

A Walk To Work

by Andy Hamilton

Appealing to Americans to become more active, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson declared April 2, 2004 to be Walk To Work Day. A handful of WalkSanDiego diehards gave it a try. Here's a photo journal of my trek from North Park to northern Kearny Mesa.

Time: 2.5 hours.

Steps: 16,900.

Distance: 9.4 miles.

Feet: sore.



Mile 0.5: Madison Street, North Park:

My neighborhood encourages walking. It includes sidewalks offset from the street, street trees, and houses (not garages) that face the public way, giving a sense of safety. Blocks are short, providing direct routes and many crossing opportunities, and keeping traffic manageably slow (although the wide streets encourage speeding). Pedestrian-Friendliness Grade: B+



Mile 1, Texas Street: Things got immediately treacherous as I headed down Texas Street to Mission Valley. Lots of people walk this way, as you can tell. Has anyone ever considered installing a sidewalk? In the parlance of sidewalk-huggers, beaten paths are called “lines of desire”. Grade: D-

Mile 2, Mission Valley River Trail:

Easily the nicest part of the walk. Also, the nicest feature in Mission Valley. Not to be missed, and it runs on either side of the River. I ran into several exercise walkers here at 6:30am. Frequently interrupted by wide North-South streets. Grade: B



Mile 2.5, Mission Center Road: These No Ped Crossing signs have sprouted in San Diego like dandelions, restricting crossing so cars can get through lights quicker. These restrictions often force pedestrians to cross three streets instead of one, and pose a real danger as they expose walkers to more conflicts with vehicles. Not state of the practice for pedestrian safety. Grade: F

Mile 3, Mission Center Road:

Oh vey! No sidewalk, speeding cars, muddy trail. Thank goodness for the bike lane. Notice the sign urges motorists (traveling uphill!) to *slow down* to 40 mph. Grade: F



Mile 5, Murray Ridge Road: This is a collector street through Serra Mesa, a 1960's suburb, designed primarily for cars. Wide streets, snout houses (garages prominent) and hidden front doors make this an unwelcoming experience for walkers, but I encountered a few nonetheless. Grade: C-

Mile 5.5, Murray Ridge Road: I came across this new multi-family (military?) housing of a decidedly friendlier character. Doors and windows face the road, no garages in evidence (placed in back?). Neighbors will definitely know each other, but be able to maintain privacy. Many front doors face a community green space. A delight. Grade: A





Mile 7, Aero Drive: Classic Kearny Mesa – extremely wide, high-speed streets, sidewalks against the curb, with numerous obstacles. No wheelchair user could make it through here. Again, bike lanes help buffer the pedestrian. These streets must be crossed at lights spaced half a mile apart, or more. The ability to cross a street pretty well defines the extent of pedestrian-friendliness. The rest of my walk was of this character. Grade: D

Mile 8, Ruffin Road: Examine the small sign (to the right) closely. It advertises a jazzercise class. The entire walk, I met almost no one walking for transportation, so naturally we’re resorting to “jazzercise” to stay healthy. It’s not working. Grade: D



Mile 8, Ruffin Road: This sums up Kearny Mesa, and much of my walk once I left North Park. Grade: F



Mile 8.5, Spectrum Development: This development was supposed to be *walkable*. It's certainly better, but front doors face parking lots rather than the sidewalk, some major corners are unfriendly, giant parking lots rather than buildings, and buildings are not clustered. It's too inconvenient to travel on foot here. Grade: C

Post-Log

The meaning of “sprawl” really hits home when you try a walk of this distance. Low density development and super-wide streets push everything unnecessarily far apart. Not only is it inefficient, it's unfriendly and ugly. Small pockets of pedestrian-friendly exceptions were fun to come across. Overall, the walk was fun, even exhilarating. Admittedly, I was sleepy the rest of the day, and a week later the top of my right foot is still sore. You really find out how well your shoes fit when you put them through such a test. For this commute, biking certainly works better.