Reviewer's report

Title: A comparative case study of walkability for older people: examining the inter-relationship of neighbourhood socio-economic status and urban form

Version: 2 Date: 1 June 2010

Reviewer: Ester Cerin

Reviewer's report:

This study examined the ways the neighborhood built environment and socio-economic status impact on the experiences of older adults who engage in walking in the neighborhood. It also examined differences in key informant descriptions of socio-political processes that impact on neighborhood walkability. The issues covered in this paper are important and timely. Although a substantial number of studies have looked into the potential effects of the built and social environment in adults and children, nor much information is available on older adults. This is unfortunate because the neighborhood environment is likely to be more important for this segment of the population due to their decreased mobility.

The manuscript is well-written, well-organized and informative. However, I think there is still room for further improvement. My suggestions are outlined below.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Abstract: 'previous studies have focused on either the effect of urban form or neighborhood SES on walkability'. This is not correct. See comment # 2 below.
2. Page 6; paragraph 2: I don't fully agree with the information presented in this paragraph. In our study (PLACE; see Owen et al., 2007; Cerin et al., 2007, 2008), we selected neighborhoods that varied in urban form AND socio-economic status. In other words, neighborhoods were not homogeneous in SES. The study attempted to disentangle context from compositional effects in two main ways. Firstly, we controlled for individual-level SES indicators (e.g., education and income). Secondly, we controlled for selection bias by including 'reasons for living in a specific neighborhood' as covariates. We also examined the interaction effects of neighborhood walkbaility and neighborhood SES on walking (in adults) (see Owen et al., 2007; AJPM).
3. Pages 6-7: in relation to the statement: 'adjusting for individual occupational status may yield an underestimation of area-level effects'. I agree. However, by running separate analyses with and without adjustment for individual-level SES variables we can obtain estimates of minimal and maximal area-level effects, respectively.
4. Page 12; line 2: How much of an overlap there was between the sample of older people and neighborhood key informants? Is this likely to be a problem?

Minor Essential Revisions
1. Page 33; 1st sentence: This is unclear.
2. Page 37; line 7: 'pubic' should read 'public'

Discretionary Revisions
None

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.