

Westchester County
Sample
Complete Streets Policy

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Presented by Southern Westchester Energy Action Consortium & Tri-State Transportation Campaign. Based on a draft policy prepared by Elan Planning.



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Preamble

In August 2011, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the “Complete Streets” bill into law. This law, which passed unanimously in both the State Senate and State Assembly, requires that Complete Street design guidelines be considered for the planning, design, construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation of roadways receiving federal and state funding. Typical design features include but are not limited to sidewalks, bicycle lanes, lane stripping, shared roadway signage, crosswalks, traffic calming, and bus pull outs. Such guidelines are intended to include convenient access and mobility to all users including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit users, and individuals of all ages and abilities.

The concept of complete streets is not new, but it is becoming increasingly more integrated into new projects and the regular maintenance or rehabilitation of local transportation systems. In fact, Tri-State Transportation Campaign estimates that over 25 municipalities and counties in New York State have adopted local complete streets policies and at least 25 states have implemented some form of complete streets policy or law.

Vision Statement

With the signing of the Complete Streets Law by Governor Cuomo, statewide attention is being given to the concept of complete streets, which impacts the safety, health and vibrancy of New York State communities. The [insert municipality here] Complete Streets Policy will encourage the development of a complete streets network throughout the community to create a more balanced transportation system. The Complete Streets Policy shall be consistent with, and assist in achieving the goals and recommendations set forth in the [insert municipality here] Comprehensive plan and other policy documents. The Policy shall ensure that new and updated public and private projects are planned, designed, maintained and operated to enable safe, comfortable and convenient travel to the greatest extent possible for users of all ages and abilities including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders.

Rationale for Complete Streets

The integration of land use and transportation is critical to the livability of a community and region. In a highly competitive global economy, regions and communities must learn to address each in a balanced manner to maintain a high quality of life for existing and future residents, businesses and visitors. The Hudson Valley is currently undergoing significant employment and population shifts. New and existing residents and employees often have an expectation for a high quality of life, which often includes a walkable, bikeable and vibrant community. Incorporating complete streets into a community can assist in achieving this high quality of life.

“Complete street” designs are a routine approach for accommodating all travel modes for all users, regardless of age or ability. This results in a balanced transportation system providing choices of where people can go and how they can get there. Complete streets may include elements such as defined pedestrian and bicycles spaces, street trees and benches, pedestrian scaled lighting, and transit stop shelters. These elements allow people to safely walk to the library, take the bus to the grocery store or bike to the park. They also enable seniors in our communities to “age in place.” Complete Streets elements have the capacity to increase bicycle, pedestrian and transit use of the street system, which would positively impact the physical health and safety of the community, the environmental quality of our neighborhoods and the economic vitality of the [insert municipality here].

Complete Streets are not about building sidewalks and bicycle lanes on every street. They are not about massive takings of rights of way. They are about very site-specific planning decisions that help to reconfigure existing road space in a manner that better accommodates the needs of users. Sometimes, it’s as simple as moving the white line to create more space on the shoulder, or making sure the cross-walk light stays on long enough for an older pedestrian to get across the road.

Health

Public health officials have become increasingly aware of our nation's declining physical fitness and the resulting increase in diseases such as diabetes and obesity. Much research has been conducted to identify a link between auto-dependent sprawl with an increase in sedentary lifestyle diseases. Research indicates that countries that invest in a more multi-modal transportation system (biking, walking, transit) have higher rates of bicycling and walking as well as lower rates of obesity. It is believed that the most practical and effective way to improve public fitness is to increase walking and bicycling.ⁱ

Walking and biking can decrease the risk of diseases related to inactivity such as asthma, hypertension and obesity. In addition to its health benefits to individuals, walking and biking decreases automobile dependence, in turn improving air quality and the overall health of the environment we live in.

Safety

A generation ago, walking and bicycling to school or work was a common practice. Today, however, the number of people walking and bicycling to local destinations has dwindled substantially. According to the EPA, in 1969, 90% of the students who lived within a mile of their school walked or biked to school; in 1999, 31% did. A major factor in this trend is a concern for safety. Recent New York Census data indicates that youth age 17 and under account for 25% of the state's population. Yet, in 2005, youth from age 5-17 represented nearly 62% of all bicycle/motor vehicle injuries and fatalities as well as nearly 26% of all pedestrian/motor vehicle injuries and fatalities.ⁱⁱ Research has also shown that seniors are disproportionately injured and killed on our streets. People aged 60 years and older comprise 59.3% of Westchester County's 27 pedestrians killed in the three years from 2007 through 2009, though they make up only 19.3% of the population. Those 75 years and older account for only 7.2% of the total population, but 18.5% of pedestrian fatalities.^{iv} Providing well-defined pedestrian and bicycle facilities coupled with an educational program is a way to help address the safety concerns often raised.

Environment

Increased greenhouse gas levels are negatively impacting the earth. Transportation accounts for 34% of greenhouse gases and for every gallon of gasoline burned, 20 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions are produced.^v The auto-centric manner in which our communities have grown is a critical factor supporting the consumption of carbon-based fuels in the U.S. Implementing a complete streets policy can have a positive impact on our environment by reducing the community's reliance on a vehicular mode of transport and offering viable transportation options such as walking, bicycling and public transit.

Fiscal Impact

Designing complete streets is not additional work for planners, architects and engineers; it is different work. The practitioners of these disciplines have in the past been asked to solve a particular problem—namely, safely and efficiently moving the maximum number of cars past a given point in the shortest time. A Complete Streets Policy simply

redefines the problem. Under this Policy, these professionals are required to use their knowledge and skills to design roads and a road network that safely and efficiently moves all users, motorized and non-motorized. The fiscal impact of designing and implementing Complete Streets is mitigated by the use of updated planning practices, prevention of delays in the design process and elimination of the need for costly retrofits.

The costs associated with the routine accommodation of alternative transportation modes (i.e. walking, biking and transit) generally represent a small percentage of a community's overall budget. Infrastructure costs are reduced by requiring less pavement per user, which in turn reduces long-term maintenance costs. The resources that are spent equate into a long-term investment in the financial and physical health of the [insert municipality here].

Additionally, the choices that can result from a complete streets policy can improve and maintain the economic vitality as well as support the economic vibrancy of [insert municipality here]. The downtown area can continue to be a target for growth and to support tourism in the region. Streets accommodating pedestrian and bicycle activity are welcoming and encourage residents and visitors to linger at local businesses, providing an important contribution to the tax base.

Exemptions

Where the [insert municipality here] or a private developer decides that accommodating all users is impractical or burdensome, they may document their determination to be exempt from the policy's requirements. This documentation will be filled out and posted for each new street and sidewalk project. It lists who the decision makers are on the project, and the ways in which all users were accommodated, or the reasons they were not. Cost may be considered a valid basis for an exemption. In New York State, as with all road projects, if decision makers follow a proper review and decide not to include Complete Streets elements, they are afforded "design immunity" and cannot be sued for injury resulting from the project, unless they are found grossly negligent.

Objectives and Guiding Principles:

A. Incorporate locally sensitive "best practices" from United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials, Institute of Transportation Engineers, NYS Department of Transportation, Americans with Disabilities Act and other appropriate entities to enable citizens to safely travel by all transportation modes, including bicycling, walking and transit ridership.

B. Promote the safe use of our multi-modal transportation system by increasing the awareness of all users through an appropriate educational program.

C. Reinforce collaboration with partners at the local, school district, county, state and federal levels to ensure appropriate connectivity for all travel modes.

[Optional Action Items: Though not imperative to include, it is always helpful to include clear action items when adopting a policy]

Short-Term

1. The [insert municipality here] shall appoint a Complete Streets Advisory Board to provide input on public projects to further the [insert municipality here] complete streets philosophy. The board will be solely advisory in nature and will consist of [seven] members.

A liaison between the Advisory Board and [insert municipality here] is strongly encouraged. The Advisory Board meetings would be open to the public and would allow for public input. The Advisory Board would meet a minimum of twice per year and on an as-needed basis as called on by the [insert municipality here], the Land Use Boards or at the inception of public transportation projects within the [insert municipality here] limits.

2. Provide information about the [insert municipality here], complete streets policy and the Complete Streets Advisory Board on the website for easy public access.

3. Promote the safe use of a multi-modal transportation system by increasing the awareness of all users through an appropriate educational program. The Complete Streets Advisory Board could lead this effort with assistance from the Planning Office, local organizations such as SWEAC, and the school district. Additionally, staff shall attend periodic workshops and training to remain well-informed of changes in the field.

4. Develop a “complete streets” checklist for all public projects undertaken within the [insert municipality here] to be reviewed by the Complete Streets Advisory Board during the project planning and design phase. The checklist may also be included in applications before the Land Use Boards for the review of private development projects. The Complete Streets Advisory Board, in conjunction with the Planning Office and Land Use Boards, will develop the checklist.

5. Coordinate with the School District and Department of Public Works to achieve shared goals related to Safe Routes to School. The [insert municipality here], Complete Streets Policy will result in a fully-connected transportation network for all modes of transportation. While not every street can be designed perfectly for every user, the development of Safe Routes to School will allow for “an interwoven array” of streets which adequately serve all modes of transit.

Mid-Term

6. Conduct a complete streets audit examining the accessibility, safety, connectivity and quality of place for an area in the [insert municipality here], that includes key community features and destinations. The Planning Office could lead this effort in coordination with the [insert municipality here] Land Use Boards and Complete Streets Advisory Board.

This information could be incorporated into a complete streets gap analysis map and a future Bicycle, Pedestrian and Public Transit Plan.

8. Identify current regulations within the City's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations which are consistent with a "complete streets" approach to roadway and streetscape development. Provide recommendations to further enhance guidelines and requirements for private development projects. Also identify possible amendments to the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations that can further support complete streets.

Long-Term

10. Complete a Bicycle, Pedestrian and Public Transit Plan including a map, illustrating gaps in pedestrian, bicycle and transit friendly components. The results of the complete street audit could be the basis for this plan and could assist in identifying complete streets needs and priorities within the City. Such a plan may also include recommendations for enforcement throughout the [insert municipality here] related to complete streets.

ⁱ "If Health Matters: Integrating Public Health Objectives in transportation Planning." Todd Litman. Victoria Transport Policy Institute. Aug. 2009.

ⁱⁱ New York State DMV Summary of Motor Vehicle Accidents: New York State, 2005. Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research, Feb. 2007.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Older Pedestrians at Risk," Tri-State Transportation Campaign (2011). Available at: <http://tstc.org/reports/older11/index.php>.

^v Growing Cooler: Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change. Reid Ewing, et al. Urban Land Institute.