Complete Streets: What are they and why should we care

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On your marks, get set, go...
What is a Complete Street?

A Complete Street is safe, comfortable and convenient for travel via automobile, foot, bicycle, and transit.

We know how to build correctly for all users.
Yet many roads are built like this

Recently completed IL 64 expansion with destinations on both sides of the road. Can you spot the pedestrian?

What is a Complete Streets policy?

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Complete streets policies provide for:
- Pedestrians
- Bicyclists
- Transit
- Motorists
- Travelers of all ages and abilities

Why have a complete streets policy?

- To make the needs of all users the default for everyday transportation planning practices

Why have a complete streets policy?

- To gradually create a complete network of roads that serve all users
Why have a complete streets policy?
- To shift transportation investments so they create better streets now

Why have a complete streets policy?
- To save money: Retrofits cost more than getting it right the first time

Who wants Complete Streets?
- Most Americans would rather drive less and walk more
- Transit is growing faster than population or driving
- About one-third of Americans don’t drive:
  - 21% of Americans over 65
  - Children under 16
  - Low income Americans can’t afford to drive

Americans want complete streets
- New National Poll
  - 47% of older Americans say it is unsafe to cross a major street near their home
  - 56% express strong support for adoption of complete streets policies

Benefits: Older Americans
- 21% over 65 do not drive
- More than 50% of non-drivers stay at home on a given day because they lack transportation options
- 54% of older Americans living in inhospitable neighborhoods say they’d walk and ride more often if things improved
Benefits: Health

- Americans move... without moving
- 60% of adults are at risk for diseases associated with inactivity:
  - Obesity
  - Diabetes
  - High blood pressure
  - Other chronic diseases

Benefits: Physical activity

- Residents are more likely to walk in a neighborhood with sidewalks
- Cities with more bike lanes have higher levels of bicycling
- 1/3 of regular transit users meet minimum daily physical activity requirement during their commute

Benefits: Physical activity

- It makes a difference!

Benefits: Safety

- Sidewalks reduce pedestrian crashes 88%
- Medians reduce crashes 40%
- Road diets reduce crashes 29%
- Countdown signals reduce crashes 25%

Benefits: People with disabilities

- Improved mobility for disabled people and reduced need for expensive paratransit service
Benefits: Better use of transit funds

A year of paratransit service for a daily commuter: $38,500

Making a transit stop accessible: $7,000-$58,000

Source: Maryland Transit Administration

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Benefits: The environment

- Fewer emissions
- Less noise pollution
- Less wear and tear on our roads
- Less need to widen roads

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Benefits: Reduced traffic

- Trips in metro areas:
  - 50% — less than three miles
  - 28% — less than one mile:
    - 65% of trips under one mile are now taken by automobile

Source: National Household Travel Survey

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Benefits: Economic activity

- Well designed multi-modal streets
  - Increase home values
  - Revitalize commercial areas
  - People can leave their car at home

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Benefits: Your wallet

- Transportation is the 2nd largest expense for most American households, and costs are rising
- Complete streets let people leave their cars at home

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How do Complete Streets change the built environment?

Before

After
Complete Streets policies change intersection design
From an intersection that looks like this…
… to one that looks like this.

Complete Streets policies change bicycling

Complete Streets policies change transit
Complete Streets policies change accessibility

Complete Streets policies and trails
- Streets provide access to trails
- Complete streets and trails can form a comprehensive non-motorized network
- Complete Streets take pressure off overcrowded trails

Complete Streets is NOT:
- A design prescription
- A mandate for immediate retrofit
- A silver bullet; other initiatives must be addressed:
  - Land use (proximity, mix of uses, density)
  - Environmental concerns
  - Reduction in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)
    - (but complete streets will help!)

What does a complete street look like?
- One size doesn’t fit all:
  - Complete Streets doesn’t mean every street has sidewalks, bike lanes and transit

There is no magic formula
The many types of Complete Streets

Safe Routes to School

Shoulder on rural roads

Busy multi-modal thoroughfares

Transit routes

Suburban thoroughfares

Residential skinny streets
The many types of Complete Streets

Low traffic streets

Historic Main Street

What do the design guides tells us?
The AASHTO “Green Book” states:
“Sidewalks are integral parts of city streets”
Not added to streets — part of the street

“Shoulders are desirable on <…> urban arterials”
Bike lanes are shoulders reserved for bicycle use!

AASHTO: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Green Book: A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets

Permission

Many transportation engineers and planners know how to build good streets; they’re seeking permission/support/direction to do so

Complete Streets and Context Sensitive Solutions

- Context sensitivity has focused primarily on surrounding physical context: land use, environment, nature, etc.
- Less focus on users of the street or road
- Complete Streets focuses on people: bicyclists, pedestrians, transit users, etc. are more than “context”

Complete Streets

- Are sensitive to the community
- Serve adjacent land uses
- Serve all who potentially will use the street
Status Nationally
- In 2008, 20 communities adopted CS policies.
- The 100 mark was reached in 2009!
- Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D, CA-5) introduced the Complete Streets Act of 2009 in March.
- Large percentage of complete streets workshops are sponsored by health organizations.

What about funding?
- Complete streets is about using existing resources differently:
  - STP, CMAQ, TE, State, Bond measures, gas tax, sales taxes, and now the stimulus dollars... the usual suspects.
- While retrofit funding is important, it is not necessary to get started.
- Additional funding is not needed.

A Complete Streets Policy
... ensures that all users of the transportation system, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users as well as children, older individuals, and individuals with disabilities, are able to travel safely and conveniently on streets and highways.

Complete Streets Resources
www.completestreets.org
- Fact Sheets
- Monthly policy news
- Policy examples
- Complete Streets Implementation Workshops (through APBP)
- Join the Coalition!