

Talking Points: Complete Streets

ASK: Co-sponsor and support federal Complete Streets legislation.

Senate: Co-sponsor S. 2686 The Complete Streets Act of 2008 from Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA)

House: Co-sponsor and support forthcoming federal complete streets legislation from Rep. Matsui (D-CA 3)

Legislative Status

Sen. Tom Harkin has introduced legislation (S. 2686 The Complete Streets Act of 2008) and legislation is expected to be introduced by Rep. Doris Matsui in the next couple weeks. The legislation would require states and MPOs to establish complete streets policies and apply them to federally-funded projects. The bill clarifies what a complete streets policy should contain (information on the policy standard is available at <http://www.completestreets.org/policies.html>). The legislation would also strengthen research and technical assistance on complete streets.

Congress has already indicated its support for complete streets. A provision in the recently enacted energy bill states a “sense of Congress” that complete streets provisions should be adopted.

Issue Overview

Complete streets policies simply require that the safety, interests, and convenience of all users – drivers, pedestrians, transit users, and bicyclists alike – be considered in the design and construction of transportation projects. The public right-of-way – our roads – should be designed and built for safe travel by everyone. These policies are not new; states and regions across the nation have enacted successful complete streets policies or legislation.

The Problem

- Millions of Americans are walking and bicycling and catching the bus along roads that are not properly designed – most everyone has seen the pathways tramped in the grass alongside a major roadway. This is a problem on many levels, making our streets more dangerous and encouraging more people to drive everywhere—which means more congestion and more pollution, among other problems.
- We need to provide for the one-third of Americans who do not drive—many of these people are elderly, or poor, or young—and without walking, biking, or transit, they have no opportunities for mobility.
- 25% of walking trips on roads with no sidewalk or shoulder; bike lanes are available for only 5% of bike trips.
- Roads designed only for cars hamper development of compact, walkable communities.

- Incomplete streets are a barrier to helping people drive less. 50% of trips in metro areas are three miles or less and 28% are one mile or less, yet 65% of these trips now take place in a car.

The Complete Streets Solution

- Transportation engineers know how to design roads that are safe for everyone – but in most places only do so for ‘special’ projects. A federal complete streets policy would result in better state and local projects – and better use of the billions of dollars invested every year in road infrastructure.
- Citizens want more travel options that are safe and convenient. A new poll from the National Association of REALTORS® found that 83% of respondents would like communities built so they can use their cars less.
- Complete streets policies are vital to improving the mobility and access of senior citizens, children and people with disabilities.
- Complete streets can be a vital tool in improving chronic public health problems such as obesity by enabling more active lifestyle.
- Complete streets increase the capacity of the road network by providing more choices.
- Complete streets policies support local, state and national efforts to increase energy efficiency and meet greenhouse gas emission targets.
- Dozens of jurisdictions, including the states of Virginia, Massachusetts, and California, and the cities of Chicago, Seattle, and Salt Lake have successfully adopted complete streets policies. Most say that since accommodation for all users is integrated from the beginning, any additional costs are minimal.
- Massachusetts’ new complete streets design manual won a national award from AASHTO.

Use relevant state/local examples to discuss the problem and solution

- See table for existing state/local complete streets policies
- Tell stories that demonstrate local demand for bicycle/pedestrian ways; tell stories of recent bicycle/pedestrian fatalities on roads without facilities
- Tell stories of the disconnect between road design and plans to build compact housing developments
- Look up local or state bicycle/pedestrian fatality rates
 - Pedestrian crash factsheet:
http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/nhtsa_static_file_downloader.jsp?file=/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/NCSA/Content/TSF/2006/810810.pdf

- Bicyclist crash factsheet:
http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/nhtsa_static_file_downloader.jsp?file=/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/NCSA/Content/TSF/2006/810802.pdf
- Other factsheets (including children, older people, and schools)
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/menuitem.6a6eaf83cf719ad24ec86e10dba046a0/>

Read through the complete streets issue fact sheets posted at <http://www.completestreets.org/benefits.html> and pick out statistics you think would be appealing to your member of Congress.