

Appendix K: Recommended Complete Streets Policy



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There is a growing movement in the U.S. to integrate non-motorized transportation in the planning, design and operation of roads, bridges and transit projects called “Complete Streets.” At the national level, the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) developed a model bicycle and policy framework in 2001. The policy is based on the principle that bicyclists and pedestrians have the right to move along or across all roadways unless specifically prohibited from doing so. The national policy has served as guidance for state DOTs and public works agencies throughout the United States. It has recently evolved into the idea that streets are only complete when they address the needs of all modes of transportation, including walking and bicycling. This approach includes providing for transit, ADA compliance and facilities for people of all ages and abilities.

In 2009 the State of Wisconsin passed a Complete Streets law that mandates the inclusion of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations on most new and expanded roads that receive State or Federal funding for construction. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation expects to have legislative rules defining the Complete Streets regulations complete by the end of 2010.

Complete Streets principles are “federal, state, local, or regional level transportation laws, policies, or principles which ensure that the safety and convenience of all users of a transportation system, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit users, children, older individuals, motorists, and individuals with disabilities, are accommodated in all phases of project planning and development.” This section provides guidance for Complete Streets policy elements.

Elements of Complete Streets Policies

1. The Principle

- Complete streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities must be able to safely move along and across a complete street.
- Creating complete streets means changing the policies and practices of transportation agencies.
- A Complete Streets policy ensures that the entire right of way is routinely designed and operated to enable safe access for all users.

- Transportation agencies must ensure that all road projects result in a complete street appropriate to local context and needs.

2. Elements of a Good Complete Streets Policy

A good Complete Streets policy:

- Specifies that ‘all users’ includes pedestrians, bicyclists, transit vehicles and users, and motorists of all ages and abilities.
- Aims to create a comprehensive, integrated, connected network.
- Recognizes the need for flexibility: that all streets are different and user needs will be balanced.
- Is adoptable by all agencies to cover all roads.
- Applies to both new and retrofit projects, including design, planning, maintenance, and operations for the entire right of way.
- Makes any exceptions specific and sets a clear procedure that requires high-level approval of exceptions.
- Directs the use of the latest and best design standards.
- Directs that complete streets solutions fit in with context of the community.
- Establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes.

3. Implementation

An effective complete streets policy should prompt transportation agencies to:



Students and an adult biking home from Golda Meier School

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- Restructure their procedures to accommodate all users on every project.
- Re-write their design manuals to encompass the safety of all users.
- Re-train planners and engineers in balancing the needs of diverse users.
- Create new data collection procedures to track how well the streets are serving all users.

Benefits of Complete Streets

Complete streets improve safety. Complete streets reduce crashes through safety improvements. One study found that designing for pedestrian travel by installing raised medians and redesigning intersections and sidewalks reduced pedestrian risk by 28%.¹ Complete streets also improve safety indirectly by increasing the number of people bicycling and walking. A recently published international study found that as the number and proportion of people bicycling and walking increases, deaths and injuries decline.²

Complete streets encourage more walking and bicycling. Public health experts are encouraging walking and bicycling as a response to the obesity epidemic, and complete streets can help. One study found that 43% of people with safe places to walk within ten minutes of home met recommended activity levels, while just 27% of those without safe places to walk were active enough.³ Residents are 65% more likely to walk in a neighborhood with sidewalks.⁴ A study in Toronto documented a 23% increase in bicycle traffic after the installation of a bike lane.⁵

Complete streets can help ease transportation woes. Streets that provide travel choices can give people the option to avoid traffic jams, and increase the overall capacity of the transportation network. Several smaller cities have adopted Complete Streets policies to increase the overall capacity of their transportation network and reduce congestion as an alternative to expensive street expansion projects. An analysis by the Victoria Transportation Policy Institute found that non-motorized transportation



Participants in the Sherman Multicultural School Safe Routes to School program practice their road skills

options can replace some vehicle trips, and in urban areas where more people commute by foot or bicycle, people drive fewer miles overall.⁶ In Portland, Oregon, a Complete Streets approach has resulted in a 74% increase in bicycle commuting in the 1990s.⁷

Complete streets help children. Streets that provide room for bicycling and walking help children get physical activity and gain independence. More children walk to school where there are sidewalks. Also, children who have and use safe walking and bicycling routes have a more positive view of their neighborhood.⁸ Gaining in popularity across the country, Safe Routes to School programs will benefit from Complete Streets policies that help turn all routes into safe routes.

Complete streets make fiscal sense. Integrating sidewalks, bike lanes, transit amenities, and safe crossings into the initial design of a project spares the expense of retrofits later. Jeff Morales, the Director of Caltrans when the state of California adopted its complete streets policy in 2001, said, “By fully considering the needs of all non-motorized travelers (pedestrians, bicyclists, and persons with disabilities) early in the life of a project, the costs associated with including facilities for these travelers are minimized.”

Policy Recommendations

America Bikes requests that Congress establish a series

1 M.R. King, J.A. Carnegie, and R. Ewing, “Pedestrian Safety Through a Raised Median and Redesigned Intersections” Transportation Research Board 1828 (2003): 56-66.

2 Jacobsen, PL, “Safety in Numbers: More Walkers and Bicyclists, Safer Walking and Biking,” Injury Prevention 9 (2003): 205-209.

3 Powell, K.E., Martin, L., & Chowdhury, P.P. (2003). Places to walk: convenience and regular physical activity. American Journal of Public Health, 93, 1519-1521.

4 Giles-Corti, B., & Donovan, R.J. (2002). The relative influence of individual, social, and physical environment determinants of physical activity. Social Science & Medicine, 54 1793-1812.

5 St. George Street Revitalization. www.tc.gc.ca/programs/environment/UTSP/st.georgestreetrevitalization.htm

6 Littman, Todd TDM Encyclopedia (ADONIS, 1999; Mackett, 2000; Socialdata Australia, 2000; Cairns et al, 2004).

7 City of Portland, Office of Sustainable Development. Local Action Plan on Global Warming, 2005 Progress Report.

8 Ewing, R. Will Schroeder, William Greene. School location and student travel: Analysis of factors affecting mode choice. Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board, No. 1895, TRB, National Research Council, Washington, D.C., 2004, pp. 55–63.

of performance measures for state and local agencies to ensure that bicycling and walking become safe and convenient options throughout the transportation network.

Policy 1. As an element of good roadway design, all projects involving new construction or reconstruction of roadways shall consider accommodation of bicyclists and pedestrians. This principle shall apply to all federal, state and local recipients of funds authorized under Titles 23 and 49, including federal land management agencies.

Exceptions to this requirement would be possible where:

- Bicyclists and/or pedestrians are not permitted to operate (e.g., on limited access highways).
- There is a demonstrable lack of need (e.g., in cul-de-sacs).
- Provisions would exceed a reasonable percentage of the overall costs of the project (e.g., 20%).