

Social Studies: Transportation & Community Design

How do communities decide where to build sidewalks, bike lanes, and crosswalks?

This optional extension connects transportation to civics, community decision-making, and equity. Appropriate for grades 3–8 with age-appropriate scaffolding.

Discussion: Who Decides?

Your school is in a neighborhood designed by people — city planners, engineers, and elected officials made choices about where to put roads, sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes. Those choices affect how you get to school.

"Who decides where sidewalks get built? How do they decide?"

"Are all neighborhoods equally easy to walk in? Why might some have wider sidewalks or better lighting than others?"

"If you could change one thing about the streets near your school, what would it be? Who would you need to talk to?"

"Have you ever been to a city council meeting? How do regular people get a say in decisions about streets and sidewalks?"

Activity: Community Walk Audit

Walk the most common routes to your school. For each block, note:

- Is there a sidewalk? Is it wide enough for two people?
- Is there a crosswalk at the intersection? A signal?
- How fast are cars going?
- Would you feel safe walking here alone? With a younger sibling?
- Is there bike parking at school?

Compile findings into a class report. This mirrors the route assessment used by SRTS programs. Students can present findings to the principal or a city official.

MA Framework: History and Social Science — Civics & Government: "Explain how people can participate in their community" (3–5), "Analyze the roles of citizens in local government" (6–8)

SRTS connection: The walk audit mirrors the SRTS route assessment process. Student data can be included in your school's SRTS application. For the SRTS walkability checklist, visit walkbiketoschool.org.