



Changing Procedure and Process

“Complete Street design should be understood as a process, not a specific product.” – *Major and Collector Street Plan, Nashville*

Changing the everyday processes that guide decision-making is at the heart of the Complete Streets movement. Changing the way planners and engineers do their jobs on a day-to-day basis is challenging, but is essential if Complete Streets plans or new design manuals are to do more than collect dust.

Implementing Complete Streets successfully requires **inclusive decision-making processes**. In many communities, Complete Streets implementation is delayed, or even derailed, by ‘silos’ that have been built within and between agencies. Such silos keep departments working independently from, and sometimes at odds with, each other — meaning the Complete Streets vision is interpreted differently or ignored completely. Simply bringing the right people together to discuss projects in light of Complete Streets is an important procedural step. It requires attention to who is involved with transportation projects as well as who *should* be involved. A committee can become a forum for this collaboration, so long as it includes representation from appropriate agencies and can influence their actions. Such committees are great for specific tasks, such as creating a specific plan or document.

Project-level teams that **bring together many departments** or agencies can also be influential in ensuring major work is done in the spirit of a Complete Streets policy. Such an approach is used in communities such as Seattle and Duluth, Minnesota. More sophisticated public involvement strategies should be employed by project-level teams, including design charrettes and regular interaction with residents and business owners.

To change processes, implementing agencies must **review the rules, procedures, and habits** that have typically guided them. Facilities for bicycling, walking, and taking and operating public transportation are simply not in some plans, codes, manuals, and other guiding documents. They can, and must, be added. Some communities do this systematically by reviewing all documents that might affect transportation. Others work through pilot projects, finding the issues that must be corrected as they work through the project.

Implementing Complete Streets requires that the **maintenance and operation procedures be updated** to look beyond automobile movement. Commonly, the only criteria for selecting and designing these projects is pavement condition and keeping costs low. However, such projects are often the most important — and frequent — opportunities to quickly create change within communities, since larger construction and reconstruction projects may take years to plan. Changes made during maintenance and operations adjustments are often inexpensive and tied to work that is already necessary. Many communities are now *planning ahead* for restriping of roadways following repaving and looking for opportunities to incorporate bicycle lanes, clearer pedestrian crossings, or improved parking. Communities can revise their paving plans so citizen groups and city planners can use the upcoming opportunities to suggest changes.

An agency committed to Complete Streets will need to **make changes to the way it selects its transportation projects**. Communities that rely on automobile Level of Service (LOS) should consider alternatives, such as relaxing LOS standards in some areas or at certain times; creating a different type of

LOS that applies to all other modes; or switching to entirely different measurements such as Auto Trips Generated. Communities with mode-specific plans should coordinate those efforts via an overarching street prioritization map and ensure that small improvements can be made on every project, not just on major routes identified in the documents. Agencies, especially Metropolitan Planning Organizations, can also employ a points system in selecting projects that reward multimodal inclusion. Equity — ensuring projects are distributed across neighborhoods regardless of income or ethnicity — must also be considered so as to avoid building out a great network in one neighborhood but nothing in the next.

Often, the most effective way to overcome barriers is to simply **create new systems**. Broadly, three commonly pursued tactics are: developing a strong exceptions review process; adopting project-specific checklists; and creating a new project development process. Complete Streets policies should spell out specific **exceptions** to the policy's application, and successful implementation requires a system to determine when and how those exceptions are made. **Checklists** remind or require planners and engineers to consider the needs of all users as they go about their work, helping to provide appropriate solutions based on transportation and land use needs; collect and share information between departments; and illuminate the decisions to the public. By themselves, checklists are usually not enough to fundamentally change transportation planning. Communities can bring all the procedural changes together by creating entirely **new step-by-step project development processes**. The best known example is the six-step process created by the Charlotte Department of Transportation in their [Urban Street Design Guidelines](#). The process starts by evaluating the existing land use and transportation context of the project; moves on to identifying gaps and deficiencies and defining future objectives; and then recommends a street classification and deliberates the tradeoffs that might need to be made.

Possible Activities

- Create a list of all documents to be updated to be consistent with the Complete Streets policy.
- Modify department procedural documents. May include:
 - Checklists.
 - Decision trees.
 - Standard operating procedures.
 - Project development steps or phases.
- Include non-transportation departments (e.g. planning, environment) that have a role in street planning, design, operations, or maintenance or participates in the updating of:
 - Utilities' street documents.
 - Plans, including neighborhood, area, redevelopment, urban forestry/street tree, and/or comprehensive plans.
 - Transit agency's street and planning documents.
- Prioritize multi-modal projects by:
 - Awarding points or otherwise prioritizing multimodal projects in project selection criteria.
 - Formally prioritizing multimodal projects in the capital improvement program (CIP) or transportation improvement program (TIP or STIP).
 - Prioritizing projects that are identified as closing gaps in the multimodal network.
- Change or create new project procedures at the following phases:
 - Planning,
 - Programming (including CIP/TIP decisions),
 - Scoping,
 - Design,
 - Construction,
 - Operation, and

- Maintenance.
- Ensure changes apply to all project types, including:
 - New construction,
 - Retrofitting/reconstruction,
 - Repair,
 - Resurfacing/restoration/rehabilitation,
 - Bridges,
 - Privately built roads,
 - Master planned neighborhoods and planned unit developments,
 - Infill,
 - Greenfield, and
 - Transit.
- Establish a process for allowing exceptions to the Complete Streets policy.
- Name a specific entity for approving exceptions (e.g., transportation director, city council, other committee or staff).
- Provide staff the decision-making power to be flexible and consider the land use context.
- Adopt or update relevant plans, such as:
 - Bicycle Master Plan,
 - Pedestrian Master Plan,
 - Transit Master Plan,
 - Non-Motorized Network Plan,
 - Transportation Plan,
 - Major Street Plan, and/or
 - General or Comprehensive Plan.
- Adopt or update relevant policies, including:
 - Education policies and activities,
 - Encouragement policies and activities,
 - Enforcement policies and activities, and
 - Multimodal Level of Service guidelines and criteria.
- Require consultants to use Complete Streets approach in project scope and/or consultant contracts.

Best Practices

- Encourage stronger relationships between departments, with citizens, and with elected officials.
- Try easier, smaller projects or those with obvious, visible benefits first.
- Keep a network approach in mind when selecting the first projects. New facilities won't be well used if they don't connect to destinations or other routes.
- Document results of early projects, including before-and-after studies of safety benefits if possible.

Reviewing and Updating Design Guidance

In many agencies, the street design manual is the go-to reference for all transportation projects. If it is not supportive of flexible, context-sensitive, and multi-modal approaches, it can be the largest barrier a community faces. A flexible manual can empower planners and engineers to develop design solutions that balance the needs of many users and support the surrounding neighborhood. Changes to the subdivision codes that apply to private development are also necessary to ensure that all new roadways and planned developments are aligned with the community's Complete Streets goals.

A number of agencies have undertaken a **complete rewrite** of their manuals, usually accompanied by developing new procedures and producing training to staff. The most innovative new manuals go beyond cross-sections to create new ways to tackle the connection between land use and transportation needs. These documents create new street typologies that provide greater nuance than is available through the traditional functional classification system, which defines roads exclusively by their function for automobiles. However, design manual re-writes can be expensive and time-consuming, and they still may not be enough to change the everyday workings of an agency.

Some places do not have their own design manuals, preferring to use a variety of national or state resources. By **referring to outside guidance**, these communities do not need to use significant resources to stay up on best practices and the latest design approaches. Instead, they opt to adapt or adopt the latest resources that best reflect their needs. Even in communities with their own design manuals, transportation staff will refer to national or state resources in addition to their own. **Project-based design decisions** can also be made through collaborative design charrettes, temporary installations, or opportune pilot projects.

Possible Activities

- Create new design guidelines, either as:
 - Entirely new document, or
 - A series of rules or recommended practices to augment existing guidance.
- Adopt or direct use of new standards, including the latest versions of:
 - AASHTO: A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets (“Green Book”),
 - AASHTO: Guide for Planning, Designing, and Operating Pedestrian Facilities,
 - AASHTO: Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities,
 - ITE: Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach,
 - NACTO: Urban Street Design Guide,
 - NACTO: Urban Bikeway Design Guide,
 - US Access Board: Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines, and/or
 - 2010 Highway Capacity Manual.
- Update street design standards that apply to:
 - Private developers,
 - City-initiated projects, and
 - Contractors working in the right-of-way via permits.
- Provide relevant updates to:
 - Land use standards and zoning codes,
 - Subdivision code,
 - Motor vehicle parking policies,
 - Bicycle parking policies,
 - Traffic calming,
 - Streetscape,
 - Transit and station-area plans, and/or
 - Recreation and parks maintenance plans for roads, sidewalks, medians, etc.
- Collaborate across departments to incorporate Complete Streets design guidance into utilities, planning, public transit, and/or other agencies dealing with roads.

Best Practices

- Consider making simple changes to design standards, or adopting templates such as the Model Design Manual for Living Streets or Complete Streets, Complete Networks.

- Take advantage of mill and overlay/repaving projects by planning, and even designing, ahead of time to include bicycle and walking needs in the process.
- Evaluate budgets to support maintenance needs, especially with roadway striping.
- Add an evaluation of bicycle and walking needs to the maintenance and operations review cycle.

Offering Training and Educational Opportunities

A successful Complete Streets initiative requires ongoing education and training — and it is about far more than helping engineers learn how to incorporate bicycle and pedestrian facilities into road projects. Planners, engineers, consultants, and other agencies need a thorough understanding of new procedures. Elected officials need ongoing engagement to understand how the general policy goals will be translated into projects on the ground. And communication with the public about what they want out of their streets, and what is happening to their roads, is essential for implementation to be successful.

Many communities employ a workshop approach to help **transportation staff** understand and embrace the intention behind Complete Streets. They need to hear how this approach works in other communities, and how it fits into their professional goals and standards. The best messengers for these sessions are those within the same profession; engineers need to hear directly from other engineers, planners from other planners. Many agencies have also used a more informal, on-the-job training approach that encourages dialogue between departments. Additional technical training should be part of regular professional development.

Work with **elected officials, involved stakeholders, and the general public** must be ongoing. Transportation staff and Complete Streets supporters need to be able to communicate how the proposed projects benefit the community and nearby residents and businesses, and how incomplete streets negatively affect mobility and access to schools, offices, and shops. Regular updates on goals and successes are key. “Experiential” learning, through activities such as walking audits and bicycle tours, has been very helpful in building support and camaraderie among staff, elected officials, and community members. Some have also produced or shared short videos that focus on the health, economic, and safety benefits of changing street design.

Possible Activities

- Leadership sends a formal memo or email to staff about the new Complete Streets Policy.
- Conduct a formal staff training process, potentially through:
 - Staff retreats,
 - Series of Complete Streets specific training sessions,
 - Funded professional development with outside experts, and/or
 - On-the-job training.
- Conduct informal mentoring-training within the transportation department.
- Provide training on technical aspects of the policy (e.g. engineering/design).
- Provide training on non-technical aspects of the policy (e.g. process changes within the department to consider all users of all abilities).
- Provide training on non-transportation topics such as environment and public health benefits.
- Provide sensitivity training to learn about all users of the road such as those with disabilities.
- Training includes department heads, managers and program staff.
- Develop systematic training in incorporating all users of all abilities for new staff.
- Include multiple departments in training, such as utilities, public health, transit agencies and economic development.

- Engage with community to explain the importance of Complete Streets policy, when and how it will be applied, from a multi-disciplinary view. Engage through:
 - Public meetings,
 - Presentations at city council meetings,
 - Presentations at district offices that are open to the public,
 - Video presentation available online,
 - Printed materials such as newsletters, pamphlets, posters, and/or
 - Walking and/or biking audits or tours.
 - Educational campaigns, which may include information about new road markings and signs, coaching on sharing the road with other users, benefits of walking, biking, and taking public transportation.

Best Practices

- Community engineers and planners must hear from their professional peers.
- Strive to instill a sense that Complete Streets is part of everyone's job.
- Outreach to community members is an on-going process and must not end with a policy's adoption.
- The first projects are the hardest to sell. Communicate on a project-by-project scale as well as in more general terms. Go to the public so they hear about the project and your goals directly from you first.
- Start with temporary or pilot projects, or choose projects with relatively simple implementation; be sure to tie these projects back to the Complete Streets objective.
- Provide regular updates to community and agency elected officials and media on implementation and successes.
- Ask your Metropolitan Planning Organization to provide training for its member jurisdictions.
- Share project successes in the context of overall policy implementation.