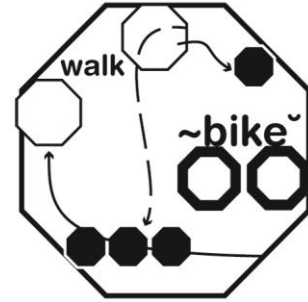


# Complete Streets

## Background

### Definition

Complete streets are defined as streets that safely accommodate all users. There is no one definition and no singular design for complete streets that fits all types of roads and communities. A “complete” street in a rural area may be fundamentally different than one in an urban area in its design, but both seek to balance the safety and mobility needs of all users. Complete streets policies demonstrate a local jurisdiction’s commitment to multimodal planning and projects that serve all users, and act as a catalyst for the development of more connected transportation networks. According to [Smart Growth America](#), adopting a complete streets policy enables communities to “direct their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation.” This statement is also reiterated in [Washington’s Complete Streets and Main Street Highways Case Study Resource](#).



### Health, equity and sustainability considerations

Many existing streets do not encourage active modes of transportation and are barriers to more active lifestyles. When streets are “complete” – safe, comfortable, and convenient for people walking, bicycling, riding public transportation, and driving – people have more opportunities to choose active forms of transportation. Thus streets become a public health asset rather than a barrier. Active transportation benefits people, the environment, and the transportation system. People who walk, bike and take transit are [more likely](#) to get the physical activity they need every day than those who drive.

**The average adult who starts biking to work loses 10 pounds of body fat in the first year.**

By definition, complete streets accommodate all users and all modes, and thus policies are based on the concept of equity and access for all. Emphasizing the diverse user groups, such as children, seniors, and people with disabilities, is a great way to strengthen local policy, and consideration of these populations often results in more robust implementation.

## Program and Policy Examples

### Program examples

Many jurisdictions in the central Puget Sound region have adopted complete streets policies and ordinances. There are many different ways to implement a complete streets policy such as through resolutions, laws and binding ordinances and also through departmental directives, plans, design guidelines, city policies and tax levies. The National Complete Streets Coalition provides an [interactive map](#) demonstrating the various types of complete streets policies.

The City of Burien adopted a complete streets policy with the passage of [Ordinance 556](#). The policy calls for inclusive transportation planning and projects. From this point forward, transportation projects and plans

in Burien will need to consider and accommodate all modes of transportation – bikes, pedestrians, transit, freight and automobiles. The policy was supported by [Communities Putting Prevention to Work](#), a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) funded initiative working to help curb chronic disease in Seattle-King County.

The City of SeaTac's [Draft Safe & Complete Streets Plan](#) is a long-range plan that outlines goals for the development of SeaTac's pedestrian and bicycle networks through the year 2040. The recommendations identified within the plan are anticipated to be integrated within and considered for adoption as part of the upcoming transportation plan and major comprehensive plan update processes. Similar to the City of Burien, SeaTac's complete streets efforts were supported by Communities Putting Prevention to Work.

The City of Renton is implementing complete streets with the passage of [Ordinance 5517](#). The city is tying complete streets and active transportation efforts to other planning efforts. The Renton Housing Authority's [Sunset Area Revitalization Efforts](#), a program working to accomplish major redevelopment in transportation, stormwater control, mixed-income housing, and community amenities, is implementing complete streets principles to the revitalization. The current neighborhood is physically split by SR 900 and is not designed to encourage pedestrian or bicycle circulation. Complete streets principles will be applied to SR 900 to improve opportunities for multimodal transportation by providing bike lanes, increasing space for transit shelters, creating planting strips that calm traffic, providing a pedestrian buffer, enlarging sidewalks, improving crosswalks, and providing better street and sidewalk lighting.

Seattle's complete streets works to create and maintain safe streets for all residents. In 2007, the Seattle City Council passed [Ordinance 122386](#), known as the Complete Streets ordinance, which directs Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to design streets for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and persons of all abilities, while promoting safe operation for all users, including freight. This is the lens through which SDOT views its major maintenance and construction projects. In 2006, the City of Seattle also passed [Bridging the Gap](#) a nine-year, \$365 million tax levy for transportation maintenance and improvements. Funding supports a variety of transportation projects including the [Neighborhood Street Fund](#) program, which pays for community-identified projects that improve access and mobility.

## Implementation

### Developing policy language

The National Complete Streets Coalition recognizes a variety of different policy statements as official commitments to incorporate the principles of complete streets into new and existing transportation infrastructure. These policies include:

#### *Council Driven:*

- Ordinance: Legally require the needs of all users be addressed in transportation projects and change city code accordingly.
- Resolution: Issued by a community's governing body, resolutions are non-binding, official statements of support for approaching community transportation projects as a way to improve access, public health, and quality of life.

#### *Council Approved:*

- Plans: Policies can be found within community comprehensive plans or transportation plans.

- City policies: A city council may also take action by adopting a complete streets policy as official city policy.
- Design guidelines: Communities may decide to integrate complete streets planning and design into new design guidance for their streets.

*Directives:*

- Departmental policy: A city department may issue its own complete streets policy directive.
- Executive order: A city's chief executive, often the mayor, can issue an executive order.

*Citizen Vote:*

- Tax levy: Some communities have decided to pursue an additional tax that will fund transportation improvements.
- Ballot measure: A citizen-led campaign for a complete streets law enacted not by a body of elected officials but by direct ballot by the general voting public.

Washington State Department of Transportation's (WSDOT's) Complete Streets Program encourages local governments to adopt arterial retrofit street ordinances based on safe access for all users: pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, public transportation users, and truck drivers.

According to WSDOT's Bikeways and Walkways Plan, a complete streets design policy is defined by several elements:

- Language that specifies "all users". This includes pedestrians, bicyclists, transit vehicles and users, and motorists of all ages and abilities.
- A primary initiative of creating a comprehensive, integrated, connected network.
- Recognition of the need for flexibility: that all streets are different and user needs will be balanced.
- Applicability to all roads.
- Applicability to both new and retrofit projects, including design, planning, maintenance, and operations for the entire right of way.
- Description of any exceptions and establishment of a clear procedure for executive or elected official(s) approval.
- Direction that complete streets solutions fit in with the context of the community.
- Performance standards with measurable outcomes.

**Model policy language**

The [National Complete Streets Coalition](#) has identified ideal complete streets policies with clear and direct statements that focus on the complete transportation system rather than focusing on "complete streets elements". Jurisdictions can adopt complete streets policies, resolutions and ordinances. The National Complete Streets Coalition cites the City of Seattle's Complete Streets ordinance as a good example of a strong complete streets Policy:

*"SDOT will plan for, design and construct all new City transportation improvement projects to provide appropriate accommodation for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and persons of all abilities, while promoting safe operation for all users, as provided for below."*

### **Opportunities for funding**

In 2011, Washington state bill [HB 1071](#) created a Complete Streets Grant Program. The [WSDOT website](#) provides more information on the development of the grant program and future funding opportunities.

In 2011, the [Federal Transit Administration established a formal policy](#) on the eligibility of pedestrian and bicycle improvements for FTA funding and defined the catchment area for pedestrians and bicyclists in relation to public transportation stops and stations.

### **Considerations for local implementation**

Complete streets policies are just one piece of the framework of policies and programs that support active transportation and complete networks. Having a complete streets policy should guide the planning of a comprehensive transportation system for all people and for all transportation choices. Full connectivity of the bicycle and pedestrian systems should be the goal of local communities. As local communities assess pedestrian and bicycle networks, this provides an opportunity to make local decisions as to the scale of complete streets along a roadway. In some areas, it makes sense to provide neighborhood greenways on local roads that parallel busy arterials. In other cases, all users may need to be accommodated within the right-of-way of the road. Both of these examples implement complete streets policies.

Local jurisdictions should make it a priority to educate engineers, planners, and all others involved in complete streets projects. Understanding the guiding principles of complete streets and the benefits of active transportation and complete networks can help to make for more meaningful and robust projects.

In 2013, the Federal Highway Administration issued a [memorandum](#) supporting flexible bicycle and pedestrian street designs like those outlined in the [NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide](#).

In 2013, the Washington State Department of Transportation endorsed the [Urban Street Design Guide](#) put out by the National Association of City Transportation Officials. The manual provides instruction on creating treatments like protected bike lanes, transit-priority streets, and parklets, which aren't included in the predominant American engineering guides.

The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) provides a [checklist](#) to ensure that projects comply with the city's complete streets ordinance and consistent with city plans. This is a great model for jurisdictions looking to implement complete street principles.

## **Resources**

Municipal Research and Services Center's [Compilation of Washington State Complete Streets Resources](#) (2014)

Smart Growth America's [Complete Streets Policy Workbook](#) (2013)

Smart Growth America's [Complete Streets Policy Analysis](#) (2012)

Smart Growth America's Report on [Complete Streets in Underserved Communities](#)

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department's Health Community Planning Toolbox Policy Intervention Tools:  
[Safety and Injury](#), [Physical Activity](#) (2013)