UNDERSTANDING

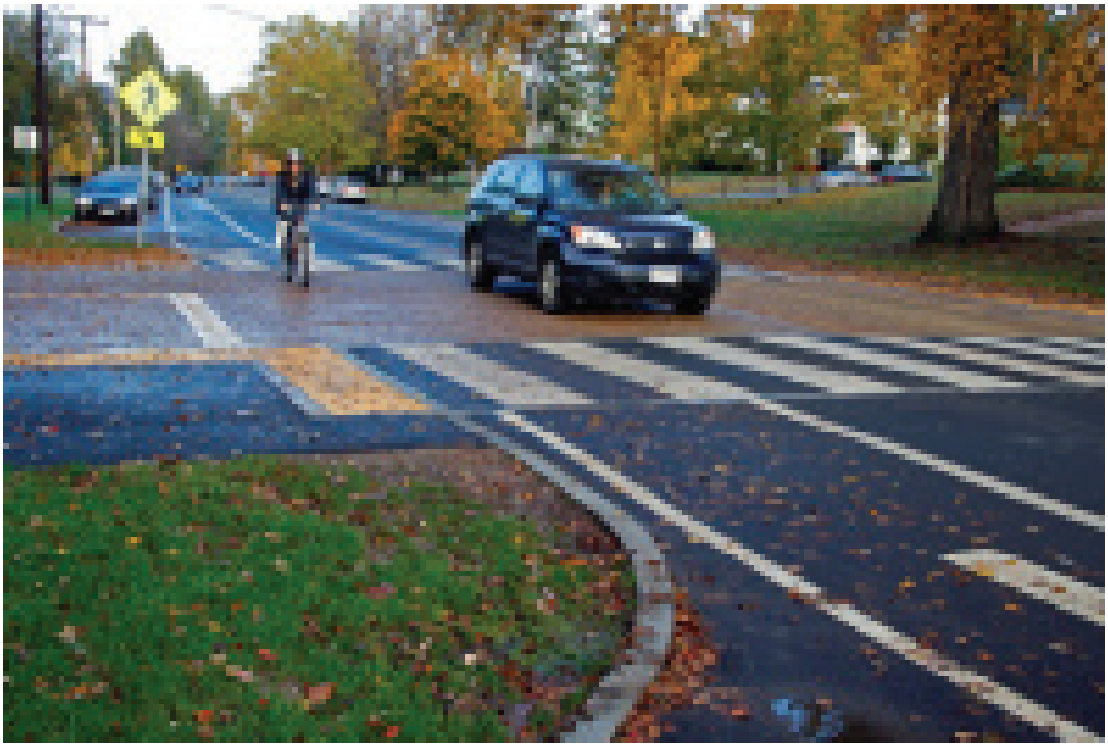
Complete Streets Policy

PURPOSE

To encourage low-carbon modes of transportation, including bicycling and walking, by ensuring that road design accommodates all users and all modes of transportation.

Transportation is one of the biggest contributors of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that cause climate change. In the Pioneer Valley, transportation accounts for about 31.8% of GHG—more than any other sector. Well designed roads can encourage low carbon transportation options like bicycling, walking, or use of mass transit.

Complete Streets Policies encourage, or require, road design and construction that adequately accommodates all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, users of mass transit, people with disabilities, the elderly, motorists, freight providers, emergency responders, and adjacent land users. When correctly implemented, a complete street creates a safe, vibrant, engaging public space for everyone using it. Complete streets also contribute to the mitigation of climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gasses, through the promotion of transportation modes that generate little or no emissions.



HOW IT WORKS

Complete Streets policies can be adopted in a variety of ways. For example, a Complete Street policy can be an administratively issued directive that guides a Department of Public Works (D.P.W.) to consider all users in their projects. A Complete Streets Policy can be adopted as a standalone bylaw or ordinance. Complete Streets principles can be incorporated into zoning codes—particularly form-based codes. Complete Streets policies can also be part of a comprehensive transportation plan. Some communities choose to adopt detailed guidelines for design, construction, maintenance and repair of roads. These guidelines can include recommended street type classifications, recommended lane widths, intersection configurations, sidewalk requirements, where and what type of bike lanes to use, street furniture requirements, approval processes, etc.

Successful complete streets policies result in projects that reflect a wide variety of community values, such as aesthetics, history, safety, mobility, and the environment.

Because the primary goal of a complete street is to accommodate all users, the first step in creating one is a thorough public outreach effort. The outreach should target various groups, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, senior citizens, families, and users of public transit. Additionally, public safety officials should be consulted to ensure adequate accommodation for emergency vehicles.

Best practices to consider as part of a complete street design include:

- **Bike lanes that provide safe, free-flowing movement for bicyclists**
- **Continuous sidewalks with adequate widths and minimal tripping hazards**
- **Traffic calming devices (speed bumps, reduced lane widths, medians, etc.)**
- **Pedestrian features (crosswalks, crossing signals, street lights, etc.)**
- **Street furniture (bus shelters, bike racks, trees, trash cans, public art, newspaper boxes, etc.)**
- **Visually attractive methods for distinguishing space for different modes of transportation**
- **A well connected street grid with minimal use of cul-de-sacs or dead ends**
- **Helpful signage for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists (wayfinding, warnings, etc.)**

A municipality can use this list of best practices as a starting point for community discussion and to develop street designs that fits its unique context. Illustrations and case studies of best practices can be a useful component of the discussion and preliminary design. Regardless of the particular best practices selected, the chosen features should be designed as a cohesive vision, with various elements complementing each other.

Examples that can be part of a cohesive vision include:

- **Coordinating the locations of bike racks, bike lanes, and signage indicating to motorists the presence of cyclists**
- **Incorporating individual bike lanes into an interconnected network**
- **Providing multiple features for pedestrians on the same road (traffic calming devices, benches, sidewalks, and pedestrian crossings located near each other)**

In addition to being part of a vision, design features should be examined for different road types, including local streets, collectors, and arterials. The design of complete streets for different roads will vary – for example, bicycles and cars may safely share a lane on low speed local roads, whereas major roads with heavy automobile traffic may require dedicated—even protected—bike lanes.

The examples in the next section include examples of several of the various types of documents that can be used for implementation. In addition, because the complete streets concept pertains to a wide variety of aspects of the built environment, officials from a variety of municipal departments should be consulted.

EXAMPLES OF WHERE STRATEGY HAS BEEN ADOPTED

Northampton, MA

Northampton developed a Comprehensive Municipal Transportation Plan in 2005 which outlines a vision for all modes of transportation. The Plan's focus is the listing of 55 action policy actions, grouped by categories including core transportation policies, roadway and intersection policies, traffic calming, sidewalks, bicycle and multi-use travel and facilities, public transit, parking, enforcement, and transportation demand management. In addition, each policy action is assigned a set of municipal departments responsible for its implementation.

Bethlehem, NY

Bethlehem passed a resolution in 2009 to "recognize bicyclists and pedestrians as equally important as motorists in the planning and design of all new street construction and reconstruction." The resolution cites the goal of the Town's Comprehensive Plan to improve mobility of all residents, and lists the benefits of bicycle and pedestrian transportation. The resolution calls for the Highway Superintendant to enforce the resolution.

New York City, NY

The NYC Street Design Manual was published in 2009 and addresses all design components of a street, including suggested materials to use in construction, lighting, and the design of the right of way. The document's comprehensive focus includes the subjects of transportation, community, and environment. It has a variety of recommendations for different stakeholders, including design professionals, property owners, municipal officials, and citizens.

LINKS TO MODEL BYLAWS OR MORE INFORMATION

COMPLETE STREETS MODEL GUIDELINES DEVELOPED BY THE NATIONAL COMPLETE STREETS COALITION:
http://www.completestreets.org/changing-policy/model-policy/model-state-legislation-options

MASSACHUSETTS LAW REGARDING ACCOMMODATION FOR BICYCLES AND PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC:
http://www.malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXIV/Chapter90e/Section2a

NORTHAMPTON MUNICIPAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN:
http://www.northamptonma.gov/opd/uploads/listWidget/2552/Northampton%20Transportation%20Plan--policies.pdf

BETHLEHEM RESOLUTION FOR COMPLETE STREETS:
http://www.townofbethlehem.org/images/pageImages/Paths4Bethlehem/CompleteStreetsResolution20090812.pdf

NEW YORK CITY STREET DESIGN MANUAL:
http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/about/streetdesignmanual.shtml

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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