

ROUTE 202 “COMMON TO COURTHOUSE”

Walk Audit Report

Prepared for the Town of Belchertown by:
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Collaborative for Educational Services, Northampton, MA

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Overview and Methodology

Goals:

1. Foster an awareness of the infrastructure elements that contribute to the walking environment
2. Evaluate the safety and quality of the walking environment along the route
3. Recommend infrastructure improvements

On May 1, 2015, Healthy Hampshire organized a walk audit of the section of Route 202 that runs from the Belchertown town common to the Eastern Hampshire District Courthouse. Eighteen older adult volunteers participated, as well as the Planning Director Doug Albertson and Conservation Commissioner LeeAnne Connelly. The Senior Center and Healthy Hampshire staff recruited participants.

Participants gathered at the Belchertown Senior Center at 9:00am for coffee and bagels. Stacey Beuttell, of WalkBoston (www.walkboston.org), led a training on features of the environment that can impact safety and accessibility, particularly for walkers. Participants then broke out into three groups and, equipped with a questionnaire, clipboard and pencil, fanned out across the corridor to record their observations. Participants reconvened at 11:15am to share their insights and discuss next steps.

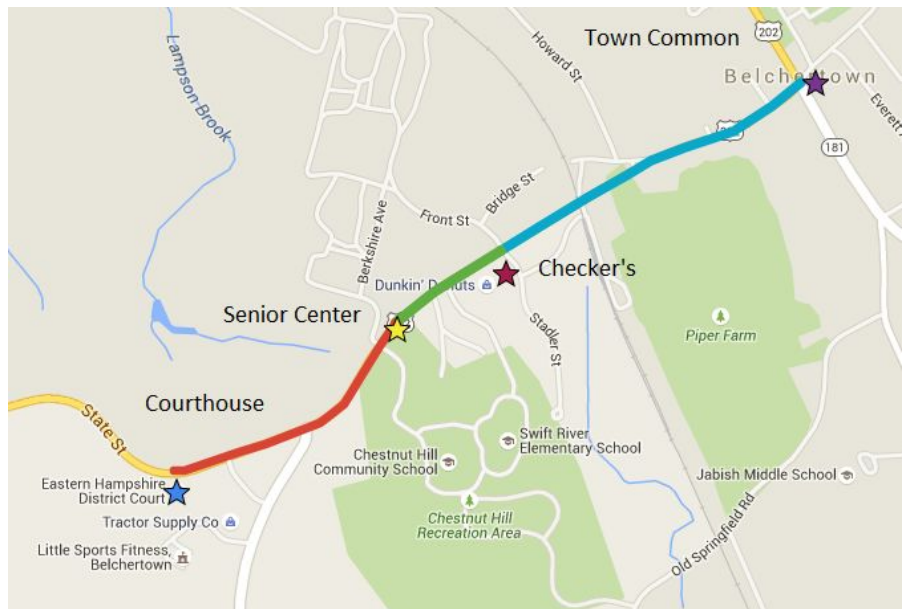
Pictures throughout this report have been taken by participants. We have also used screenshots from Google Maps Streetview, as it is much easier to see the infrastructure and road design.

This report summarizes the data collected through the audit, as well as the observations shared during the discussion.

Study Area

Participants studied three distinct sections of this corridor, and the report is organized by these sections:

- Eastern Hampshire District Courthouse to Senior Center (RED)
- Senior Center to Checker's (GREEN)
- Checker's to Town Common (Maple St) (BLUE)



General Recommendations from Walk Audit Group

- **Implement traffic calming techniques** to slow traffic down.
- **Increase safety and visibility of crosswalks.** Repainting is a great first step. Longer-term, they need to be redesigned to be truly accessible to everyone. Raised crosswalks, blinking lights, curb ramps, detectable warning strips, etc.
- **Push-button pedestrian activated signals.** Consider installing pedestrian traffic signals at Front St, Senior Center and Route 21 intersections. Include as a provision in development agreements with developers building on the State School campus.
- **Tighten the turning radius at each intersection and driveway** to slow turning traffic and increase pedestrian sightlines, visibility and length of crossings.
- **Make sidewalks clearly continuous across curb cuts and driveways** using paint or continuous materials such as concrete to indicate the appropriate path for pedestrians.
- **Add benches, spruce up green spaces and plant shade trees** to make it more inviting to pedestrians, reduce the radiant heat from asphalt, and make it easier for people (particularly those with disabilities) to get from one place to another.
- **Consolidate driveways or narrow driveways** to reduce the number of curb cuts that pedestrians are expected to negotiate (e.g. around the Checker's plaza)
- **Sidewalks should always be added** in this area when there is new construction.
- **Connect sidewalks to walking and recreational trails** and develop a way-finding/signage plan to encourage walkers to use the Lake Wallace trail, Piper Farm or other planned recreational trails.
- **Plan for bicyclist and pedestrians first** when renovating any street or road.
- **Establish a dedicated sidewalk maintenance budget** to repair/replace sidewalk in this corridor.



TOWN COMMON TO CHECKER'S



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Heading west from town common down Route 202/21 (Maple St)

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The Belchertown town common is the historic center of town. Town Hall, the library, the post office and other businesses and churches are located here. Heading down Route 202/Route 21 (Maple St), there are sidewalks on each side of the road. From the intersection at Town Hall to the Beers and Store Funeral Home (10 Maple St), the sidewalks are new concrete with no buffer between the sidewalk and the road.



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From Beers and Story Funeral Home (10 Maple St)

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From the entrance to the Beers and Story Funeral Home (driveway on far right of the picture) to the entrance to Piper Farm, the sidewalks are older and narrower, but there is a narrow grassy buffer on both sides between the sidewalk and the road.



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Maple Street veers off to the right and the road becomes State Street.

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The buffer on the right side disappears after Piper Farm, but the sidewalks continue on both sides until the fork in the road where Maple St. splits off to the right. Route 202/21 continues (State St.), with the sidewalk on the south side continuing and the sidewalk on the north side rejoining after the fork in the road.



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Heading over the bridge on State St.

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The sidewalk on the south side stops shortly after, and the north side continues over the bridge. The shoulder is narrow on the bridge and there is no buffer between the sidewalk and the road. After the bridge the road intersects with Front and Stadler St. (Checker's), and there is a blinking yellow traffic light. Few drivers pay attention to the blinking light—it never changes and has been in place for a long time. It does little to mitigate traffic speeds and may give pedestrians a false sense of security that drivers will stop for them.



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Intersection of Front St. and Stadler St.

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Infrastructure Challenges from TOWN COMMON TO CHECKER'S

- ★ Sidewalks are not continuous on both sides of the road.
- ★ Sidewalks are too narrow.
- ★ Sidewalks are bumpy and rough -- could be a tripping hazard for elders or difficult to navigate for someone in a wheelchair.
- ★ Gaps in buffer between the sidewalk and the road.
- ★ There are no curb ramps with detectable warning strips.
- ★ There are no reflectors on the railing over the bridge.
- ★ Numerous driveway and road curb cuts without continuity of sidewalks over those curb cuts
- ★ Trees on each side provide shade, but no trees around the Front St./Stadler St. intersection.
- ★ Need more places to rest, especially for people walking on the incline towards the common.
- ★ It is difficult to spot the entrance to Piper Farm. It could be better promoted as a destination for recreation and rest.
- ★ No trash receptacles.
- ★ There is no indication about where cyclists are expected to be and no facilities for cyclists.
- ★ There is some lighting, but unclear whether it would be properly lit for walking after dusk.
- ★ The crosswalks located at the Front St./Stadler St. intersection are very long and would benefit from curb extensions to shorten the distance.
- ★ There are few pedestrian safety facilities such as signage, pedestrian lights, raised crosswalks, detectable warning strips, etc.
- ★ The blinking light is not effective as a traffic calming device. As development continues at the State School, the location and type of traffic signal at this intersection may change.

CHECKER'S TO SENIOR CENTER



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Heading down State Street towards the Senior Center

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This stretch of Route 202/21 is known as State Street, and it includes a number of businesses, the entrance to the school complex, sports fields, the Senior Center and Police Department. The sidewalk is on the south side, and runs continuously until it stops at the entrance to the Senior Center and Police Department. There is a narrow grassy buffer between the sidewalk and the road. The north side has a narrow dirt path, indicating that many people use that area to walk. The businesses on this road generally have parking in front of their buildings, making it difficult for pedestrians to walk safely from the sidewalk to the business. (Note: picture is from google maps and is outdated, but pedestrian facilities remain accurate).



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Stretch of State St. going past the entrance to Swift River School.

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Intersection at Senior Center

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The sidewalk stops at the intersection where the Police Department and Senior Center complex (right) and the Chestnut Hill Community School (left) are located. From here, there is no sidewalk leading to the school. The crosswalks on each side of the intersection are faded. The crossing distance across State St. is long. There are no curb ramps, warning strips or curb bump-outs and the crosswalk essentially ends in the driveways.

Infrastructure Challenges from CHECKER'S TO SENIOR CENTER

- ★ Sidewalks are not continuous on both sides of the road.
- ★ Sidewalks are too narrow.
- ★ Sidewalks are bumpy and rough -- could be a tripping hazard for elders or difficult to navigate for someone in a wheelchair.
- ★ Buffer between sidewalk and road feels too narrow.
- ★ No sidewalks leading to Swift River, Chestnut Hill Schools.
- ★ There are no curb ramps with detectable warning strips.
- ★ The curb radii for the turns at each intersection of road or driveway are unnecessarily long.
- ★ Numerous driveway and road curb cuts without continuity of sidewalks over those curb cuts. Driveway going to Swift River is 80 feet across.
- ★ Very few trees to provide shade for walkers, for street cooling and beautification.
- ★ Need more places to rest, like benches or parklets (mini green spaces meant for public utilization).
- ★ No trash receptacles.
- ★ There is no indication about where cyclists are expected to be and no facilities for cyclists.
- ★ There are a few streetlights mounted to utility poles. They are not focused on crosswalk areas.
- ★ The crosswalks located at the Senior Center intersection are very long and would benefit from curb extensions to shorten the distance.
- ★ Drivers do not appear to slow down for pedestrians trying to negotiate crosswalk.
- ★ There are few pedestrian safety facilities such as signage, pedestrian light, raised crosswalks, detectable warning strips, etc.
- ★ Businesses are set back from the road with individual parking lots, often in front of their building, with no marked pedestrian routes to the front door.

SENIOR CENTER TO COURTHOUSE



S State St just past the Senior Center driveway heading towards the Courthouse.

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This stretch of State Street is without sidewalks. There are several destinations on this section of road, including Planet Fitness. It ends with the Eastern Hampshire District Courthouse. People without cars who need to get to the courthouse can take the bus, which drops them at the common. Then, they must walk all the way down to the Courthouse-- a distance of 1.3 miles. This stretch feels more like a state rural highway, with cars going faster and no pedestrian facilities.



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Intersection of Route 21

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At the intersection of State St. and Route 21, Route 202/State St. officially becomes a MassDOT road. The Route 21 intersection has no accommodations for pedestrians or cyclists. Continuing down State St., there are several business complexes off to the left and a beautiful wooded trail on the right that goes around Lake Wallace. The trail can be accessed behind the Police Department. It can also be accessed across from the Courthouse, though there is no parking or signage in that area indicating the trail.



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The Courthouse is located on the left side.

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As State St curves around, it approaches the Courthouse on the left. The dirt path on the shoulder indicates pedestrian activity.

Infrastructure Challenges from SENIOR CENTER TO COURTHOUSE

- ★ No sidewalks on either side of the road.
- ★ There is no indication about where cyclists are expected to be and no facilities for cyclists.
- ★ No visible access to the Lake Wallace trail. No parking, no signage, and no crosswalk leading to it from the Courthouse. This trail could be used to promote employee wellness for those working at the Courthouse.
- ★ No streetlights.
- ★ Businesses are set back from the road with individual parking lots, often in front of their building, which make it less appealing for pedestrian activity.
- ★ Posted traffic speed is 40 MPH from the Courthouse until the school zone. Consider reducing speed on the roadway between the Courthouse and the school zone.