



AN INITIATIVE OF

the de Beaumont Foundation + Kaiser Permanente

## FAST FACTS



# Complete Streets FAQs

"Our Complete Streets policy meets[s] the diverse needs of all Houstonians while also creating more accessible and attractive connections to residential areas, parks, businesses, restaurants, schools and employment centers. As we work to build a healthier community, it is more important than ever to reimagine our approach to streets, sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, public transit, bike trails and lanes."

— Former Mayor Annise Parker,  
Houston, TX

## What are Complete Streets policies?

Complete Streets policies harmonize the needs and safety of all forms of transportation, including walking, biking, public transit, and cars, to serve people regardless of age, ability, income, race, or ethnicity. Complete Streets policies ensure streets are routinely designed, operated, and maintained to balance the needs and safety of all people who use the street and may include design features such as street lighting, landscaping, sidewalk coverage, traffic calming measures and connectivity of pedestrian walkways, bike lanes, and crosswalks. Together, these policies ensure that all people, regardless of age, ability, income, race, ethnicity, or where they live, have safe and convenient ways of getting around as well as opportunities for active living.

## How do Complete Streets improve the lives of big city residents?

Complete Streets policies allow city residents to safely walk, bike, roll, use mobility-assistive devices, drive or take public transit around their community. They keep buses running on time, reduce traffic congestion, and make sure kids have safe routes to school. Done right, these policies have a range of benefits for cities, from community safety to connectedness, improved health to reduced stress and economic well-being.

Walking and biking are good for the local economy. Multiple studies show that people who visit shopping districts by bike spend more money on a weekly basis than those who visit by car.<sup>1-6</sup> Construction projects that build biking and walking infrastructure also create more jobs than traditional road projects.<sup>5</sup>

A comprehensive study of walkability has found that people in walkable neighborhoods achieved 35-45 more minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week and were substantially less likely to be overweight or obese than similar people living in low walkability neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup>

Improving options for city residents to move safely and conveniently around their community is an equity issue. Studies by the Brookings Institution, the National Council on Disability and the AARP show that older adults, people living with disabilities, communities of color, and low-income individuals and families are disproportionately likely to face challenges travelling by car.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is the potential to save lives by expanding the availability of, safety for, and access to a variety of transportation options paired with integrating health-enhancing choices into transportation policy.<sup>9</sup> These policies can prevent chronic diseases, reduce and

prevent motor-vehicle-related injury and deaths, and improve environmental health, all while stimulating economic development and ensuring all people can safely and conveniently access the key amenities they need to thrive.

## What is the evidence that Complete Streets policies work?

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's County Health Rankings and Roadmaps Project, Complete Streets are scientifically supported, meaning there is strong evidence of their effectiveness.<sup>10</sup> Because of their ability to boost physical activity and prevent injury, Complete Streets are also one of the CDC's recommended transportation policies.<sup>9</sup>

Complete Streets policies encourage an active lifestyle by creating opportunities to integrate physical activity into daily life, thereby helping to reduce the risk of obesity and its associated health problems, which include diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, as well as certain cancers, stroke, asthma, and depression.<sup>11</sup> Studies have also found that walkability improvements are associated with lower body mass index (BMI) among children.<sup>12</sup>

Complete Streets policies have been shown to reduce traffic speed and the risk of injury for people walking and biking.<sup>13-17</sup> In one study of 37 cities with Complete Streets policies, the safer conditions created by these projects avoided a total of \$18.1 million in collision and injury costs in one year alone.<sup>18</sup> This same study found a net increase in new businesses, property values, and employment levels in communities implementing projects associated with Complete Streets.

Beyond the health benefits, Complete Streets have also resulted in improved green space,<sup>10</sup> an increased sense of community,<sup>19</sup> and reductions in crime and stress,<sup>20</sup> and may reduce vehicle miles traveled.<sup>21</sup>

## What are some future policy issues to consider?

In some communities, residents may need to be made aware of the benefits of Complete Streets policies. One way to overcome this obstacle is to evoke a unifying value by using the term "Safe Streets" to implement an equivalent policy, as safety, especially for children, is a value that can unite people around change. Because of their comprehensive nature, implementation is another challenge to Complete Streets policies: changing internal processes to accommodate new and different strategies for design and construction requires both interagency cooperation and time. In planning for Complete Streets implementation, cities will need to pay special attention to low- and moderate-income areas, which are typically the least safe for pedestrians and bicyclists, especially for children walking and biking to school. These communities face long-standing infrastructure disparities including fewer sidewalks and marked crosswalks and a higher concentration of streets with dangerous, faster-moving and/or higher-volume traffic.<sup>22</sup>

### RESOURCES FOR CITIES ON IMPLEMENTING COMPLETE STREETS POLICIES

**Action Strategies Toolkit - RWJF** A guide for local and state leaders working to create healthy communities and prevent childhood obesity.

**Healthy city is an active city (A): a physical activity planning guide** A guide provided by the World Health Organization for city leaders to create a plan for physical activity, active living and sport in their cities.

**National Complete Streets Coalition** A program of Smart Growth America to promote Complete Streets Policies.

**The Best Complete Streets Policies of 2018** A report published by the National Complete Streets Coalition that highlights examples of strong Complete Streets policies from all levels of government nationwide.

## The Elements of a Complete Streets Policy

A framework by the National Complete Streets Coalition to help communities craft strong, binding Complete Streets policies that prioritize equitable implementation

**UNC-Bushell 2013** Bushell, M.A., Poole, B.W., Zegeer, C.V., & Rodriguez, D.A. (2013). *Costs for Pedestrian and Bicyclist Infrastructure Improvements: A Resource for Researchers, Engineers, Planners, and the General Public*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Highway Safety Research Center.

## Getting the Wheels Rolling | ChangeLab Solutions

Getting the wheels rolling: A guide to using policy to create bicycle friendly communities.

**Walk Friendly Communities - Strategies** Provides a set of strategies that communities should incorporate when building programs to comprehensively address walking and pedestrian safety.

## What Are Complete Streets? | ChangeLab Solutions

A fact sheet for advocates and community members.

**Complete Streets Policies at the Local Level | ChangeLab Solutions** Complete Streets tools that provide well-researched language that can be used to outline a Complete Streets vision.

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CityHealth, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, works to advance a package of evidence-based policy solutions that will help millions of people live longer, better lives in vibrant, prosperous communities.

CityHealth will regularly evaluate cities on the number and strength of their policies. <http://www.cityhealth.org/>



