

COMPLETE STREETS

Approved by the Transportation Policy Committee on March 31, 2011

Approved by the Public Policy Committee on May 13, 2011

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Policy

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) supports Complete Streets policies that require that the safety, interests, and convenience of all users – drivers, bicyclists, transit users and pedestrians of all ages and abilities – be considered in the design, construction, operations, and management of transportation projects. ASCE believes that America's transportation system should be designed, built, operated, and managed for safe travel by everyone.

Issue

Millions of Americans are walking, bicycling and catching the bus along roads that are not properly designed to accommodate them. Twenty-five percent of walking trips are on roads with no sidewalk or shoulder; bike lanes are available for only 5% of bike trips. This makes our streets more dangerous and encourages more people to drive to meet their needs.

Our transportation system should provide for the one-third of Americans who do not drive, including the elderly, the poor, and the young. Without walking, biking, or transit they have no opportunities for mobility.

Roads designed only for cars hamper development of compact, walkable communities. These streets deter people who might choose to drive less and avoid the high cost of gas if safe options were available.

Rationale

Changing policy so that our transportation system routinely considers the needs of people on foot, public transportation, and bicycles means that walking, riding bikes, and riding buses and trains will be safer and easier. People of all ages and abilities will have more options when traveling to work, to school, to the grocery store, and to visit family.

Complete Streets improve safety. A Federal Highway Administration safety review found that streets designed with sidewalks, raised medians, better bus stop placement, traffic-calming measures, and treatments for disabled travelers improve pedestrian safety.

Complete Streets encourage walking and bicycling for health. The Centers for Disease Control and 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.

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.

Complete Streets address oil dependence. The 2008 National Household Transportation Survey found 50% of all trips in the United States are three miles or less and 28% of all trips are one mile or less – distances easy to walk, bike, or hop a bus or train. Yet, 72% of the shortest trips are now made by automobile. In part, this is because of streets that make it dangerous or unpleasant for other modes of travel.

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 and welcome on the roadways. A safe walking and bicycling environment is an essential part of improving public transportation and creating friendly, walkable communities.

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