

# Complete Streets

## Improve Mobility for Older 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](http://www.completestreets.org)) to learn about the diverse groups working together to enact complete streets policies across the country!

An 82-year old woman was fined more than \$100 for crossing the street against a DON'T WALK signal in the San Fernando Valley in California in April 2006. Though she started her journey during the WALK signal, she could not reach the opposite curb before the signal changed. One elderly neighbor resorts to calling a cab simply to cross the poorly designed street.<sup>1</sup>



Right photo courtesy of Dan Burden  
Left photo courtesy of Dan Burden

While the street pictured on the left does have crosswalks and signals the distance is intimidating to an older person and makes it hard for the senior to even see the walk signal. The street on the right provides a refuge median to make it much more inviting to slower pedestrians.

### Incomplete streets a problem for older Americans

Even when roads have basic pedestrian facilities, they often do not consider the needs of the growing population of older Americans. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2025, the portion of Americans over 65 will increase from 12% to nearly 20%, totaling 62 million Americans. As people age, many give up driving for safety's sake.

Unfortunately many roads do not provide safe alternatives to driving. Crossings are long, sidewalks are absent, and transit stops have no place to sit. A national poll found 47% of Americans over 50 said they could not cross main roads near their home safely.<sup>23</sup> Almost 40% said their neighborhoods do not have adequate sidewalks, while another 55% reported no bike lanes or paths, and 48% reported no comfortable place to wait for the bus.<sup>4</sup> In 2005, older Americans made up 20% of all pedestrian fatalities. Older Americans need the public right-of-way to better serve them by providing safe places to walk, bicycle, or board the bus, and by designing streets to better accommodate older drivers.

Incomplete streets breed isolation. More than 50% of older Americans who do not drive stay home on a given day because they lack transportation options. Non-driving seniors make 65 percent fewer trips to visit family, friends or go to church; many report they don't like to ask for rides.<sup>5</sup> Older Americans make just 8% of their trips on foot or bike – far less than in some European countries, where 50% of seniors' trips use these active modes.

[www.completestreets.org](http://www.completestreets.org)

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### 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

1707 L St NW, Suite 1050  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 207-3355  
info@completestreets.org

## Complete Streets Improve Mobility for Older Americans



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

Complete streets make it much easier for seniors to stay active, particularly when they require assistance in the form of a cane, walker, or wheelchair.

(over)

### Complete streets help create livable communities

Complete streets provide older persons with a variety of options for getting around, whether walking, taking public transit, or sharing rides with family and friends. One recent survey showed that 82% of older Americans surveyed consider public transportation to be a better alternative to driving, particularly at night.<sup>6</sup> More than half (54%) of older adults who reported an inhospitable walking, bicycling and transit environment outside their homes said they would walk, bicycle, and take transit more if their streets were improved. A majority of older people support complete street policies.<sup>7</sup> Research also shows that moderate exercise, such as walking and biking, contributes significantly to a healthy lifestyle.

A community with a complete streets policy considers the needs of older residents every time a transportation investment decision is made. Proven methods to create complete streets for aging pedestrians include retiming signals to account for slower walking speed, constructing median refuges or sidewalk bulb-outs to shorten crossing distances, and installing curb ramps, sidewalk seating and bus shelters with seating. Improved lighting, signage and pavement markings are among the measures that can benefit drivers of any age, but particularly older drivers.

<sup>1</sup> The Daily News, Los Angeles. April 10, 2006

<sup>2</sup> AARP, Fighting Gas Prices, Nearly A Third of Americans Age 50+ Hang Up Their Keys To Walk But Find Streets Inhospitable, Public Transportation Inaccessible.

<sup>3</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Safety Facts: Older Population. 2005.

<sup>4</sup> AARP, *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Surface Transportation Policy Project, Aging Americans: Stranded Without Options. April 2004.

<sup>6</sup> American Public Transportation Association, Transit News. December 2005.

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