

COMPLETE STREETS:

FUNDAMENTALS

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 streets for everyone. They are designed & operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, & public transportation users of all ages & abilities are able to safely move along & across a complete street. 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 do Complete Streets policies do?

Creating complete streets means transportation agencies change their approach to community roads. 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. The National Complete Streets Coalition has identified the elements of an ideal Complete Streets policy to help you write one for your town: www.completestreets.org/elements

What does a “complete” street look like?

There is no singular design prescription for Complete Streets; each one is unique & responds to its community context. A complete street may include: sidewalks, bike lanes (or wide paved shoulders), special bus lanes, comfortable & accessible public transportation stops, frequent & safe crossing opportunities, median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, narrower travel lanes, roundabouts, & more. A complete street in a rural area will look quite different from a complete street in an urban area, but both are designed to balance safety & convenience for everyone using the road: www.completestreets.org/manytypes



Charlotte, NC Department of Transportation

Why do we need Complete Streets policies?

Incomplete streets – those designed with only cars in mind – **limit transportation choices** by making walking, bicycling, & taking public transportation inconvenient, unattractive, & too often, dangerous. Changing policy so that our transportation system routinely includes the needs of people on foot, public transportation, & bicycles means that walking, riding bikes, & riding buses & trains will be **safer & easier**. People of all ages & abilities will have more options when traveling to work, to school, to the grocery store, & to visit family.

Making these travel choices more convenient, attractive, & safe means people do not need to rely solely on automobiles. They can replace congestion-clogged trips in their cars with swift bus rides or heart-healthy bicycle trips. Complete Streets **improve the efficiency & capacity** of existing roads too, by moving people in the same amount of space – just think of all the people who can fit on a bus or streetcar versus the same amount of people each driving their own car. Getting more productivity out of the existing road & public transportation systems is vital to **reducing congestion**.

Complete Streets are particularly prudent when communities are tightening their budgets & looking to ensure long-term benefits from investments. A well-balanced 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, & high impact**. Building more sidewalks & striping bike lanes has been shown to create more jobs than traditional car-focused transportation projects.

National Complete Streets Coalition

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What are some of the benefits of Complete Streets?

Complete streets can offer many benefits in all communities, regardless of size or location. The National Complete Streets Coalition has developed a number of fact sheets: www.completestreets.org/factsheets

Complete Streets improve safety. A Federal Highways Administration safety review found that streets designed with sidewalks, raised medians, better bus stop placement, traffic-calming measures, & treatments for disabled travelers improve pedestrian safety. Some features, such as medians, improve safety for all users: they enable pedestrians to cross busy roads in two stages, reduce left-turning motorist crashes to zero, & improve bicycle safety.

Complete streets encourage walking & bicycling for health. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention recently named adoption of Complete Streets policies as a recommended strategy to prevent obesity. One study found that 43% of people with safe places to walk within 10 minutes of home met recommended activity levels; among individuals without safe place to walk, just 27% were active enough. Easy access to transit can also contribute to healthy physical activity: nearly one third of transit users meet the Surgeon General's recommendations for minimum daily exercise through their daily travels.



Don Burden, Walkable and Livable Communities Institute



Don Burden, Walkable and Livable Communities Institute

Complete Streets can lower transportation costs for families. Americans spent an average of 18 cents of every dollar on transportation, with the poorest fifth of families spending more than double that figure. In fact, most families spend far more on transportation than on food. When residents have the opportunity to walk, bike, or take transit, they have more control over their expenses by replacing car trips with these inexpensive options. Taking public transportation, for example, saves individuals \$9,581 each year.

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 streets. A safe walking & bicycling environment is an essential part of improving public transportation & creating friendly, walkable communities. A recent study found that people who live in walkable communities are more likely to be socially engaged & trusting than residents of less walkable neighborhoods. Additionally, they reported being in better health & happier more often.

How can I get a Complete Streets policy adopted in my community?

Advocating for Complete Streets means working with your neighbors & local policymakers, including elected officials & government staff. Ways to start the conversation include talking about:

- schools that have no sidewalks out front,
- bus stops that are not accessible for people in wheelchairs,
- missing crosswalks by the grocery store,
- no safe routes to bicycle to work, &
- other particularly problematic & unsafe streets.

Work together to identify ways to make these places safer & more attractive & present your ideas to others. Make your case & show examples of what your streets could like.

The National Complete Streets Coalition's website has many resources to help. Modify & use the introductory presentation in your community, show it at PTA & neighborhood association meetings & to your local chamber of commerce. The website also has information on finding other local advocates, developing a good policy, & effectively implementing that policy. Check them out at www.completestreets.org

The National Complete Streets Coalition offers **interactive full-day workshops** led by national experts to help communities establish a common vision for their streets; develop a Complete Streets policy that builds on local expertise; & implement Complete Streets policies by identifying ways to change the transportation decision-making process: 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

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

Over 200 communities have adopted Complete Streets policies, & at an accelerating pace. Policies are in place in states like Minnesota, North Carolina, & California & in communities like Seattle, Washington, Nashville, Tennessee, & Las Cruces, New Mexico. Keep track by checking out our Complete Streets Atlas: www.completestreets.org/atlas