stop sign intersections audited, cars did not make complete stops. Many cars rolled through the intersections without yielding. At intersections without stop signs, cars stopped only when pedestrians have already entered the crosswalk. Cars did not always yield causing pedestrians to feel unsafe while crossing. This was especially problematic on Wentworth where vehicular and pedestrian traffic is typically heavy.

At 98% of traffic light intersections, cars stopped on the red light. However, yielding and stopping before the crosswalk were less common (~70%). In addition, traffic volume and speed were high. Speeding was noted as a safety concern at Canal/Cermak, Archer/Canal, Cermak/Clark, and the six-corner intersection at Archer/Cermak/Princeton. The combination of poor yielding behavior, speeding traffic, and high volume create unsafe and difficult crossing conditions for pedestrians.

TOP: faded crosswalk at Canal and Archer

Pedestrian Signals
Almost all intersections with traffic lights had pedestrian crossing signals. However, several locations were identified as problematic for pedestrians, especially seniors.

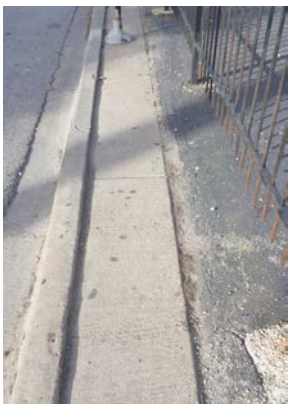
- Missing countdown timers: Archer/Canal, Archer/Clark, Archer/Cermak/Princeton
- Misaligned or obstructed signal: Archer/Cermak/Princeton, Archer/Wentworth
- Insufficient crossing time: Archer/Cermak/Princeton

TOP: tree obstructing pedestrian light at Princeton

Crosswalks
About 33% of the crosswalks did not have visible markings to indicate where a pedestrian should cross. Marked crosswalks are important because they alert motorists of pedestrian crossings. At unmarked crosswalks, motorists were less likely to yield or stop for pedestrians.

Sidewalks
In places with overgrown tree roots, some portions of existing sidewalks were cracked or uneven. This was prominent in residential areas, especially on 24th St and 24th Pl. Additionally, sidewalks were missing along the east side of Canal St, east side of Wentworth Ave, and west side of Stewart St.

In terms of sidewalk width, most sidewalks were 5' or greater. However, several stretches were narrowed due to trees and other obstructions, such as utility poles, signs, and overgrown vegetation. Those sidewalks did not meet ADA accessibility standards and created mobility challenges for people using walkers, wheelchairs, or strollers. The east side of Wentworth by Archer Ave, in particular, was significantly narrow (less than 2'). As a result, many pedestrians crossed unsafely from the parking lot to the west side of street.


TOP: narrow sidewalk on Wentworth by Archer


TOP: cracked sidewalk by Centennial Mural

Curb Ramps
Curb ramps provide transitions between the street and the sidewalk for people with disabilities. Approximately 78% of sidewalks audited had curb ramps; however, a majority needed repair. Many ramps did not have ADA required tactile pads. At intersections without accessible ramps, namely along Stewart Ave, pedestrians with mobility aids or strollers were forced to walk on the road.


TOP: shared curb ramp at the 6-corner intersection

Some intersections, including Archer/Canal and Cermak/Canal, had single shared curb ramps that do not align with the direction of travel. This is an issue for pedestrians with visual impairments because it directs them to the center of the traffic intersection.

Parked Cars
In the residential areas, specifically on Princeton and along Wentworth, cars were parked close to intersections, which obstructs pedestrian view of oncoming traffic. Cars also sometimes were parked in the crosswalks blocking access for pedestrians.

Bicycle Lanes
The only protected bicycles lanes in Chinatown were along 18th St by Wentworth Ave. Without barriers between bicycles lanes and cars, many cyclists chose to ride on the sidewalks to avoid large or speeding vehicles. This was common along Archer and Wentworth Ave. This creates high potential for conflict between cyclists and pedestrians.


TOP: cyclist riding on sidewalk instead of street

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on findings from the walkability audits and charrettes.

Infrastructure Improvements

- Identify alternative ADA compliant pathways and crossings
  ex. Mid-block crossing on Wentworth from parking lot to Richland Food Court
- Repair and maintain viaducts leading into and out of Chinatown
  ex. 18th and Wentworth/Clark; Canal/Stewart
- Install ADA compliant curb ramps
  ex. Stewart between 23rd St and 24 Pl
- Install separate curb ramp and landing for each direction of a crosswalk
  ex. Archer/Canal
- Extend curbs where crosswalks are too long and where parked cars block view of traffic
  ex. Princeton between 22nd and 24th Pl
- Repair all uneven or cracked segments of existing sidewalks
- Remove or relocate obstructions along walkways
- Realign or repair all pedestrian signals so that they are easy to see
- Install audible pedestrian signals at six-corner intersection
- Re-stripe and maintain crosswalks
- Implement traffic calming features where speeding is a problem
  ex. Cermak/Clark
- Add bicycle parking along Wentworth
- Add protected bicycle lanes where crashes are frequent

Amenities Improvements

- Improve lighting under viaducts
- Install more pedestrian lighting on residential streets
- Install trash cans along business corridors
- Install more public seating and shelters near bus stops

Educational Campaigns

- Bilingual promotion of the importance of obeying traffic rules and regulations
- Bilingual promotion of the benefits of active transportation

Other

- Conduct traffic study on Archer-Cermak-Princeton intersection

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