

POLICY STATEMENT



POLICY STATEMENT: COMPLETE STREETS

Overview of APBP Policy Statements

The Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals (APBP) supports the community of professionals working to create more walkable, bikeable places through facilitating the exchange of professional and technical knowledge and by promoting fundamental positions that are broadly acknowledged and acted upon by APBP members.

APBP Policy Principles:

1. APBP represents the professional expertise and practical experience of its members in transportation policy discussions to advance active, healthy, and sustainable communities.
2. APBP recognizes the impacts of systemic and institutionalized racism, and we recognize our responsibility to identify and address inequities.
3. APBP endorses active transportation as an integral part of transportation systems through all stages of planning, design, funding, and implementation.
4. APBP supports connected, convenient, accessible, and safe streets and pathways in every community and planning with the input of every member of a community.
5. APBP advances a safe system approach that leverages active transportation to create equitable access for everyone in every place.

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Position:

The [Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals](#) (APBP) supports the Complete Streets movement and recommends that transportation agencies and governments adopt and implement Complete Streets policies. Furthermore, agencies should modify their planning, design, prioritization, and project delivery practices and standards to institutionalize the Complete Streets approach so that all potential users and uses are adequately accommodated with safe, welcoming, and context-appropriate facilities and networks.

Definition:

The U.S. based [National Complete Streets Coalition](#), of which APBP is a member, defines Complete Streets as streets that “...are planned, designed, operated, and maintained to be safe and comfortable for everyone, regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, income, or chosen transportation mode.”¹ The benefits of Complete Streets include a greater emphasis on equity considerations, increasing the efficiency of streets², offering more transportation options³, and improving safety and mobility for all street users, particularly children and other vulnerable road users⁴. Further, Complete Streets can help address prevailing inequities in transportation investment. Complete Streets work for all users and all trips—not just those who can afford to own, operate, and park a car, and not just for adults who drive but for children, people with disabilities, and the elderly as well.

The Complete Streets approach is a process that entails planning, designing, and constructing streets that support the surrounding context—e.g., the destinations, trip generation, and character of development along the corridor. It is not a prescribed one-size-fits-all solution. In fact, a variety of designs and treatments can and should be employed to serve all users and uses in a variety of land use and traffic contexts. Some roadways (such

¹ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/equity-benefits-of-complete-streets/>

² <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/complete-streets-ease-traffic-woes/>

³ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/health-benefits-of-complete-streets/>

⁴ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/children-benefits-of-complete-streets/>

as limited-access highways) may not have bicycle or pedestrian accommodations within the right-of-way. Furthermore, the Complete Streets approach is distinctly different than streetscaping, placemaking, and urban design (although it is compatible with those concepts).

The National Complete Streets Coalition states that:

“A Complete Streets approach integrates people and place in the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of our transportation networks. This helps to ensure streets are safe for people of all ages and abilities, balance the needs of different modes, and support local land uses, economies, cultures, and natural environments.”

Application:

The Complete Streets approach is a system-wide approach to transportation planning and street design that applies to all roadways within an agency’s jurisdiction. It is not selectively applied to individual projects. Complete Streets policies and practices can be adopted by any agency, regardless of its size or urban/rural context, that has a role in planning, designing, constructing, or maintaining street and roadway networks.

According to the National Complete Streets Coalition, more than 1,200 Complete Streets policies have been passed in the United States⁵. Already, 33 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia have adopted a Complete Streets policy. In Canada, some municipalities and provincial governments have adopted Complete Streets policies while others have incorporated Complete Streets components in Official Plans and Transportation Master Plans. The Complete Streets approach has enjoyed rapid acceptance, perhaps because of its simplicity in defining a policy for designing and operating public streets. The widespread adoption of Complete Streets policies has also helped to break down longstanding barriers to more community participation in transportation planning as well as create a stronger distinction between the conventional auto-oriented functional planning approach and the more comprehensive Complete Streets approach.

Recommendations:

Adopt a Complete Streets Policy.

APBP recommends that all transportation agencies develop and adopt Complete Streets policies. The National Complete Streets Coalition states⁶ that an ideal Complete Streets policy includes the following:

1. **Vision and intent:** Includes an equitable vision for how and why the community wants to complete its streets. Specifies need to create complete, connected, network and specifies at least four modes, two of which must be biking or walking.
2. **Diverse users:** Benefits all users equitably, particularly vulnerable users and the most underinvested and underserved communities.
3. **Commitment in all projects and phases:** Applies to new, retrofit/reconstruction, maintenance, and ongoing projects.

⁵ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/policy-development/policy-atlas/> This link leads to a .pdf inventory of all Complete Streets policies’ the .pdf is updated monthly.

⁶ The Elements of a Complete Streets Policy (2018) <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/elements-complete-streets-policy/>

4. **Clear, accountable expectations:** Makes any exceptions specific and sets a clear procedure that requires high-level approval and public notice prior to exceptions being granted.
5. **Jurisdiction:** Requires interagency coordination between government departments and partner agencies on Complete Streets.
6. **Design:** Directs the use of the latest and best design criteria and guidelines and sets a time frame for their implementation.
7. **Land use and context sensitivity:** Considers the surrounding community's current and expected land use and transportation needs.
8. **Performance measures:** Establishes performance standards that are specific, equitable, and available to the public.
9. **Project selection criteria:** Provides specific criteria to encourage project selection and funding prioritization for multimodal corridors and Complete Streets implementation.
10. **Implementation steps:** Includes specific next steps for implementation of the policy
11. **Ongoing Monitoring:** Includes a monitoring or feedback mechanism to keep track of these implementation steps.

The National Complete Streets Coalition provides example policies on its website.

Beyond adopting a policy, implementing Complete Streets requires changing planning, design, prioritization, and project delivery practices, as well as regular monitoring of performance measures and adjustments to the policy as needed.

Develop a Complete Streets Plan.

In order to achieve a network-wide level of implementation of Complete Streets criteria, many agencies find a valuable first step is to develop a Complete Streets plan, design guide, or design manual that focuses on the particular characteristics of their community and includes predefined street types with associated design parameters, decision-making guidance, and a method for weighing and resolving tradeoffs in constrained environments.

Example Plans –

[Ames, Iowa](#) (adopted October 2018). The plan is organized around four main chapters: Overview and Policy; Street and Intersection Types; Design Criteria, including callouts for pedestrians and transit; and an Implementation Plan. The Complete Streets Plan's two appendices review adopted land use and transportation plans; and profiles existing conditions related to multimodal transportation in Ames.

[Arlington, Washington](#) (adopted November 2018). The plan includes the same content as the Ames plan, adding sections on the mobility, health, environmental, and economic benefits of Complete Streets with an equity focus. Street tree and landscape guidelines, and low impact design guidelines augment design guidelines. The Plan also includes case studies from 13 peer communities.

[Milwaukee, WI](#) Milwaukee was recently awarded the third best Complete Streets Plan of 2018 by the Complete Streets Coalition. Its Complete Streets program is notable for emphasizing context-sensitive streets and for a strong implementation committee composed of both city staff and outside organizations.

Big Cities – Austin, Chicago, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington DC

Many big cities in America adopted Complete Streets policies and developed Complete Streets manuals or plans over the past decade and a half. Examples for the cities above provide a good sampling of these efforts:

- Austin, Texas
- [Chicago](#) New York City: [Strategic Plan](#) and [Sustainable Streets Plan](#)
- [Philadelphia](#) Policy and [Complete Streets Project Portfolio](#)
- [San Francisco](#) and [Better Streets campaign](#)
- [Seattle](#)
- [Washington DC](#)

State DOTs – Caltrans, FDOT, MassDOT, MNDOT, NYSDOT

State DOTs can be a key partner in promoting Complete Streets across a larger number of communities. Starting with context-sensitive design in the late 20th Century, and smart growth and smart transportation policies in the early 21st Century, state DOTs have been ratcheting up their efforts in this arena as well. The DOTs listed above provide a good sampling of these efforts:

- [California](#)
- [Florida](#)
- [Massachusetts](#)
- [Minnesota](#)
- [New York State](#)

Develop Network Plans.

Complete Streets provide both more significant and a greater number of benefits when they are integrated into transportation network development plans. A Complete Streets policy on its own does not guarantee the creation of complete networks, so bringing these two processes together is important for determining and reconciling the important tradeoffs involved in setting modal priorities for any given corridor. A network of Complete Streets that are safe, comfortable, and form complete networks for walking, biking, and transit can help to generate a higher level of acceptance and support in the community when compared to a single Complete Street. In this regard, it is also important to define both the geographic extent of network plans and their connections into neighboring areas.

In practice, due to limited resources and constrained capacity, it is common for municipalities and counties to develop complete street network plans over many years and in the form of separate mode-specific plans, such as a bicycle network plan, a pedestrian network plan, a high-crash corridor network plan, etc. This approach has both benefits – such as efficient use of existing resources, and potential for frequent updates to plans – and limitations – such as potential lack of coordination between plans or lack of a focus on implementation. The most successful plans are those that overcome the constraints and focus on milestones and metrics for implementation and on a long-term implementation strategy. The development and implementation of Network Plans are possibly the next main challenge for many communities implementing Complete Streets policies.

Example Plans -

Costa Mesa, California's Circulation Element of its General Plan includes an overview of its balanced approach to Complete Streets, which conforms to the California Complete Streets Act (2008). Many other California communities have taken similar steps in follow-up of the act, a notable example of statewide implementation.

http://ftp.costamesaca.gov/costamesaca/generalplan2015-2035/adopted/03_FinalDraft_CirculationElement.pdf

Small- and Mid-Size Cities: Boulder, CO; Chapel Hill, NC; Louisville, KY; Portland, OR; Tucson, AZ

Typically, it is easier for smaller and mid-size cities to develop a network plan, since the scale of the infrastructure and of community and stakeholder coordination is more manageable. Examples for the cities above provide a good sampling of these efforts, some of which are complete, some underway:

- Boulder, CO [Complete Streets Plan](#) and [Network Plan](#)
- [Chapel Hill, NC](#)
- [Louisville KY](#)
- [Portland OR](#)
- [Tucson AZ](#)

Modify planning, design, and construction practices to implement the Complete Streets approach.

Once a Complete Streets policy is adopted, and while the policy's provisions are being institutionalized, APBP favors rapid implementation of projects to ensure that "low-hanging" fruit opportunities become catalysts for further Complete Street project implementation, that community involvement gets spurred into positive loops of engagement, that better health outcomes from active transportation use are significant enough to be quickly measured and encouraged, and finally, that more transportation options are permanently provided for people of all ages and incomes.

Examples across the United States and Canada have demonstrated that implementing Complete Streets adds little to no expense to agency transportation budgets (compared to incomplete streets) and can in fact lower capital expenses by encouraging shifts to active transportation and transit⁷. The National Complete Streets Coalition provides guidance to help local governments implement Complete Streets policies⁸.

Example Plans -

Houston, TX:

In 2018 and 2019, Harris County and the City of Houston implemented the Build 50 Challenge, a rapid implementation program that aimed to build 50 miles of bikeways in 12 months. Ultimately, the program new implemented a network of low-stress bikeways that connected 68,000 residents and over 170,000 jobs to within ½ mile of safe riding routes, and eleven schools and three colleges or universities to within ¼ mile of a separated bike lane. <https://tooledesign.com/project/houston-bike-plan-project-implementation/>

⁷ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/cost-of-complete-streets/>

⁸ Complete Streets Implementation: A Resource Appendix

https://smartgrowthamerica.org/app/uploads/2016/09/Implementing-CS-Policy_Brief-Guidebook.pdf

COVID-19: Across America, and in Denver, Minneapolis, Oakland CA, Philadelphia; Seattle; Washington, DC

The COVID-19 epidemic which engulfed the country in 2020 provided a spur for rapid implementation of projects in many communities, so that they could adopt transportation and recreation alternatives more adequate to the required norms of social distancing. The Complete Streets Coalition has kept track of some of efforts across the nation, including in Denver, Minneapolis, and Oakland CA; and Philadelphia, Seattle and Washington DC provide further examples:

<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/covid-19-how-is-your-community-responding/>

<https://www.archpaper.com/2020/04/open-streets-initiative-cities-coronavirus-street-closures/>

<https://www.oaklandca.gov/projects/oakland-slow-streets>

<https://sf.streetsblog.org/2020/04/20/oakland-paves-way-for-open-streets/>

Key Elements

Staff Capacity

Training staff on Complete Streets principles and outcomes can be an on-going process. While training is important in the first couple of post-policy-adoption years, hiring staff that do not need to be trained should be the next priority. There are a growing number of planners, engineers, public health professionals, and others who are knowledgeable of and committed to Complete Streets. Agencies should consider revising position descriptions and hiring criteria to attract these talented professionals. As an example, PennDOT consolidated job functions and created the position of a statewide bicycle and pedestrian coordinator in 2015; similarly, the City of Philadelphia created the position of its first Complete Streets Director in 2016, while also retaining a bicycle and pedestrian coordinator position created in 2008.

Design Flexibility

APBP acknowledges that many municipalities experience barriers to implementation because of existing, sometimes outdated, state or local design standards; potential inconsistency with other local policies, and entrenched operational practices. For US jurisdictions, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has issued several new rules and guidelines to provide greater flexibility at the federal sphere to spur Complete Street implementation, including through rulemaking that now provides greater design flexibility on National Highway System (NHS) streets with speed limits under 50 mph⁹ (80 km/h).

Transportation and Land Use Connection: Street Typologies and Overlays

Street typologies and overlays are planning and design tools typically developed as part of Complete Streets policy implementation. Street typologies connect adjacent land uses to a street's transportation function, allowing for a context sensitive outcome. Streets can be characterized by multiple street types, depending on

⁹ Achieving Multimodal Networks: Applying Design Flexibility and Reducing Conflicts

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/multimodal_networks

how the adjacent land use changes. Overlays for particular activities such as transit stops or school zones allow an overriding street type to accommodate these activities. See the street typologies and overlays in the above-mentioned Complete Streets Plans for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Chapter 3) and Ames, Iowa (Chapter 2).

Other examples include Oklahoma City's Comprehensive Plan, [PlanOKC](#) . Most recently, in July 2020 FDOT adopted a [Context Classification Guide for Florida's streets and roadways](#), which will better define appropriate design criteria for typical streets, in the context of its surroundings and the transportation network .

Speed Management

Based on the expanding levels of flexibility, at a minimum, APBP recommends that towns and cities of every size adopt at least the following three best practices to advance Complete Streets implementation:

- Design streets based on an appropriate target speed—the speed at which motorized traffic is intended to move. Target speeds on Complete Streets are generally between 10 and 35 miles per hour (15 to 50 km/h). The ideal target speed in urban environments is 25 miles per hour (40 km/h) or less. Design speeds should match target speeds, which may require implementing geometric, traffic control, and signal timing measures to achieve the target speed.
- Lower speed limits (ideally to 25 miles per hour [40 km/h] or less on streets without separated bikeways). FHWA describes alternative methods for setting speed limits¹⁰. On some streets, implementing traffic calming and speed mitigation may be necessary to achieve a higher level of compliance with lower speed limits.
- Coordinate early with state/provincial and other agency reviewers to develop cooperation and approval for variances from state/provincial and local standards.

These practices are in keeping with guidance provided by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)¹¹ and the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)¹².

Note that while lower motor vehicle speeds have consistently been shown to increase safety for all road users and are especially important on multimodal streets, even roadways designed with higher speed limits and design speeds should also accommodate bicycling and walking in a context-sensitive manner and in consideration of the types of users that are likely present. US federal policies mandate bicyclist and pedestrian accommodations on National Highway System (NHS) non-interstate roadways while also encouraging agencies to consider accommodations on non-NHS roadways. Several states have similar policies, while several Canadian provinces have adopted provincial cycling network plans that incorporate facilities on higher speed roadways. That said, separation between bicyclists and motor vehicle traffic is necessary above 35 miles per hour (50 km/h) in order to accommodate bicyclists of all ages and abilities.

¹⁰ Methods and Practices for Setting Speed Limits: An Informational Report (FHWA)

¹¹ Urban Street Design Guide: Design Speed <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/design-controls/design-speed/>

¹² Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach <https://ecommerce.ite.org/IMIS/ItemDetail?iProductCode=RP-036A-E>

Complementary Movements

Many other concepts and movements complement Complete Streets. Below we list the complementary movements that most clearly intersect with the goals and policies of the Complete Streets movement.

Vision Zero

Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. First implemented in Sweden in the 1990s, Vision Zero has proved successful across Europe — and now it's gaining momentum in major American cities. Vision Zero strategies and Complete Streets are closely intertwined, and support similar goals. For more information, please refer to the APBP Policy Statement on Vision Zero (https://apbp.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/APBP_Policy_Statement_on_Vis.pdf) and to the Vision Zero Network: <https://visionzeronetwork.org/resources/vision-zero-communities/>

Safe Routes to School, Parks, Older Adults, etc.

A Complete Streets approach, policy and design guidelines are used to achieve many goals, including the various 'safe routes to...' programs. Travel to schools, parks, transit, and other community destinations benefit from rights-of-way designed for all users. Include 'safe routes to...' planning work as part of Complete Streets planning and vice versa, rather than two separate processes.

Active Living Programs

Building Complete Streets is a necessary but many times no sufficient condition for activating public spaces with pedestrian and bicycle traffic and activity. In many cases, Active Living Programs can then fulfill that function. At the policy level, programs supported by health practitioners, the Centers for Disease Control and entities such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provide guidance and support for local active living program implementation. For more information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/interventions/programs/aled.htm>

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2011/10/active-living-by-design.html>

Age Friendly Communities

Activation of Complete Streets and public spaces also involved consideration of age-appropriate design criteria, and designing communities that are attractive for ages from 8 to 80. The AARP is a major supporter of these efforts. For more information on age-friendly communities:

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/an-introduction.html>

https://www.who.int/ageing/projects/age_friendly_cities/en/#:~:text=In%20an%20age%2Dfriendly%20community,to%20participate%20fully%20in%20society.

Tactical Urbanism

Tactical urbanism includes low-cost, temporary changes to the built environment, usually in cities, intended to improve local neighborhoods and city gathering places. Tactical urbanism is also commonly referred to as

guerrilla urbanism, pop-up urbanism, city repair, or D.I.Y. urbanism. Tactical urbanism can be a low-cost way to pilot or implement Complete Streets infrastructure. For more information:

<https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/2017/02/16/great-idea-tactical-urbanism>

<http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/>

Resources:

For further information, APBP suggests these recognized sources:

- Achieving Multimodal Networks: Applying Design Flexibility and Reducing Conflicts (FHWA 2016) https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/multimodal_networks
- National Complete Streets Coalition <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/>
- Completing Our Streets: The Transition to Safe and Inclusive Transportation Networks (Barbara McCann 2013, Island Press) <http://www.islandpress.org/book/completing-our-streets>
- Complete Streets: Best Policy and Implementation Practices (American Planning Association 2010) <https://www.planning.org/research/streets/>
- AARP's Complete Streets in the Southeast: A Tool Kit <http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/info-2014/complete-streets-southeast-toolkit.html> As AARP suggests: "Y'all could benefit from these lessons and resources, regardless of your location."
- ChangeLab Solutions <http://www.changelabsolutions.org/publications/what-are-complete-streets> offers [Complete Streets Talking Points](#), [Model Comprehensive Plan Language](#), and [Model Complete Streets Laws and Resolutions](#).
- Complete Streets for Canada <http://completestreetsforcanada.ca/>
- Geometric Design Guide for Canadian Roads (Transportation Association of Canada) <https://www.tac-atc.ca/en/publications-and-resources/geometric-design-guide-canadian-roads>

Hyperlinks to case studies mentioned above include:

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- Ames, Iowa: <https://www.cityofames.org/home/showdocument?id=47852>
 - Arlington, Washington: <http://www.arlingtonwa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1855/Arlington-Complete-Streets-Policy>
 - Austin, Texas: <https://austintexas.gov/department/complete-streets>
 - Chicago: <https://www.chicago.gov/dam/city/depts/cdot/Admin/ChicagoForwardCDOTActionAgenda.pdf>
 - New York City: <https://www1.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/about/stratplan.shtml> and <https://www1.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2013-dot-sustainable-streets.pdf>
 - Philadelphia: <https://www.philadelphiastreet.com/complete-streets> and <http://www.phillyotis.com/portfolio-item/complete-streets/>
 - San Francisco: <https://www.sfcta.org/policies/complete-streets> and <https://www.sfbetterstreets.org/>
 - Seattle: <https://www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/urban-design-program/complete-streets-in-seattle>
 - Washington DC: <https://comp.ddot.dc.gov/Documents/Complete%20Streets%20Policy.pdf>

- California: <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/transportation-planning/office-of-smart-mobility-climate-change/smart-mobility-active-transportation/complete-streets>
- Florida: <https://www.fdot.gov/roadway/csi/default.shtm>
- Massachusetts: <https://masscompletestreets.com/>
- Minnesota: <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/completestreets/>
- New York State: <https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/completestreets>
- Boulder, CO <https://bouldercolorado.gov/transportation/complete-streets> and <https://bouldercolorado.gov/transportation/transportation-network-plans-tnps>
- Chapel Hill, NC <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/residents/a-z-services/getting-around-chapel-hill-3946>
- Louisville KY <https://louisvilleky.gov/government/complete-streets>
- Portland OR <https://www.portland.gov/transportation/planning/transportation-system-plan-tsp>
- Tucson AZ <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/tdot/complete-streets-tucson>
- Oklahoma City's Comprehensive Plan, PlanOKC <http://planokc.org/development-guide/infrastructure-investment/street-typology/#:~:text=Investment%20%2F%20Street%20Typology-,Street%20Typology,the%20basis%20for%20design%20criteria>
- Florida Context Classification Guide: https://fdotwww.blob.core.windows.net/sitefinity/docs/default-source/roadway/completestreets/files/fdot-context-classification.pdf?sfvrsn=12be90da_2

APBP's policy statement development

The Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals (APBP) relied on the professional experience of its members and widely available information and tools to draft its policy statement on Complete Streets. APBP has worked closely with the National Complete Streets Coalition, serving on the NCSC steering committee for more than 10 years and managing the NCSC Complete Streets workshop program between 2008 and 2016. Many APBP members have planned or designed Complete Streets, developed Complete Streets policies, created Complete Streets design guidelines, managed transportation agencies' Complete Streets programs, and some APBP members are Complete Streets workshop instructors.

This policy statement was developed by the APBP Policy Committee. APBP's Board of Directors approved the original policy statement on February 21, 2019 and approved updates and revisions on February 18, 2021. APBP members can suggest changes to any policy statement by contacting the association's executive director, Policy Committee chair, or a board member. For more information, contact: Melanie Bowzer, Executive Director, at mbowzer@amrms.com.