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More folks afoot downtown

After years of declines, Minneapolis saw back-to-back gains in its pedestrian traffic, a report says. St. Paul also showed a rise.

By [Susan Feyder](#), Star Tribune

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The steady rise in occupancy in downtown Minneapolis office towers has resulted in a record increase in traffic in skyways and sidewalks, according to Pedestrian Studies, a Minneapolis research firm that has conducted foot-traffic studies here and in other major cities since 1991.

This year's study, which measured foot traffic at 30 different downtown locations, found skyway traffic was up about 10 percent from historical averages. That follows a 5 percent increase in 2006.

Pedestrian Studies said street-level traffic along the Nicollet Mall also was up but didn't provide a percentage gain for 2007.

Pedestrian Studies founder Peter Bruce said the back-to-back gains are unusual. "It's something I haven't seen in many years, and [it] follows a few years of declines," he said.

Bruce credits rising occupancy in office buildings, which has boosted the number of downtown workers.

The vacancy rate for downtown office buildings peaked at almost 21 percent in 2004, but has dropped steadily, hitting 15.4 percent as of the third quarter this year, according to United Properties.

The addition of some new skyway-level retailers, such as Brooks Brothers, also could be generating more traffic, Bruce said.

This year's study found that the Target store skyway over N. 9th Street was the busiest, followed by skyways leading to City Center, Northstar Center and the TCF Tower.

Bruce said a separate foot-traffic study in downtown St. Paul also measured increased volumes. Pedestrian traffic there was up about 7 percent from historical averages.

Bruce collects the data for his annual studies by hiring temporary workers. They fan out on skyways and sidewalks in front of buildings whose managers pay to participate in the research. The workers use handheld clickers to get hourly tallies of people walking by.

Building owners and managers use Bruce's research to market their properties and negotiate lease terms with tenants. Retailers also use the data to scout locations.

Maple Grove building gets medical tenants

Ryan Companies has signed three tenants at its new Grove Health medical office building in Maple Grove.

The 41,000-square-foot facility is part of the Grove, a 157-acre mixed-use development near the intersection of Interstate 94 and Maple Grove Parkway. The building is a block from the new Maple Grove Hospital that is under construction and scheduled to open in 2009.

Ryan worked with Cushman & Wakefield to find tenants.

Those who signed long-term leases include Grove Health Dental, Medical Advanced Pain Specialists and Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare.

Susan Feyder • 612-673-1723



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