



Costs of Complete Streets

What We Are Learning from State and Local Governments

States and communities across the United States have been able to successfully work for safe accommodation of all users within their existing transportation budgets. Many states and local governments with fiscal constraints are deciding that Complete Streets are the more cost effective investment. They have taught us three things about handling the costs of Complete Streets:

- Complete Streets projects can be achieved within the context of existing transportation budgets and sometimes they can even save money
- Complete Streets projects can make transportation projects more popular and garner more support for transportation funding;
- Changing to a Complete Streets approach improves safety and adds lasting value to the community and to the transportation network.

Complete Streets Can Be Achieved Within Existing Budgets

Complete Streets projects can often be achieved within the context of existing transportation budgets; and sometimes can even save money.

MINNESOTA: A state-mandated feasibility study found that moving to a Complete Streets approach would not significantly increase costs, and would provide valuable safety benefits.¹

CALIFORNIA: The State Department of Transportation has determined that any additional costs of taking a Complete Streets approach are negligible and outweighed by the benefits.²

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA: Research conducted by the Department of Transportation has shown that the incremental cost of sidewalks, bike lanes, and other features are far less than the normal annual variation in construction costs. Project costs vary greatly by adjoining land use, terrain, and need to purchase right of way. For example, converting a farm to market road to a city street can cost varies from \$6 million per mile to \$12 million per mile; new arterials can cost \$5 million per mile or up to 200% more at \$15 million per mile. The portion of those costs that can be attributed to 'complete streets features' are small, provide safety benefits, and better match community values.³

LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA: As part of their Complete Streets implementation process, County staff re-examined their list of road projects approved in the Metropolitan Planning Organizations's 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan. As a result of this complete streets analysis, the staff determined that five road projects slated for widening from two to four lanes should be reduced to a two lane divided roadway with median and turn lanes. The County asked for amendments to the 2035 LRTP to reflect these changes in roadway plans. The changes are estimated to reduce the cost of these five projects by \$58.5 million, a significant savings for the county and its taxpayers that will also create streets that are better for all users.⁴

An incremental approach saves money and thinking ahead can avoid costly mistakes. Complete Streets policies do not trigger any spending; they require more careful planning of existing transportation projects. This means safety improvements can be incorporated into existing projects instead of seeking separate funding sources.

WASHINGTON: The State Department of Transportation determined that a Complete Streets process would save an average of \$9 million per project, or about 30%, when rehabilitating highways that serve as small-town Main Streets. The pilot project incorporated community input at the beginning of the process and incorporated sidewalks, safe crossings, parking management, and other features important to small towns; the savings came from reduced schedule, scope, and budget changes.⁵

“The advantage of inserting a dialogue about all users at the earliest stages of project development is that it provides the designers and engineers the best opportunity to create solutions at the best price.”

– James Simpson, Commissioner,
New Jersey Department of Transportation

MINNESOTA: Sewer work necessitated replacing 76th Street through Richfield. The consulting engineer estimated the sewer work and roadway reconstruction at \$6 million. When re-evaluating the street’s transportation needs via a Complete Streets approach, the Minnesota Department of Transportation found the roadway was too wide. By reallocating the right-of-way to better accommodate multiple users, the state saw a cost savings of \$2 million, or one-third of the original cost while also better serving the mobility and safety needs of multiple users.⁶

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO: The city has created much of its bicycle network within its existing budget for maintenance and repaving. The city repaves 7% to 10% of its network every year, and has created many miles of bikeways by converting undivided four lanes to road diets that include bike lanes. Before- and after- evaluations have found that the new configurations reduce speeding and improve community satisfaction with the roadway.⁷

Many Complete Streets improvements are modest in size and low-cost. The careful planning encouraged by Complete Streets policies helps jurisdictions find many effective measures that can be accomplished at little or no extra cost. Some standard infrastructure projects, such as conversion from open to closed drainage, can be enhanced with complete streets facilities (e.g. sidewalks) for negligible additional cost. Changing pedestrian signal timing at intersections to a 3.5 feet/second walking speed adds nothing to the cost of a signal, and adding countdown clocks can be done for as little as \$2000 per intersection. Adding curb bulbs where on-street parking occurs reduces the time for pedestrians to cross the street, allowing more time for automobile movement; this can be a relatively low cost way to improve both pedestrian and automobile access. Additional costs associated with the routine accommodation of bicycling, walking, and public transportation represent an immeasurably small percentage of the total budget. On a project-by-project basis, any additional money spent is actually a long-term investment in the financial and physical health of the community.

“When we talk about ‘Complete Streets,’ we aren’t necessarily talking about expensive widening projects or major redesigns of our roadways. These concepts can often be applied to existing streets by simply re-thinking how we approach traffic flow and how we accommodate all modes of transportation.”

– Phil Broyles, Director of Public Works,
Springfield, Missouri

ARIZONA: The Department of Transportation now routinely includes a ‘bicycle buffer’ lane to the left of exclusive right-turn lanes when they are doing intersection reconstruction projects. Costs are minimal, covering just paint and possibly pavement.⁸

Citizens Support Complete Streets

Complete Streets projects can make transportation projects more popular and garner more support for transportation funding.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON: In 2006, Seattle voters approved a nine-year, \$365 million levy in large part because of its promise to improve the transit, bicycle, pedestrian, and motorist networks. In the measure's first four years, the city has improved safety for children walking to 19 schools; remarked over 3,300 crosswalks; built nearly 70 blocks of new sidewalks; planted nearly 3,300 street trees; marked over 110 miles of new bicycle facilities; and paved 128 road lane-miles.⁹

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE: In Mayor Karl Dean's 2010-2011 transportation budget included \$12.5 million dollars for sidewalks, \$3 million for bikeways, and more than \$10 million for mass transit. Overall, Nashville is spending nearly 60% of its local transportation dollars on walking, biking and transit infrastructure.¹⁰

"If we think we don't have the time and money to do it right, what makes you think we have the time and money to do it over?"

– Dr. Mark Nicholson, testifying in favor of a Complete Streets policy in Billings, Montana

Complete Streets Bring Safer Streets

Some communities have concluded that whether it costs more or less, a Complete Streets approach adds lasting value to the community and to the transportation network. Complete Streets policies are a cost-effective way to address pedestrian safety hazards.

ORLANDO, FLORIDA: A study prepared the City of Orlando found that restriping Edgewater Drive from 4 lanes to 2 travel lanes, a center turn lane, and bicycle lanes reduced the frequency of crashes involving injuries from every nine days to once every 30 days while the number of people walking and bicycling rose 23% and 30% respectively.¹¹

VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON: Fourth Plain Boulevard was converted from four lanes with poor provisions for people walking, biking or in wheelchairs into a street with two through lanes, a center turn lane, two bicycle lanes, curb ramps and improved sidewalks. After this inexpensive treatment, vehicle collisions dropped 52%, and the number of pedestrian crashes dropped from two per year to zero.¹²

"Walking and bicycling are important components of a complete transportation system and of Minnesota's quality of life.

People of all ages deserve to arrive at their destinations safely, no matter what mode they choose.."

–Tom Sorel, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Transportation

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Sources:

- ¹ <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/completestreets/legislation.html>
- ² Letter from Gregg Albright, Deputy Director of Modal Planning and Programs at California Department of Transportation addressed to Barbara McCann of the National Complete Streets Coalition. May 20, 2008.
- ³ "Discussing the Value of Complete Streets: Answers to Common Objections." Presentation by Norm Steinman, Charlotte Department of Transportation. December 1, 2011.
- ⁴ Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, Lee County, and BikeWalk Lee. <http://www.mpo-swfl.org/content/agendas/2011/12-Dec/TAC/T05.List%20of%20LRTP%20Amendments.pdf>
- ⁵ <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/research/reports/fullreports/733.1.pdf>
- ⁶ "Response to Frequently Asked Complete Streets Questions Regarding Date and Costs Policy." Delivered to the Minnesota State Legislature on December 17, 2010 by Scott Bradley, Director of Context Sensitive Solutions at the Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- ⁷ Complete Streets: Best Policy and Implementation Practices. American Planning Association. March 2010.
- ⁸ As relayed by Michael Sanders, Arizona Department of Transportation, during the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals Professional Development Seminar session "Busting the Myth that Complete Streets Cost More." October 26, 2011.
- ⁹ Bridging the Gap 2010 Annual Report. Seattle Department of Transportation. <http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/docs/btg/BTGAnnualReport2010-FINAL.pdf>
- ¹⁰ "Edgewater Drive Before & After Re-Striping Results" City of Orlando.
- ¹¹ Rosales, Jennifer. Road Diet Handbook: Setting Trends for Livable Streets. Parsons Brinckerhoff.

