

# Seattle, USA

## Healthy and Sustainable City Indicators Report: Comparisons with 25 cities internationally

Global Healthy & Sustainable City-Indicators Collaboration



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Global Observatory of  
**Healthy and  
Sustainable Cities**

Full report including data, methods and study limitations has been published as:

The Lancet Global Health Series on urban design, transport, and health. 2022. <https://www.thelancet.com/series/urban-design-2022>

Global Observatory of Healthy & Sustainable Cities. 2022. <https://www.healthysustainablecities.org>

Population data: Schiavina, M. et al. (2019): GHS population grid multitemporal (1975, 1990, 2000, 2015) R2019A. European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC). <https://doi.org/10.2905/42E8BE89-54FF-464E-BE7B-BF9E64DA5218>

Urban boundaries: Florczyk, A. et al. (2019): GHS Urban Centre Database 2015, multitemporal and multidimensional attributes, R2019A. European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC).

<https://data.jrc.ec.europa.eu/dataset/53473144-b88c-44bc-b4a3-4583ed1f547e>

Urban features: OpenStreetMap contributors. Openstreetmap (2020). <https://planet.osm.org/pbf/planet-200803.osm.pbf.torrent>

Colour scale: Crameri, F. (2018). Scientific colour-maps (3.0.4). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1287763>

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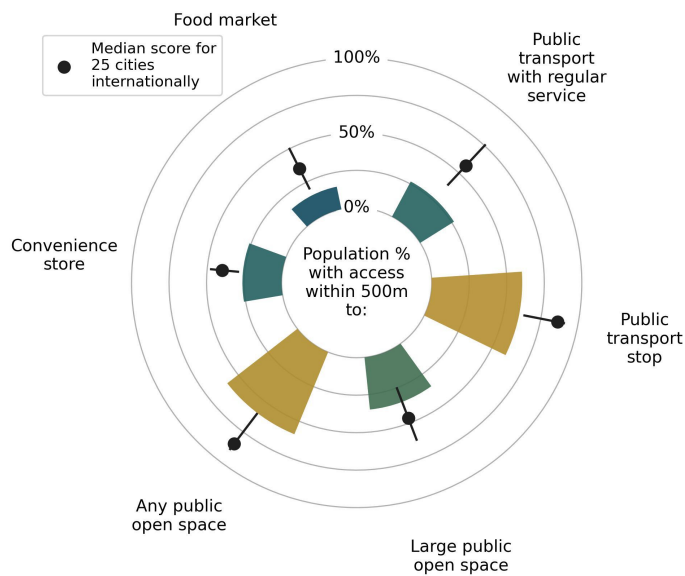
Jacob Carson & Anne Vernez Moudon

## Healthy and Sustainable City Indicators Report

This brief report outlines how the Seattle metropolitan area performs on a selection of spatial and policy indicators of healthy and sustainable cities. Our collaborative study examined the spatial distribution of urban design and transport features and the presence and quality of city planning policies that promote health and sustainability for 25 cities across 19 countries. Further details of the study are available at <https://doi.org/STUDY-DOI-TBA>

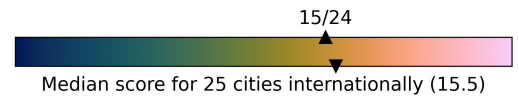
Comparisons with the median values for all cities included in this international study could inform changes needed for local city policies. The maps show the distribution of urban design and transport features across Seattle, and identify areas that could benefit the most from interventions to create healthy and sustainable environments.

(below) Percentage of population with access to amenities within 500 metres (m) in Seattle, USA.



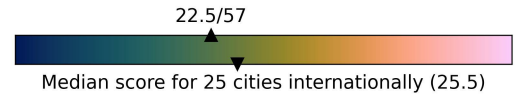
### Policy presence in Seattle

Urban design and transport policies supporting health and sustainability



### Policy quality in Seattle

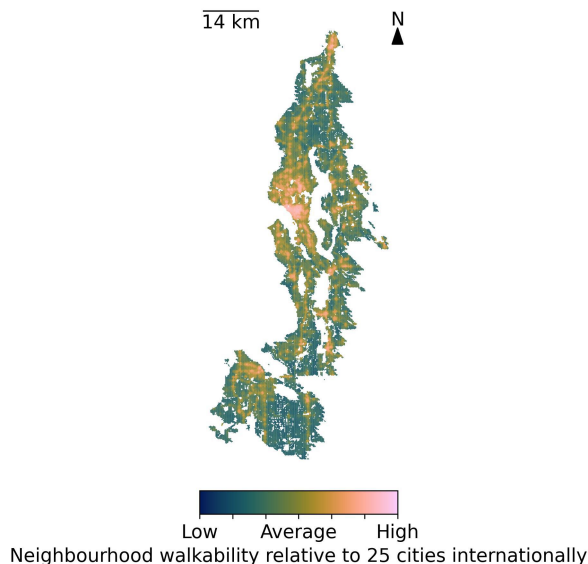
Policy quality rating for specific, measurable policies aligned with consensus evidence on healthy cities



City planning requirements	Seattle	% of cities with requirement met, by country income group	
		Middle /6	High /19
Specific health-focused actions in metropolitan urban policy	✓	0%	84%
Specific health-focused actions in metropolitan transport policy	✓	50%	63%
Health Impact Assessment requirements in urban/transport policy/legislation	✗	33%	11%
Information on government expenditure on infrastructure for different transport modes	✓	33%	47%
Air pollution policies related to transport planning	✓	50%	89%
Air pollution policies related to land use planning	✓	67%	84%

## Walkability in Seattle

Walkable neighbourhoods provide opportunities for active, healthy, and sustainable lifestyles through having sufficient but not excessive population density to support adequate provision of local amenities, including public transport services. They also have mixed land uses and well-connected streets, to ensure proximate and convenient access to destinations. High-quality pedestrian infrastructure and reducing traffic through managing demand for car use can also encourage walking for transport.

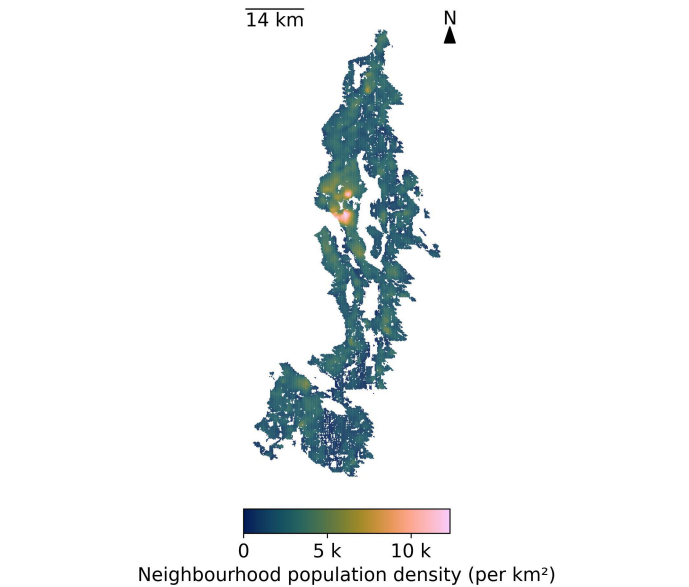


(above) 44.6% of population live in neighbourhoods with walkability scores greater than the 25 international city median

Walkability policy for Seattle				
	Policy identified	Specific standard or aim	Measurable target	Consistent with health evidence
Housing density requirements	✓	✓	✓	~
Street connectivity requirements	✗	-	-	-
Parking restrictions to discourage car use	✓	✗	✗	?
Pedestrian infrastructure provision	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cycling infrastructure provision	✓	✓	✗	✓
Walking participation targets	✓	✓	✓	✗
Cycling participation targets	✓	✓	✓	✓

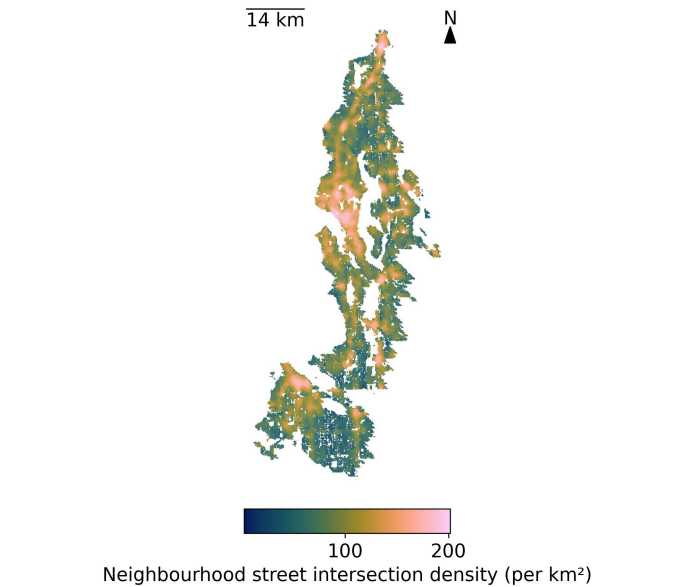


Population density



(above) 6.4% of population meet minimum threshold\* for neighbourhood population density (5,677 people per km<sup>2</sup>)

Street connectivity



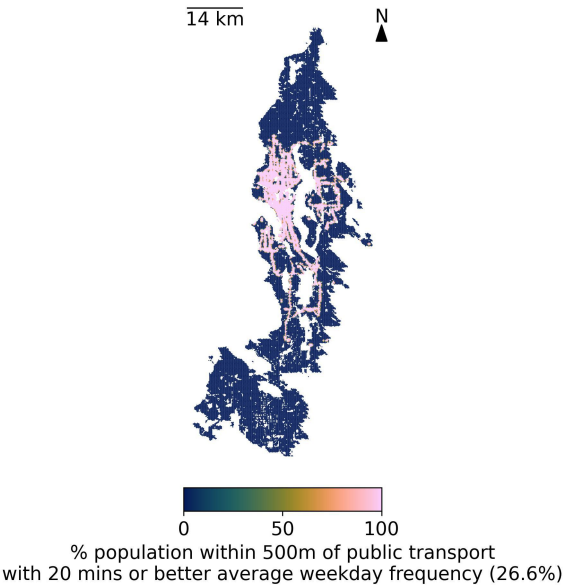
(above) 43.2% of population meet minimum threshold\* for neighbourhood street intersection density (106 intersections per km<sup>2</sup>)

\* Thresholds are based on our modelling of built environment features required to reach the World Health Organization's Global Action Plan for Physical Activity target of a 15% relative reduction in insufficient physical activity through walking. We found preliminary evidence that street intersection density above 250 per km<sup>2</sup> and ultra-dense neighbourhoods (> 15,000 persons per km<sup>2</sup>) may have decreasing benefits for physical activity. This is an important topic for future research.





Public transport access

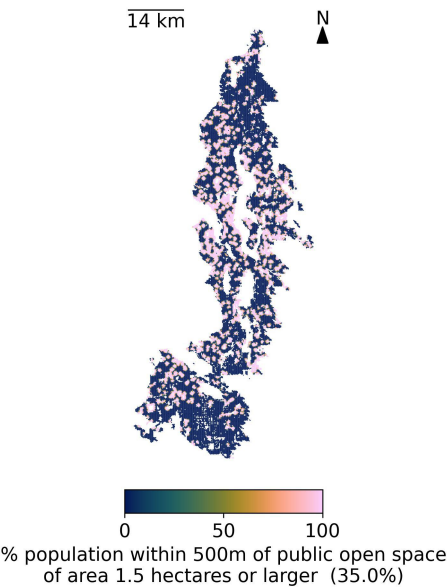


Easy access to frequent public transport is a key determinant of healthy and sustainable transport systems. Public transport near housing and employment increases the mode share of public transport trips, thus encouraging transport-related walking; offering access to regional jobs and services; improving health, economic development, and social inclusiveness; and reducing pollution and carbon emissions. The frequency of services also encourages public transport use, in addition to the proximity of stations or stops.

Public transport policy for Seattle

	Policy identified	Specific standard or aim	Measurable target	Consistent with health evidence
Requirements for public transport access to employment and services	✓	✓	✓	✓
Employment distribution requirements	✗	-	-	-
Minimum requirements for public transport access	✓	✓	✓	✓
Targets for public transport use	✗	-	-	-

Public open space access



Local access to high-quality public open space promotes recreational physical activity and mental health. Nearby public open space creates convivial, attractive environments, helps cool the city and protects biodiversity. As cities densify and private open space declines, providing more public open space is critical for population health. Having public open space within 400 m of homes can encourage walking. Access to larger parks may also be important.

Public open space policy for Seattle

	Policy identified	Specific standard or aim	Measurable target	Consistent with health evidence
Minimum requirements for public open space access	✗	-	-	-

Summary

The availability of urban and transport policies supporting health and sustainability in Seattle is average compared with other cities. However, the quality of those available is slightly below average in terms of their specificity, measurability and consistency with health evidence. Seattle does not appear to have a requirement for health impact assessment of urban and transport interventions. Although Seattle has numerous standards for walkability, some lack measurable targets. It also lacks standards and measurable targets for some public transport and public open space policies. The vast majority of neighbourhoods in Seattle have low walkability relative to the 25 cities in this international study. Only 6% of residents in Seattle live in neighbourhoods meeting density thresholds and only 43% live in neighbourhoods meeting street connectivity thresholds to achieve WHO targets to increase physical activity. Similarly, only 27% of residents live in neighbourhoods with access to public transport stops with regular services within 500m. Around 50% of residents have access to some public open space within 500m, and only 35% live within 500m of a larger public open space. The proportion of the population with access within 500m to public transport, public open space, convenience stores and food markets in Seattle, is well below the average for the cities studied.

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**Citation**

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