

Complete Streets

Improve Mobility for Disabled Americans



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!

In November 2006, a blind pedestrian was struck by a car while crossing the street on his way to a bus stop in Vancouver, Washington. Only visible pedestrian signals had been provided at the intersection. Because the pedestrian was not in the painted crosswalk, the driver was not found to be at fault.¹



Right: photo courtesy of Michael Rankin
Left: photo courtesy of the 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 a barrier

Even when roadways are provided with space for pedestrians to walk, they may still not be usable for some. They often are difficult to navigate for people who use wheelchairs, can't see well, or for older people who move more slowly. Our streets should be safe and comfortable for everyone to use – particularly for people who cannot choose to drive.

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 with high-speed traffic can limit the mobility of older persons. WALK signals that only work for the sighted provide no cues to pedestrians who have vision loss. Bus stops that are only a place with a pole in the grass without sidewalks are inaccessible and an uncomfortable place to wait.

Incomplete streets are a constant source of frustration and danger for people with disabilities. A recent study found that blind pedestrians waited three times longer to cross the street, and made many more dangerous crossings than sighted pedestrians.² A significant portion of paratransit trips are necessary, not because people are too disabled to use public transit, but because the street network is so poorly designed that they cannot reach the bus stop or train station.

In Houston, sidewalks are not provided between home and the nearest bus stop for 3 out of 5 disabled and older residents; 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 percent live within 2 blocks of a bus stop.³

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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
Institute of Transportation Engineers
Kimley Horn and Associates, Inc.
League of American Bicyclists
McCann Consulting
National Center for Bicycling and Walking
Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Smart Growth America

National Complete Streets Coalition

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Right: www.pedbikeinages.com/Dan Burden
Left: www.pedbikeinages.com/Dan Burden

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 help create livable communities

Streets that are really complete provide all of us – not just a few – with a choice of mobility options. They allow everyone to get to work, school and other destinations with the same level of safety and convenience, whether or not they have mobility, vision, or cognitive disabilities. They also help people who are coping with temporary disabilities, and those pushing strollers, pulling wheeled luggage, or managing large packages.

Complete streets means attention to details at intersections (such as curb ramps and retimed signals to account for slower movement), along pedestrian routes (smooth sidewalks free of obstacles, with usable benches) and at transit stops (ample space to approach, wait, and board safely).

A community with a complete streets policy routinely considers all users when transportation investment decisions are made. Providing a variety of transportation options connect citizens to the community and reduce the need to provide more costly alternatives, such as paratransit or private transportation service. These policies help remove barriers, transforming streets to serve everyone.

¹ The Columbian News, Clark County, Washington. November 19, 2006.

² Ashmead, D.H., Guth, D., Wall, R.S., Long, R.G., and Ponchillia, P.E. Street Crossing by Sighted and Blind Pedestrians at a Modern Roundabout. *J. Transp. Engrg.*, 131 (11): 812-821 (November 2005)

³ Gilderbloom JI, Markham JP. Housing quality among the elderly: A decade of changes. *Int J Aging Hum Dev* 1998; 46(1). Also available at http://www.louisville.edu/org/sun/housing/cd_v2/Bookarticles/Ch1.htm [accessed Nov. 26, 2006].

