

# COMPLETE STREETS:

## POLICY BASICS

The streets of our cities & towns are an important part of our communities. They allow children to get to school & parents to get to work. They bring together neighbors & draw visitors to neighborhood stores. These streets ought to be designed for everyone – whether young or old, on foot or on bicycle, in a car or in a bus – but too often they are designed only for speeding cars or creeping traffic jams.

Now, in communities across the country, a movement is growing to **complete the streets**. States, cities, & towns are asking their planners & engineers to build roads that are **safer, more accessible, & easier for everyone**. In the process, they are creating better communities for people to live, play, work, & shop.

### What are Complete Streets?

Complete Streets are designed & operated to enable safe access for all users: pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, & public transportation users of all ages & abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, & bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time & make it safe for people to walk to & from train stations.

### What are Complete Streets policies?

By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners & engineers to routinely design & operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. This means that every transportation project will make the street network better & safer for drivers, transit users, pedestrians, & bicyclists – making your town a better place to live.



### Why do we need Complete Streets policies?

#### Many of our streets are incomplete.

Incomplete streets – those designed with only cars in mind – limit transportation choices by making walking, bicycling, & taking public transportation **inconvenient, unattractive, & too often, dangerous**. These roadways often lack sidewalks, crosswalks, & space for people to safely ride bicycles. Roads often make no room for public transportation vehicles & riders & few accommodations for people with disabilities.

#### Americans want mobility.

Recent opinion polls found that **66% of Americans want more transportation options** & the freedom to choose how to get where they need to go. Yet **73% feel they have no choice but to drive** as much as they do. This is no surprise, as about one-quarter of walking trips take place on roads without sidewalks or shoulder, & bike lanes are available for only about 5% of bicycle trips. Changing policy so that our transportation system routinely includes the needs of people on foot, public transportation, & bicycles means that people of all ages & abilities will have more options when traveling to work, to school, to the grocery store, & to visit family.

#### Complete Streets foster strong communities.

Complete streets play an important role in livable communities, where all people – regardless of age, ability or mode of transportation – **feel safe & welcome** on the roadways. Complete streets provide benefits to the community in many ways, by improving public health, lowering transportation costs for families, encouraging local business, increasing capacity, & improving mobility for all.

#### Few states build complete transportation corridors.

In 2000, the US Department of Transportation advised states receiving federal funds that “bicycling & walking facilities will be incorporated into all transportation projects unless exceptional circumstances exist.” Unfortunately, fewer than half the states follow this federal guidance. Many highway projects add automobile capacity & increase vehicle speeds, but **do nothing** to mitigate the negative impact this can have on walking, biking, & taking public transportation.

### National Complete Streets Coalition

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## A comprehensive Complete Streets policy:

- Includes a vision for how & why the community wants to complete its streets.
- Specifies 'all users' to include pedestrians, bicyclists, & transit passengers of all ages & abilities, as well as trucks, buses, & automobiles.
- Applies to both new and retrofit projects, including design, planning, maintenance, & operations, for the entire right of way.
- Makes specific exceptions & sets a clear procedure that requires high-level approval of exceptions.
- Encourages street connectivity & aims to create a comprehensive, integrated, connected network for all modes.
- Is understood by all agencies to cover all roads.
- Directs the use of the latest & best design guidelines while recognizing the need for flexibility in balancing user needs.
- Directs that Complete Streets solutions will complement the context of the community.
- Establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes.
- Includes specific next steps for implementation of the policy.



## Implementing Complete Streets

Complete Streets policies end the project-by-project struggle for better facilities by requiring all road construction & improvement projects to begin with evaluating how the street serves all who use it – people of all ages & abilities, whether on foot or on bicycles, riding public transportation, or driving trucks & automobiles.

An effective Complete Streets policy should prompt transportation agencies to:

- Restructure procedures to accommodate all users on every project;
- Develop new design policies & guides;
- Offer training & education opportunities to planners, engineers, project managers, elected officials, & the general public; &
- Institute better ways to measure performance & collect data on how well the streets are serving all users.

### National Complete Streets Coalition Steering Committee:

AARP • Active Living by Design • Alliance for Biking & Walking • America Bikes • America Walks • American Council of the Blind • American Planning Association • American Public Transportation Association • American Society of Landscape Architects • Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals • City of Boulder • Institute of Transportation Engineers • League of American Bicyclists • National Association of Area Agencies on Aging • National Association of City Transportation Officials • National Association of REALTORS • National Center for Bicycling and Walking • Ryan Snyder Associates • Safe Route to School National Partnership • Smart Growth America • SvR Design Company • Transportation for America



## How do I write a Complete Streets policy?

Developing a Complete Streets policy means working with your neighbors, elected officials, transportation planners & engineers, transit agencies, and representatives from older adult, public health, disability, environment, & youth organizations. Bringing everyone to the table will build a robust community vision for Complete Streets & foster a broader understanding of why & how transportation decisions are made.

In developing language for each of the 10 elements of a comprehensive policy (listed at left), be sure to refer to the National Complete Streets Coalition's website for more information on each element ([www.completestreets.org/policyelements](http://www.completestreets.org/policyelements)). Check out examples of existing strong policy language in the annual policy analysis report at [www.completestreets.org/policyanalysis](http://www.completestreets.org/policyanalysis)

The National Complete Streets Coalition offers **interactive full-day workshops** led by national experts to help communities develop a Complete Streets policy that builds on local expertise & implement that policy by identifying ways to change the transportation decision-making process: [www.completestreets.org/workshops](http://www.completestreets.org/workshops)

Need transportation planning & engineering professionals who are ready to help design & construct complete streets? Our Complete Streets Partner firms can offer the expertise & dedication you need: [www.completestreets.org/help](http://www.completestreets.org/help)

## What about the costs of Complete Streets?

Complete Streets are sound financial investments in our communities that provide long-term benefits from investments. An existing transportation budget can incorporate Complete Streets projects with little to no additional funding, accomplished through re-prioritizing projects & allocating funds to projects that improve overall mobility. Many of the ways to create more complete roadways are low cost, fast to implement, and high impact. Building sidewalks striping bike lanes have been shown to create more jobs than traditional car-focused transportation projects.