

FLORIDA

Consumer Action

NETWORK **FOUNDATION**

FOR RELEASE:

April 6, 2017

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Lisa Frank, 503-758-0712, lisa@fcan.org

Walk Audits Show Need for Street Improvements

St. Petersburg, Fla. - As more and more people move to St. Petersburg, our transportation system is under increasing stress to meet people's needs. One solution is to provide alternatives to driving, but six walk audits conducted by the local nonprofit Florida Consumer Action Network Foundation found streets throughout the city need improvements to make walking more pleasant and safe.

"St. Petersburg is a great city with great neighborhoods, but not all our streets are great for walking," says Florida Consumer Action Network Campaign Organizer Lisa Frank. "We need to do more to make our streets excellent places to walk, bike, and use transit if we're going to keep St. Pete moving forward."

The walk audit results will inform the City of St. Petersburg's Complete Streets initiative, which seeks to plan, design, operate, and maintain streets such that people of all ages and physical and economic abilities can safely and comfortably move around the city street network. On Thursday, April 6th, FCAN Foundation presented the following recommendations to City Council to improve walkability:

- **Improve sidewalk maintenance and repair procedures.** Maintenance problems were common and merit increased attention.
- **Address speed through roadway design.** Speeding was observed on every walk audit. Trees, narrower lanes, and other roadway design elements can discourage speeding.
- **Improve bicycle and transit facilities.** Quality bike lanes discourage sidewalk riding, calm traffic, and improve safety; shaded, accessible bus stops would better serve riders.
- **Pursue road diets.** Converting vehicle lanes to turn lanes, bike lanes, or wider sidewalks results in safer streets that are often more efficient, without impacting traffic.

"We have a great opportunity to make this a world-class city for walking and biking with the Complete Streets plan," says St. Petersburg City Council Member Darden Rice. "Complete Streets is already making a difference on streets like Central Avenue, which is a much better place to walk and shop now that we've added wider sidewalks, curb bulb-outs, and bicycle shared lane markings. These changes make streets safer for people walking, biking, and driving."

Armed with clipboards, volunteers evaluated crossings, sidewalks, comfort and appeal, safety, and driver behavior on six streets around St. Petersburg using a *Walk Audit Toolkit* created by AARP.

"Imagine having to operate your wheelchair, walker or motorized scooter down the middle of the street because a sidewalk is non-existent or in disrepair or doesn't have a curb ramp," says Jason Martino, Director of Planning with the Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas, Inc. and chair of the St. Petersburg Commission on Aging. "That is the reality in many neighborhoods today and we need to place great attention to these types of issues in order to accommodate our aging and disabled population and evolve as an age-friendly community."

18th Avenue South illustrates common challenges. Most of the street has sidewalks and mature trees provide welcome shade, but sidewalks are narrow, cracked, and frequently interrupted by driveways. Some bus stops provide shade and seating; many don't, and three lacked sidewalks or ramps for people in wheelchairs. Walkers also dodge people riding bikes on the sidewalk since the road has no bike lanes. Need to cross the street? Cross your fingers for good luck- the flashing beacons near the Enoch Davis Recreation Center didn't work at the time of the walk audit.

"I had an opportunity to do a walk audit with another auditor that was vision impaired," says Debbie Reed, a North Kenwood resident. "It brought a different perspective, to experience walking a corridor with a disability. The broken concrete that would signal me to step cautiously became a tripping hazard. The palm frond hanging over the sidewalk that I could walk around or duck under became a slap in the face."

In addition to 18th Avenue South, volunteers audited 22nd Avenue South, 54th Avenue South, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Street, 13th Avenue North, 16th Street North, and 28th Street North. Participants rated most streets "fair," meaning "somewhat" pedestrian-friendly and safe. Portions of 22nd Avenue South, 16th Street North, and 28th Street North received "poor" scores where they lacked sidewalks. Dr. M.L.K., Jr. Street through downtown received the best overall rating, "good." No street was ranked "excellent" overall — but Complete Streets supporters are hopeful.

"Walking is very important to me due to its impact ranging from business growth to public health and safety" says Keri Melshenker, executive director of the Skyway Marina District Business Association. "These walking audits help us identify a path forward to improve streets in the Skyway Marina District, Midtown, and throughout St. Pete."

St. Petersburg residents can share ideas for Complete Streets via an online survey now through the end of April at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/StPeteCS>.

###

The Florida Consumer Action Network Foundation conducts research and public education on Florida consumer issues and seeks to empower consumers to fight back on utilities, health care, insurance, federal budget issues, transportation, and financial services reform. FCAN Foundation also sponsors non-partisan voter registration drives, voter education, and "Get Out The Vote" campaigns. Visit www.fcan.org/foundation.