



Complete Streets Policy Development and Adoption

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Policy development and adoption

Development process

Complete Streets policies formalize a community's intent to plan, design, and maintain streets so they are safe for all users of all ages and abilities.

The most successful policies are those that reflect input from a broad group of stakeholders, including transportation planners and engineers, elected officials, transit agencies, public health departments, and members of the community. In writing a policy, communities may want to:

- Host a workshop on policy development from a regional or national technical assistance provider.
- Host working sessions with representatives from various decision-making departments and organizations to begin asking questions and collaborating on policy language.
- Convene a committee or sub-committee to develop policy language based on the resources provided below and circulate the draft to other stakeholders.

Types of policies

Complete Streets can be achieved through a variety of policy mechanisms. The following policy types are discussed in detail in the NCSC's publication *Complete Streets Local Policy Workbook* (2013).¹

Ordinance

Complete Streets ordinances legally require that transportation projects and municipal code addresses the needs of all users. Ordinances may also apply to private developers by changing zoning and subdivision requirements. Ordinances require strong support from the community and elected officials and may be subject to judicial enforcement.

Resolution

Issued by a community's governing body, resolutions are non-binding, official statements of support for approaching community transportation projects as a way to improve access, public health, and quality of life. Because resolutions do not require action, they may be forgotten or neglected if an implementation plan is not created.

Plans

Complete Streets policies can also be situated within community comprehensive plans or transportation plans. The process of updating a plan or adopting a new one provides an excellent opportunity to engage all sectors of the community. To be truly effective, the Complete Streets approach must touch all aspects of the plan. For example, a policy should not be restricted to only the bicycle elements or applied only to streets included on a bicycle and

¹ Available on Smart Growth America's website at <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/guides/complete-streets-local-policy-workbook/>.

pedestrian plan. Plans must also be well regarded by the community and inform the budget process, or they risk obsolescence or irrelevance.

Municipal policies

A city council or village board may also take action by adopting a Complete Streets policy as official municipal policy. Generally, this means that a Complete Streets policy is developed by a group of stakeholders and then taken to the full Council for discussion and a vote. These policies tend to be lengthier and more detailed than resolutions or ordinances and can build robust partnerships between agencies, community members, and decision makers. Like resolutions, such policies are not necessarily legally binding, but the support for change tends to be very high with, resulting in a shared, lasting impetus for implementation of the policy.

Design guidelines

Communities may decide to integrate Complete Streets elements into new design guidance for their streets. Manuals can take years to develop, but, simply changing important details such as street cross-section standards can be done in a short time. Revisions to design guidance—including development of new standards—are an important step in policy implementation regardless of how the policy is initially adopted.

Departmental policy

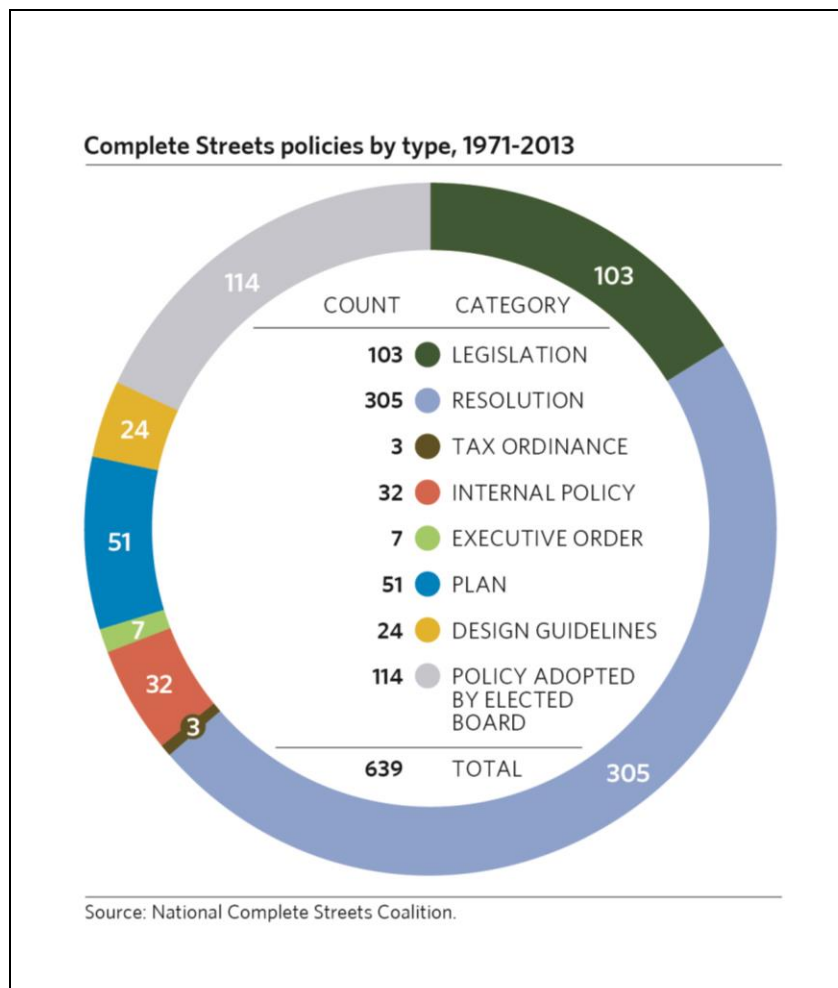
A relatively uncommon, but useful, policy adoption method is for a municipal department to issue its own Complete Streets policy directive. These policies are issued by the department head and usually created “in house” by that department. Though not mandated by law, such policies generally have good support from transportation professionals and are likely to be accompanied by changes in practice to ensure implementation.

Executive order

Directives issued by the municipality’s chief executive are not as common as other policy types but have proved useful. These executive orders are most helpful in defining the problem and directing department heads to make the necessary changes. Though such policies reflect strong political will, they may only last as long as the current executive sits in office. Elected officials often have the power to facilitate or influence the hiring or appointment of key municipal staff that can enable individual units or departments to move ahead with Complete Streets changes.

Distribution of policy types

By the end of 2013, more than 600 jurisdictions nationwide had formally committed to a Complete Streets approach by adopting some form of a policy. Nearly half of these policies are resolutions, around one-fifth is a policy adopted by an elected board, and about one-sixth is binding legislation. The remainder is a mix of internal policies, executive orders, plans, design guidelines, and tax ordinances. The annual *Complete Streets Policy Analysis* from the NCSC updates this information and provides links to the best recent examples of the various policy types.



Choosing the right policy type

A Complete Streets policy should take into account existing policy, practice, and politics. Municipalities that evaluate how transportation decisions are made can identify places in the current processes where there is room for new principles to fit in and to grow into routine practice. Local governments should identify the type of policy that would be most effective in sparking change, while still being realistic about the type of policy that can be passed and implemented successfully.

Policy elements

The NCSC promotes a comprehensive policy model that includes ten elements.

1. **Vision and intent:** The policy outlines a vision for how and why the community wants to complete its streets. A strong vision can inspire a community to follow through on its Complete Streets policy.
2. **All users and modes:** The policy specifies that “all users” includes pedestrians, bicyclists and transit passengers of all ages and abilities, as well as trucks, buses, and automobiles. A true Complete Streets policy must apply to everyone traveling along the road.
3. **All projects and phases:** A strong Complete Streets policy will integrate Complete Streets planning into all types of projects, including new construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, repair, and maintenance. The Complete Streets approach views all transportation improvements as opportunities to create safer, more accessible streets for all users. Under this approach, even small projects can be an opportunity to make meaningful improvements.
4. **Clear, accountable exceptions:** Making a policy work in the real world requires developing a process to handle exceptions to providing for all modes in every project. There must be a clear process for defining and granting exceptions, which should be kept on record and publicly available. The Federal Highway Administration’s guidance on accommodating bicycle and pedestrian travel named three exceptions that have become commonly used in Complete Streets policies: 1) accommodation is not necessary on corridors where non-motorized use is prohibited, such as interstate freeways; 2) cost of accommodation is excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use; 3) a documented absence of current or future need.
5. **Network:** Complete Streets policies should result in the creation of a comprehensive, integrated, and connected transportation network for all modes of travel. A network approach helps to balance the needs of all users.
6. **Jurisdiction:** Creating Complete Streets networks is difficult because many agencies control our streets. All agencies and local staff should clearly understand the policy, should be involved in the process, and should be empowered to coordinate with other jurisdictions on projects that intersect or connect to the local network.
7. **Design:** Communities adopting a Complete Streets policy should review their current policies and manuals to ensure the ability to accommodate all modes of travel while still providing flexibility to projects to be tailored to unique circumstances. Some communities will opt to re-write their design manual, and others will refer to existing

design guides, such as those issued by AASHTO, their state DOT, NACTO, ITE, and the MUTCD and ADA Accessibility Guidelines.

8. **Context sensitivity:** An effective Complete Streets policy must be sensitive to the community context. A strong statement about context can help align transportation and land use planning goals, creating livable, strong neighborhoods.
9. **Performance measures:** Complete Streets planning requires taking a broader look at how the system is serving all users and includes performance standards with measurable outcomes. The traditional performance measure for transportation planning has been vehicular Level of Service (LOS), but communities with Complete Streets policies can measure success through a variety of ways that best fit the project.
10. **Implementation next steps:** Describing specific next steps for implementing Complete Streets can help take the policy from paper to practice. Restructuring procedures to accommodate all users on every project; developing new design policies and guides; offering workshops and other educational opportunities to transportation professionals, community leaders, and residents; and instituting better ways to measure performance and collect data on how well the streets are serving all users are the keys to successful implementation.

Regional policy examples

The National Completes Streets Coalition Policy Atlas² currently shows 20 jurisdictions in our region that have adopted Complete Streets policies.

Public Act 095-0665 passed the Illinois General Assembly in 2007. It added a section to the Illinois Highway code requiring that the planning and development of state transportation projects give full consideration to “bicycle and pedestrian ways,” and requiring their establishment during construction and reconstruction of state facilities in or within one mile of an urban area. Though the law provides a number of exceptions – including resurfacing projects that do not widen roadways – it allows local communities to request that bicycle and pedestrian facilities be included in resurfacing projects.³ Such requests would typically require the local agency to pay for a percentage of the cost (local match). In accordance with the law, IDOT issued Bureau of Design and Environment (BDE) Procedure Memorandum 68-10 in June 2010, which revised Chapters 5 and 17 of the BDE Manual to specify the state match on bicycle and pedestrian projects and to provide guidance on selecting facilities and working with local agencies.⁴

Within the Chicago region, DuPage and Lake Counties have adopted Complete Streets policies, and Cook County has both an internal policy and an ordinance. The DuPage County Healthy Roads Initiative directs the county division of transportation to create safe facilities for non-motorized users whenever possible, with an emphasis on low-cost improvements in the course of routine work.⁵ Lake County’s 2010 “Policy on Infrastructure Guidelines for Non-Motorized

² <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/changing-policy/complete-streets-atlas>

³ Illinois Public Act 095-0665.

⁴ See <http://www.bikelib.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/BDEMemo060110.pdf>

⁵ See http://www.dupageco.org/EDP/Bikeways_and_Trails/1233/

Travel Investments” provides specific direction on incorporating facilities for people traveling on foot, bicycles, and transit, as well as accommodating people with limited mobility and guidance on public input processes.⁶ Cook County first established a Complete Streets policy framework through a 2009 executive order directed at county departments.⁷ A 2011 ordinance fleshed out this directive and created specific performance objectives, operational guidelines, and an exception process.⁸

Many municipalities in the region have also adopted Complete Streets policies, of which several have been nationally recognized. Oak Park’s policy was among ten best Complete Streets policies of 2012 according to the NCSC, and Des Plaines’ policy was recognized in 2011 for the strength of its policy language.⁹

The Active Transportation Alliance has prepared a guide that includes the text of several Chicago-area Complete Streets policies, including the Cook County ordinance, and breaks down how the policies score according to NCSC’s ten policy elements.¹⁰ Beyond the ones listed above, other notable policies from the region include those in Blue Island, Berwyn, and Highland Park.¹¹

Best policies and practices from around the country

- The NCSC provides a number of resources that discuss the policy development process in detail. These publications provide examples of and links to outstanding policy language from communities across the country. The *Complete Streets Local Policy Workbook* (2013) is focused on the policy development process in particular. The *Best Complete Streets Policies* reports (annual since 2011) analyze all known Complete Streets policies adopted each year, scoring them in terms of the ten policy attributes listed

⁶ See

<http://www.lakecountyil.gov/Transportation/Publications/Documents/Nonmotorized%20Policy%20Guidelines.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.activetrans.org/blog/rsadowsky/complete-streets-cook-county-announced>

⁸ <http://activetransportationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Cook%20County%20Complete%20Streets%20Policy.pdf>

⁹ The 2012 policy analysis is available at <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs-2012-policy-analysis.pdf>;

Oak Park policy: <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/policy/cs-il-oakpark-policy.pdf>

Des Plaines policy: <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/policy/cs-il-desplaines-policy.pdf>

¹⁰ See

http://activetransportationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/P2_02%20SAMPLES%20Complete%20Streets%20Policy%20Sample%20and%20Ratings%20Packet.pdf

¹¹ Blue Island ordinance: <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/policy/cs-il-blueisland-ordinance.pdf>

Berwyn ordinance: <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/policy/cs-il-berwyn-ordinance.pdf>

Highland Park policy and non-motorized plan:

http://www.cityhpil.com/documents/19/2030_BikePlan_Oct19_201210190933244990.pdf

above. The reports are available on the NCSC website:

<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets>.

- “‘Everyone Should Be Able to Choose How They Get Around’: How Topeka, Kansas, Passed a Complete Streets Resolution” is a case study of the development and passage of a Complete Streets policy that includes interviews, lessons learned, and advice for other communities. Full text is available at:
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3938956/>.
- The Minnesota Department of Transportation produced a collection of case studies on how Complete Streets went from concepts to completed projects in 11 cities. The report includes discussion of how initial momentum was created and how the communities built institutional support for Complete Streets to ensure successful implementation. *Complete Streets from Policy to Project: The Planning and Implementation of Complete Streets at Multiple Scales* is available at:
<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/research/TS/2013/201330.pdf>.
- The American Planning Association has developed draft standards for the incorporation of sustainable principles in communities’ comprehensive plans, including Complete Streets, as part of a multifaceted approach to creating livable built environments. These standards are available at:
<https://www.planning.org/sustainingplaces/compplanstandards/>.
- ChangeLab Solutions offers model Comprehensive Plan language for incorporating Complete Streets principles into a community’s long-term vision:
<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/comp-plan-language-cs>.



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