

Complete Streets

Improve Mobility for Americans with Disabilities



Complete Streets are designed and operated so they work for all users— pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Communities that adopt complete streets policies are asking transportation planners and engineers to consistently design and alter the right-of-way with all users in mind. Contact the National Complete Streets Coalition (www.completestreets.org) to learn about the diverse groups working together to enact complete streets policies across the country!

Walking home one evening, Bernard Vinther followed his guide dog into a signalized intersection. A car hit him and his dog, injuring him and killing his dog. The intersection is lit by a streetlight but has no painted crosswalks and no safe crossing cues for blind pedestrians.¹



Right: Michael Rankin
Left: US Access Board

The bus stop pictured at left would strand a wheelchair user and force anyone to tramp through the grass or walk in the street. The intersection pictured at right has no pedestrian facilities at all – even though the crossing is a legal one.

Incomplete streets impede livability

Streets in our communities must allow safe and comfortable travel for everyone, including people with disabilities. Yet, they often are difficult to navigate for people who use wheelchairs, have diminished vision, can't hear well, or for people who move more slowly. Nearly one in five Americans face at least one of these challenges.²

Incomplete streets do not provide for pedestrians of all abilities and are thus a constant source of frustration and danger for people with disabilities. Along incomplete streets, unpaved surfaces and disconnected, narrow, or deteriorated sidewalks discourage wheelchair travel – and the lack of a curb ramp can force a pedestrian into the street. Wide intersections designed to quickly move motorized traffic may not provide enough time for someone with a disability to cross safely. Pedestrian signals that use only visual cues can lead to dangerous situations for those with low vision. A recent study found that blind pedestrians waited three times longer to cross the street, and made many more dangerous crossings than sighted pedestrians.³

Planting a bus stop sign in a patch of grass may not trigger other site improvements, but without sidewalks and necessary curb cuts, these stops are inaccessible and an uncomfortable place to wait for everyone. In Houston, sidewalks are absent between home and the nearest bus stop for three out of five residents with disabilities and older adults; nearly three-quarters said streets near their homes also lack curb ramps and bus shelters. As a result, fewer than 10% of them use public transportation, even though 50% live within two blocks of a bus stop.⁴ Many people with disabilities may prefer to use fixed route transit, but a street network that does not account for their needs forces them to use more costly paratransit service.

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The Benefits of Complete Streets 2



Complete Streets Steering Committee Organizations

AARP
Alliance for Biking and Walking
America Bikes
America Walks
American Council of the Blind
American Planning Association
American Public Transportation Association
American Society of Landscape Architects
Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals
City of Boulder
HNTB
Institute of Transportation Engineers
League of American Bicyclists
McCann Consulting
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Center for Bicycling and Walking
Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Smart Growth America
SvR Design Company

National Complete Streets Coalition

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Complete Streets Improve Mobility for Americans with Disabilities



Right: www.pedbikeimages.com/Dan Burden
Left: John Lofthore

The station pictured at left allows a rider using a wheelchair to wait for the bus in a safe, convenient environment. The crosswalk pictured at right provides visual and sensory clues, such as raised bumps, to guide people safely across the street.

Complete streets remove barriers

Streets that are truly “complete” provide all of us with a choice of mobility options. They allow everyone to travel to and from work, school, and other destinations with the same level of safety and convenience, whether or not they have mobility, vision, or cognitive disabilities. Complete streets also help people who are coping with temporary disabilities as well as those pushing strollers, pulling wheeled luggage, or managing large packages.

Complete streets policies provide flexibility to transportation professionals and give them room to be creative in developing solutions that promote accessible travel. Operating under a policy can prompt a deeper analysis and encourage them to work with community members with disabilities. In roadway design, complete streets means attention to details at intersections, such as installing curb ramps, audible or tactile signals for blind pedestrians, and/or providing longer crossing times; along pedestrian routes by providing smooth sidewalks free of obstacles, with usable benches; and at transit stops with ample space to approach, wait, and board safely.

Complete streets policies remove barriers to independent travel by considering the needs of all users at the outset of every transportation project. Providing transportation choices for everyone, including those with disabilities, improves livability by connecting citizens to their community and by reducing dependence on more costly alternatives, such as paratransit or private transportation service.

For detailed guidance, please see the Revised Draft Guidelines for Accessible Public Rights-of-Way from the U.S. Access board: <http://www.access-board.gov/prowac/draft.htm>

¹ Trumbo, John and Paula Horton. “Car accident claims Keenewick man’s loyal guide dog.” Tacoma News Tribune, Mar. 19, 2010.

² Brault, Matthew. (2008). Americans with Disabilities: 2005. U.S. Census Bureau. December 2008.

³ Ashmead, D.H., et al. (2005). Street Crossing by Sighted and Blind Pedestrians at a Modern Roundabout. Journal of Transportation Engineering, 131 (11): 812-821, November 2005.

⁴ Gilderbloom JI, Markham JP. Housing quality among the elderly: A decade of changes. Int J Aging Hum Dev 1998; 46(1).

