

Chapter 10: Talking About Complete Streets

The accepted definition of complete streets is: roadways designed to meet the needs of all users regardless of mode choice, age or ability. However, the meaning of complete street may vary by community, application or individual. This chapter is intended to serve as a resource for professionals, decision makers and the public who are interested in discussing and educating others about complete streets concepts.

SIMILAR CONCEPTS

The complete streets terminology is similar to terms such as “livable streets”, “context sensitive solution”, “sustainable transportation”, and “transit oriented developed”. All of these concepts give greater emphasis to alternatives to driving alone than traditional transportation planning concepts which primarily focused on vehicle transportation. Each of these newer terms reveal an approach to planning and designing transportation facilities which takes into consideration transit, bicycling and walking and the demands and desires of each community. Unlike the other terms, “complete streets” is the most encompassing phrase associated with this approach and conveys the need for streets to have all the necessary and appropriate parts to achieve its objective, as opposed other concepts that place greater emphasis on one particular transportation design such as transit accommodations, or pedestrian scale facilities.

COMMUNITY VALUE

In order to facilitate dialogue about complete streets between various stakeholders, this section provides some suggestions for talking about complete streets in way that resonates with roadway users not familiar with in transportation planning terminology. Groups that may be engaged in complete streets discussion include, but are not limited to policy makers, advocacy groups, schools, law enforcement, neighborhood associations, and business groups.

When encouraging dialogue about complete streets amongst with stakeholders, begin with a common understanding of complete streets. See Chapter 1: What are Complete Streets, Why Complete Streets? When talking about the benefits of complete streets, consider the following:

What does improved access mean?

- Increasing people's ability to meet most of their daily needs (ex. shopping, school, services, work) without having to drive.
- Improving the convenience of walk, bicycle and transit by designing facilities that provide shorter routes that are not obstructed and reduce weight times at intersections.
- Improving the comfort of walk, bicycle, and transit by designing facilities that are buffered from high traffic volumes or speeds, reducing pedestrian exposure to traffic at intersections and providing lighting and shade.

What does economic benefit mean?

- Reinvesting money in the local economy by reducing fuel consumption and vehicle related expenses.
- Reducing household cost by not spending it on fuel and other vehicle-related expenses
- See Appendix J, Economic Framework for Evaluating Complete Streets.

Why care about safety?

- Traffic crash injuries can result in severe and/or permanent health damage, affecting quality of life and at a great cost to individuals and societies.
- Bicycle and pedestrians are disproportionately negatively impacted by collisions.
- Increasing the number of people of walking, biking, and public transportation use result in lower rates of chronic disease (including cancer, diabetes, stroke, and heart disease) and mortality.
- Slower vehicle speeds have a positive correlation with improved safety for all modes.

Why is equity important?

- People experiencing poverty or language barriers, people of color, older adults, youth, and people with disabilities tend to experience a disproportionately small share of benefits from transportation investments, particularly because traditional transportation investment prioritize vehicles. These groups are overrepresented in households without access to a vehicle.
- Other elements of the transportation system, such as lack of ADA compliance or safe street crossings also create extra barriers that may prevent these groups from experiencing the full benefit of transportation investments

How are the environment and complete streets related?

- The street is a system: a transportation system, an ecosystem and a system of social and economic interactions.
- Improve habitat in right-of-ways.
- Increase tree canopy in rights-of-way which can increase habitat and reduce the urban heat island affect.
- Treat storm water volumes and flow to improve water quality and reduce run off.
- Avoid impacts to natural areas.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emission and fossil fuel consumption by reducing the number and length of vehicle trips and improving the flow of traffic (and minimizing motor idling).

ADDRESSING SPECIFIC USER GROUPS

Consult the following fact sheets developed by Smart Growth American when addressing specific user groups or topics. Go to www.smartgrowthamerica.com to download pdf or view web versions of fact sheets. Smart Growth American offers the following fact sheets:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Children | <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Revitalization | <input type="checkbox"/> Ease Traffic Woes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People with Disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Prices | <input type="checkbox"/> Costs of Complete Streets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Older Adults | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety | <input type="checkbox"/> Change Travel Patterns |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower Transportation Costs | <input type="checkbox"/> Complete and Green Streets |
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