

Boston Region Vision Zero

Engagement: Walk Audit Academies

Walk audit academies are an important tool for education, capacity building, and community engagement around safe street design and vulnerable road user safety. As part of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) commitment to developing and testing localized strategies for expanding roadway safety, the MPO partnered with WalkMassachusetts to conduct Walk Audit Academies in two municipalities. The primary objective of this strategy is to evaluate existing conditions for vulnerable road users on the ground, allowing residents, municipal planners, and advocates to diagnose safety issues and identify actionable recommendations to improve safety, comfort, and access for vulnerable road users, both through short-term and long-term interventions.

The Walk Audit Academy Process

Developed and facilitated by WalkMassachusetts in partnership with municipal staff and the MPO, the walk audit academies provided a framework for community-based safety assessments. Before each audit, the Boston MPO presented an overview of regional Vision Zero planning efforts, while WalkMassachusetts reviewed a primer on walk audits and how they can be used to assess the built environment. These presentations outlined the walk audit process and allowed participants to identify roadway features that create unsafe and uncomfortable conditions.

In coordination with the MPO and municipal staff, WalkMassachusetts planned the walk audit route and designated stopping locations for in-field discussion. These facilitated discussions along the route, allowed participants to evaluate multimodal infrastructure existing conditions, observe roadway user behaviors, and propose potential interventions.

Participants were provided with walk audit forms, safe street design intervention examples, and online resources to conduct future walk audits in their own communities. Each session concluded with a debrief of observations and an invitation to follow-up office hours with WalkMassachusetts and MPO staff for further technical assistance.

Vision Zero Alignment

The walk audit academy strategy advances the Safe System Approach through a focus on evaluating infrastructure and vulnerable road user safety. In addition, a key part of the MPO's engagement strategy involves partnerships with community-based organizations to conduct focused stakeholder engagement, bringing together residents, local and regional

planners, municipal staff, and advocates from across the Boston region and neighboring regions.

The corridors selected for these walk audit academies were based on crash data and the regional High-Injury and High-Risk Networks (HIN and HRN). The HIN identifies locations with the highest concentrations of past fatal and serious injury crashes based on historical crash data, while the HRN proactively identifies corridors and intersections with a high risk of fatal and serious injury crashes based on factors like roadway geometry and the presence of vulnerable road users. Both Washington Street in Holliston (Figure 1) and sections of South and North Main streets, Highland Avenue, and Memorial Parkway are priority corridors on the regional HIN. Focusing on these roadways allowed this work to translate high-level safety commitments in the MPO's Safety Action Plan into on-the-ground observations and specific, actionable recommendations, supporting broader regional Vision Zero goals.

Figure 1:
Washington Street in Holliston

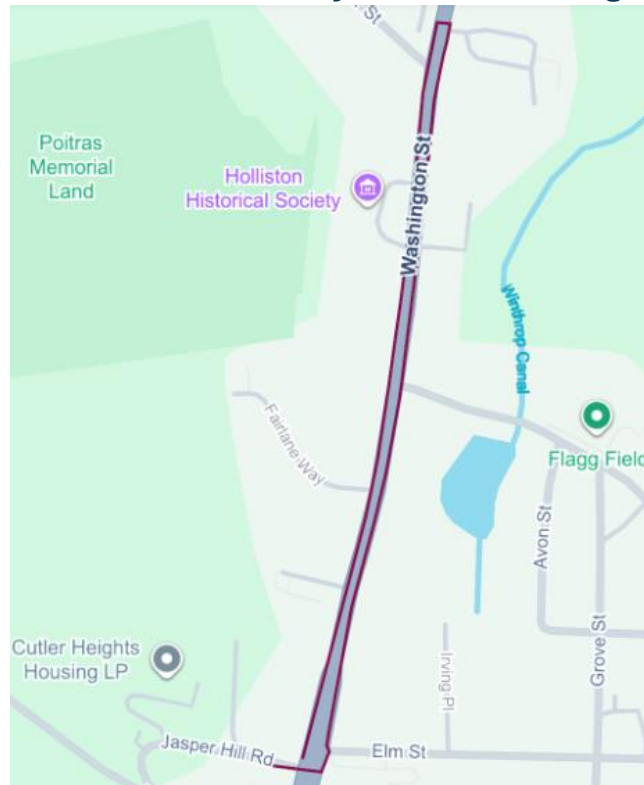


Scope and Reach

The walk audit academies took place in Holliston and Randolph and reached a total of 38 stakeholders from 17 municipalities:

Holliston, Mass.—Washington Street: Engaged 15 participants, including residents, municipal planners, and advocates. The route started at Holliston Town Hall, on Jasper Hill Road, and ended at the Holliston Housing Authority, located just north of Winter Street. The corridor runs through both institutional and residential areas (Figure 2).

Figure 2.
Holliston Walk Audit Academy Route on Washington Street



Randolph, Mass.—South and North Main streets, Depot Street, Highland Avenue, and Memorial Parkway: Engaged 23 participants. This audit focused primarily on North Main Street (State Route 28) as a gateway to Downtown Randolph and a connection to local destinations, while also including observations of Depot Street, Highland Avenue, and Memorial Parkway, running past Randolph High School (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Randolph Walk Audit Academy Route on South and North Main Streets, Depot Street, Highland Avenue, and Memorial Parkway



Results and Next Steps

In addition to building relationships with municipal staff and engaging stakeholders and advocates across the two communities, the walk audit academies allowed participants to synthesize their road safety learning by documenting specific observations and safety recommendations for the corridors.

As the MPO continues to engage specific municipalities to further the local work needed to accomplish roadway safety, it is informative to continually acknowledge commonalities across the region that all municipalities can recognize and learn from. Common safety challenges that emerged from these walk audit academies include

- **Excessive vehicle speeds and wide travel lanes:** Both corridors feature wide vehicle travel lanes and street designs that encourage high vehicle speeds, reducing safety for people traveling outside of vehicles.
- **High-speed turning and wide corner radii:** Intersections along both routes feature wide turning radii that enable vehicles to take turns at high speeds, creating hazardous conditions and poor sightlines for drivers and crossing pedestrians.
- **Deficient and missing crosswalks infrastructure:** Both corridors have challenges with pedestrian crossings, including long crossing distances, faded or missing high-

visibility markings, vehicle encroachment into crosswalks, and crosswalk placement that fail to align with existing pedestrian desire lines.

- **Vulnerability and safety concerns around school zones:** Heavy traffic, lack of clear crosswalks, and high-speed vehicle movements near schools along both corridors create stressful environments for students and others walking or rolling in the area.

Common recommended solutions include

- **Corridor traffic calming:** Improve the safety of wide roadways by visually and physically narrowing travel lanes (to 10 or 11 feet) and deploying traffic-calming elements such as speed humps or cushions.
- **Quick-build curb extensions:** Use paint, flex posts, modular curbing, or planters to tighten corner radii, slow right-turning vehicles, and shorten pedestrian crossing distances.
- **Enhanced pedestrian crossings:** Upgrade crosswalks using high-visibility pavement markings, advanced yield pavement markings and stop bars, and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons or raised crosswalks at key pedestrian locations.
- **Pilot projects and stakeholder engagement:** Implement short-term demonstration projects while conducting engagement and sharing findings with community residents, stakeholders, municipal leadership, and state agencies to build support for permanent capital improvements.

The full reports for these walk audit academies provide recommendations for both short- and long-term improvements that can be used to inform future roadway design, planning studies, capital projects, and grant applications. The full reports are available online at <https://audits.walkmass.org/>