

July 15, 2008

Re: Support H.R. 5951 to create safe and complete streets for safer, healthier communities

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the National Complete Streets Coalition, we are writing to encourage you to co-sponsor H.R. 5951, the Safe and Complete Streets Act of 2008 introduced by Congresswoman Matsui. This important piece of legislation would ensure that future transportation investments made by state Departments of Transportation and Metropolitan Planning Organizations create appropriate and safe transportation facilities for all those using the road – motorists, transit vehicles and riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

The National Complete Streets Coalition is a diverse coalition of more than 50 organizations working in support of complete streets policies across the country. Our members range from user groups such as AARP, the League of American Bicyclists and the American Council of the Blind to industry groups such as the American Public Transportation Association and the American Planning Association (see a full list of members at: <http://www.completestreets.org/howeare.html>).

More than 50 jurisdictions spanning all regions of the country have adopted complete streets policies that direct transportation planners to consider the needs of all users when transportation investment decisions are made. They ensure that our transportation investments create high quality streets that don't create barriers for children, disabled people, older persons, or those who do not drive. The Safe and Complete Streets Act of 2008 builds on these existing successful state and local policies to define effective complete streets policies, and to direct state DOTs and MPOs to adopt such policies and apply them to upcoming transportation projects. For example, when a DOT or MPO is planning a new road construction or road widening project, they must look at who uses the road and adequately accommodate those users by providing appropriate infrastructure. The bill also authorizes needed research and dissemination of complete streets best practices.

Complete streets benefit American communities in numerous ways. Streets designed for all users are safer, can ease congestion, and are less costly in the long run.

- Complete streets can help **increase the capacity of the transportation network** by giving people more choices. The Texas Transportation Institute found that providing more travel options, including public transportation, bicycling and walking facilities, is an important element in reducing congestion. Many studies show that when roads are better designed for bicycling, walking, and taking transit, more people do so.
- Complete streets **improve pedestrian safety**. The Federal Highway Administration has confirmed that designing the street with pedestrians in mind -- sidewalks, raised medians, better bus stop placement, traffic-calming measures, and treatments for disabled travelers -- significantly reduces pedestrian risk. About one-third of Americans do not drive, including low-income Americans who cannot afford cars and an increasing number of older adults. Whether they walk or bicycle directly to their destinations, or to public transportation, these individuals require safe access to get to work, school, shops and medical visits, and to take part in social, civic and volunteer activities. In 2006, nearly one quarter of pedestrian fatalities were children (8 percent) and older adults (15 percent).

- Complete streets make **better use of taxpayer dollars**. Illinois adopted a statewide complete streets law last year to help avoid the type of preventable expense that was incurred in the aftermath of several tragic accidents. A bridge near Cary, Illinois, built without any safe way to cross it via foot or bicycle, led to several deaths, and a successful wrongful-death lawsuit filed by the parents of a teenager killed on the bridge. In response, the state DOT was required to retrofit the existing bridge, at great expense, by adding a path to the span.

Complete streets also make important contributions towards alleviating the serious national challenges of climate change and obesity. Complete streets promote clean air, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and help children and adults get more physical activity.

- Complete streets **fight climate change and reduce our dependence on foreign oil**—they are an essential component in reducing automobile trips. The 2001 National Household Transportation Survey revealed that 50 percent of all trips in metropolitan areas are three miles or less and 28 percent are one mile or less – distances easily traversed by foot or bicycle. Yet, 65 percent of trips under one mile are now made by automobile, in part because of incomplete streets that make it dangerous or unpleasant to walk, bicycle, or take transit. Complete streets policies should be an element of the nation’s strategy for addressing climate change and energy security.
- Complete streets **encourage healthy and active lifestyles**. A forthcoming international physical activity study has found that the more transit stops, sidewalks, and bike lanes are present near home, the more likely residents are to reach recommended daily physical activity levels. Nearly one third of transit users meet the Surgeon General’s daily activity recommendations just through their routine travels.

Please show your support for addressing these critical problems by contacting Sam Stefanki (Sam.Stefanki@mail.house.gov) in Congresswoman Matsui’s office to co-sponsor H.R. 5951, The Safe and Complete Streets Act of 2008.

Sincerely,

AARP
 America Bikes
 America Walks
 American Planning Association
 American Public Transportation Association
 American Society of Landscape Architects
 Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals
 Bikes Belong
 Campaign to End Obesity
 Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
 Easter Seals
 Environmental Defense
 Friends of the Earth

League of American Bicyclists
 National Association of REALTORS
 National Center for Bicycling and Walking
 National Recreation and Parks Association
 Natural Resources Defense Council
 Rails to Trails Conservancy
 Reconnecting America
 Safe Routes to School National Partnership
 Smart Growth America
 Surface Transportation Policy Partnership
 Thunderhead Alliance
 Transportation Equity Network
 Transport Worker’s Union
 Trust for America’s Health
 U.S. Public Interest Research Group
 YMCA of the USA