

WALK WITH CAITLYN

My name is Caitlyn Taix. I live in the Franklin to Fort neighborhood. I commute to work at the Missoula Food Bank & Community Center in the River Road side of town, and **I try to sustainably commute by walking at least once per week.** In the summertime, it's much more frequent, but year-round, my goal is one day a week, rain or shine- though I do usually check the weather to make sure I'm choosing a good day.

I've gone through phases where I try to do it all the time and then fall off when life gets busy, **so finding a rhythm that feels realistic has been key.**

A big motivator for me is staying active. I like to move my body, and **walking to work is an easy way to build movement into my day—especially on days when I have lots of meetings** or know I'll be sitting most of the time.

I also live fairly close to work, so **walking helps me save money on gas and reduce my environmental footprint** without feeling like a huge sacrifice.

One misconception I hear a lot is that walking takes too much time. Depending on where you're coming from, it can take longer, but I've found that it doesn't have to feel like wasted time. I like to be productive while I commute. **Sometimes I'm putting together playlists for fitness classes I teach, calling my grandma, or organizing my to-do list. Other days, I just walk in silence and enjoy the quiet.**

My commute is less than a mile and takes about 15 minutes. Driving takes maybe five or six minutes, but once you factor in parking and walking from the car, it's really not that much different. **And it doesn't have to be an everyday thing. Some days it just doesn't make sense to walk—and that's okay.** Fitting it in when you can still counts.

For anyone thinking about walking to work but feeling unsure, planning ahead helps so much.

There are plenty of mornings where I want to make excuses—running late, weird lunch to pack, something after work—but if I look at the weather ahead of time and decide, “Wednesday is my walking day,” it’s much easier to commit. Packing my bag and laying out clothes ahead of time makes the morning smoother and takes one more thing off my mental to-do list.

It kind of feels like being back in school—knowing exactly what you need for the day and just grabbing it and going. **Once you’re in walking mode, it’s no harder than getting in the car.**

There are a couple of improvements that have made a big difference for me. **I have to cross a busy street, and the pedestrian crossing lights—the ones you activate so drivers know someone is crossing—make me feel much safer.** More of those in busy areas would really help people feel more comfortable walking. Sidewalk maintenance is another big one. **When sidewalks are shoveled and iced, the commute is smoother, quicker, and a lot less stressful.**

Some of my favorite moments from walking to work are the small, routine interactions. In the summer, I pass an apartment complex where someone sits outside drinking coffee at the same time every morning. **We don't know each other's names, but we exchange a quick hello every day, and it's become this small, meaningful human connection.**

Another moment that really stands out happened when I was walking to the food bank. I noticed a shopping cart along the way—something that's actually really valuable for the food bank—so I grabbed it and pushed it with me. I started picking up litter too, and it just felt good. **I was listening to music, moving my body, and feeling connected to my neighborhood. It was one of those days where you feel like the best version of yourself.**
