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National Complete Streets Coalition

[GET INVOLVED](#)

[EVENTS](#)

[RESEARCH](#)

[COMPLETE STREETS: A TO Z](#)

[FUNDAMENTALS](#)

[What are Complete Streets?](#)

[Benefits of Complete Streets](#)

[Fact Sheets](#)

[Resources](#)

[CHANGING POLICY](#)

[IMPLEMENTATION](#)

[FEDERAL POLICY](#)

[GET HELP](#)

[BLOG](#)

[NEWSLETTER](#)

[WHO WE ARE](#)

[CALLES COMPLETAS](#)

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What are Complete Streets?

Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time and make it safe for people to walk to and from train stations.

Creating Complete Streets means transportation agencies must change their approach to community roads. By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners and engineers to **routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users**, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. This means that every transportation project will make the street network better and safer for drivers, transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists – making your town a better place to live.

What does a “Complete Street” look like?

There is no singular design prescription for Complete Streets; each one is unique and responds to its community context. A complete street may include: sidewalks, bike lanes (or wide paved shoulders), special bus lanes, comfortable and accessible public transportation stops, frequent and safe crossing opportunities, median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, narrower travel lanes, roundabouts, and more.

A Complete Street in a rural area will look quite different from a Complete Street in a highly urban area, but both are designed to balance safety and convenience for everyone using the road. Check out our [‘Many Types of Complete Streets’ slideshow](#) to see examples from across the country.

Why do we need Complete Streets policies?

Incomplete streets – those designed with only cars in mind – limit transportation choices by making walking, bicycling, and taking public transportation inconvenient, unattractive, and, too often, dangerous.

Changing policy to routinely include the needs of people on foot, public transportation, and bicycles would make walking, riding bikes, riding buses and trains safer and easier. People of all ages and abilities would have more options when traveling to work, to school, to the grocery store, and to visit family.

Making these travel choices more convenient, attractive, and safe means people do not need to rely solely on automobiles. They can replace congestion-clogged trips in their cars with swift bus rides or heart-healthy bicycle trips. Complete Streets improves the efficiency and capacity of existing roads too, by moving people in the same amount of space – just think of all the people who can fit on a bus or streetcar versus the same amount of people each driving their own car. Getting more productivity out of the existing road and public transportation systems is vital to reducing congestion.

Complete Streets are particularly prudent when more communities are tightening their budgets and looking to ensure long-term benefits from investments. An existing transportation budget can incorporate Complete Streets projects with little to no additional funding, accomplished through re-prioritizing projects and allocating funds to projects that improve overall mobility. Many of the ways to create more complete

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roadways are low cost, fast to implement, and high impact. Building more sidewalks and striping bike lanes has been shown to create more jobs than traditional car-focused transportation projects.

Where are Complete Streets being built?

Many states and cities have adopted bike plans or pedestrian plans that designate some streets as corridors for improvements for bicycling and walking. More and more, communities are going beyond this to ensure that every street project takes all road users into account.

Among the places with some form of Complete Streets policy are the states of Oregon, California, Illinois, North Carolina, Minnesota, Connecticut, and Florida. The City of Santa Barbara, California calls for "achieving equality of convenience and choice" for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and drivers. Columbia, Missouri adopted new street standards to encourage healthy bicycling and walking. And the regional body that allocates federal transportation dollars around Columbus, Ohio has directed all projects provide for people on foot, bicycle, and public transportation. Check our [interactive atlas](#) to see all the jurisdictions that have formally committed to the Complete Streets approach.

How can I get a Complete Streets policy adopted in my community?

Advocating for Complete Streets means working with your neighbors and local policymakers, including elected officials and government staff.

Talk with them about particularly problematic and unsafe streets: schools that have no sidewalks out front, bus stops that are not accessible for people in wheelchairs, missing crosswalks by the grocery store, and no safe routes to bicycle to work. Work together to identify ways to make these places safer and more attractive and present your ideas to others. Make your case and [show examples](#) of what your streets could like. For great strategy ideas, check out the free ["Power of 25" presentation](#) made by Peter Lagerwey.

This website has many resources to help you. You can [modify and use our introductory presentation](#) in your community, show it at PTA and neighborhood association meetings and to your local chamber of commerce. See the [Changing Policy tab](#) for information on developing a good policy and finding other local advocates. We also have answers to many questions on how to implement a policy.



The National Complete Streets Coalition offers [interactive full-day workshops led by national experts](#) to help communities establish a common vision for their streets; develop an appropriate Complete Streets policy that builds on local expertise; and implement Complete Streets policies by identifying ways to change and streamline the everyday transportation decision-making process.

Need transportation planning and engineering professionals who are ready to help design and construct complete streets? [Our Complete Streets Partner firms](#) can offer the expertise and dedication you need.

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Benefits of Complete Streets

- [GET INVOLVED](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [RESEARCH](#)
- [COMPLETE STREETS: A TO Z](#)
- [FUNDAMENTALS](#)
 - [What are Complete Streets?](#)
 - [Benefits of Complete Streets](#)
 - [Fact Sheets](#)
 - [Resources](#)
- [CHANGING POLICY](#)
- [IMPLEMENTATION](#)
- [FEDERAL POLICY](#)
- [GET HELP](#)
- [BLOG](#)
- [NEWSLETTER](#)
- [WHO WE ARE](#)
- [CALLES COMPLETAS](#)
- [ESPAÑOL](#)

Complete Streets can offer many benefits in all communities, regardless of size or location.

Complete Streets make economic sense. A balanced transportation system that includes complete streets can bolster economic growth and stability by providing accessible and efficient connections between residences, schools, parks, public transportation, offices, and retail destinations.

Complete Streets improve safety by reducing crashes through safety improvements. One study found that designing for pedestrian travel by installing raised medians and redesigning intersections and sidewalks reduced pedestrian risk by 28%.

Complete Streets encourage more walking and bicycling. Public health experts are encouraging walking and bicycling as a response to the obesity epidemic, and complete streets can help. One study found that 43 percent of people with safe places to walk within 10 minutes of home met recommended activity levels, while just 27% of those without safe places to walk were active enough.

Complete Streets can help ease transportation woes. Streets that provide travel choices can give people the option to avoid traffic jams, and increase the overall capacity of the transportation network. Several smaller cities have adopted complete streets policies as one strategy to increase the overall capacity of their transportation network and reduce congestion.

Complete Streets help children. Streets that provide room for bicycling and walking help children get physical activity and gain independence. More children walk to school where there are sidewalks, and children who have and use safe walking and bicycling routes have a more positive view of their neighborhood. Safe Routes to School programs, gaining in popularity across the country, will benefit from complete streets policies that help turn all routes into safe routes.

Complete streets are good for air quality. Poor air quality in our urban areas is linked to increases in asthma and other illnesses. Yet if each resident of an American community of 100,000 replaced one car trip with one bike trip just once a month, it would cut carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by 3,764 tons of per year in the community. Complete streets allow this to happen more easily.

Complete Streets make fiscal sense. Integrating sidewalks, bike lanes, transit amenities, and safe crossings into the initial design of a project spares the expense of retrofits later. Jeff Morales, former Director of Caltrans, said, "by fully considering the needs of all non-motorized travelers (pedestrians, bicyclists, and persons with disabilities) early in the life of a project, the costs associated with including facilities for these travelers are minimized."

[The Many Benefits of Complete Streets: Presentation](#)

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