Walking Tall

New pedestrian planning guidebook helps communities assess their walkability and choose pedestrian projects.

By Jane M. Sanders

If Hippocrates was correct when he said, “Walking is man’s best medicine,” then Georgians may need a strong dose of it.

It could cure some of what ails the state’s citizens, addressing problems ranging from corpulence to congestion — both in the chest and on the highway.

Advocates of walking say it can decrease obesity, and therefore improve public health. Walking also can reduce air and noise pollution, as well as traffic congestion and petroleum consumption. It requires no special training, and, as medicines go, it’s relatively cheap. Walking also represents a healthy source of community.

So where can you get this miracle drug? The new Georgia Guidebook for Pedestrian Planning, developed by researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology for the Georgia Department of Transportation, is not a prescription for walking but it does provide directions for administering the “medicine.” More specifically, it helps assess the pedestrian environment and prioritize projects to improve it.

“There’s something in the guidebook for everyone — from local, regional and state planners in the beginning stages all the way to the advanced stages of developing pedestrian facilities — and that was our intent,” says Associate Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering Adjo Amekudzi, the project’s principal researcher. “It was also important to us that it not be prescriptive. … The intent was not to prescribe one model that fits all because there’s nothing like that. The guidebook is a comprehensive resource document.”

Amekudzi and fellow researcher Karen Dixon — a former Georgia Tech associate professor who led the study until she moved to Oregon State University in 2005 — worked with an advisory committee of public and private group stakeholders to establish a vision, goals and objectives for pedestrian planning in Georgia.

“Georgia must continue to develop pedestrian facilities (which include sidewalks, walkways, crosswalks and shelters) as a viable transportation choice,” Amekudzi says. “We want to make walking for short trips safe and convenient and provide Georgia’s residents and visitors with the opportunity to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. That is our vision.”

Given the number of accidents in Georgia involving both pedestrians and vehicles, safety is a high priority with regard to pedestrian facilities, Amekudzi says. From 2000 to 2003 in Georgia, 8,416 pedestrians were injured, and 624 were killed in collisions with vehicles.

Detailed in the guidebook (available online at www.dot.state.ga.us/bikeped/pedestrian_plan) are four primary goals: 1) enhance safety; 2) create seamless integration of pedestrian facilities into the transportation system; 3) integrate planning and design of pedestrian facilities into transportation planning; 4) encourage a pedestrian-friendly environment for everyone.

Each goal correlates to several action items, and the guidebook provides basic planning tools to help achieve these ends. “This allows us over time to execute our goals and objectives incrementally to get to this more pedestrian-friendly environment we need in Georgia,” Amekudzi adds.

The 132-page guidebook includes six chapters covering the vision and goals, planning and prioritizing projects, pedestrian facility funding, Georgia pedestrian laws, pedestrian safety and educational strategies, and land-use and zoning policy. It also cites some examples of successful pedestrian facility projects and provides a listing of other pedestrian planning resources.

Though the Peach State is the targeted end user, governments outside Georgia may find parts of the guidebook useful, Amekudzi notes.

Read more at: gtresearchnews.gatech.edu/reshor/rh-w07/walk.html

Below: Associate Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering Adjo Amekudzi led the development of the new Georgia Guidebook for Pedestrian Planning. She is posed here with construction equipment on the Fifth Street Bridge in Atlanta.

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