

# Complete Streets

## FACT SHEET

### Overview

The concept of a “complete street” has been in the transportation planner’s vocabulary for a number of years. It refers to a set of street design concepts that ensures that all users are safely accommodated, regardless of how they travel or what their special needs may be. Consider this description of “First Avenue”: Jennifer may safely drive home from work; Andy, who is visually impaired, can cross the street where there is a traffic signal, and board the bus; Joe and Amy can ride their bikes to school.

### Who has adopted Complete Street Policies in New York State?

Fourteen New York State counties or municipalities have adopted Complete Street policies as of 2011:

Buffalo, NY	Complete Streets Policy	2008
New York City, NY	Sustainable Streets Strategic Plan	2008
Bethlehem, NY	Resolution No. 30	2009
Ulster County, NY	Resolution No. 229-09	2009
Babylon, NY	Complete Streets Policy	2010
Brookhaven, NY	Resolution 2010-993	2010
Cuba, NY	Resolution	2010
Elizabethtown, NY	Resolution	2010
Gowanda, NY	Resolution	2010
Islip, NY	Resolution	2010
Kingston, NY	Resolution	2010
Salamanca, NY	Comprehensive Plan: Complete Streets Policy	2010
Rochester, NY	Resolution 2011-356	2011
Town of Lewisboro, NY	Resolution	2011

*A complete street design will save money on future transportation retrofits; reduced congestion will provide more efficient travel within your community; and creating complete streets can spur economic development.*



Pittsford, New York



## Complete Streets Act

This concept was given the force of law in New York with the passage of the Complete Streets Act in August, 2011 (S05411A/A08366). The law took effect on February 15, 2012. The law does not provide any additional funding for complete street design features, so funding decisions should be addressed early in planning stage. It states that “the transportation plans of New York State should consider the needs of all users of our roadways including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders, motorists and citizens of all ages and abilities, including children, the elderly and the disabled...Therefore, it shall be the policy of the state to consider people of all ages and abilities and all appropriate forms of transportation when planning roadway projects.” The law covers only projects that are funded with federal and state funds. However, NYSAMPO encourages local governments to consider these principles for locally funded projects as well.

The section of the law defining responsibilities of New York State DOT and local agencies that undertake street projects: “Consideration of complete street design. (A) For all state, county and local transportation projects that are undertaken by the Department [of Transportation] or receive both federal and state funding and are subject to Department of Transportation oversight, the department or agency with jurisdiction over such projects shall consider the convenient access and mobility on the road network by all users of all ages, including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation users **through the use of complete street design features in the planning, design,**

**construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation, but not including resurfacing, maintenance, or pavement recycling of such projects.”**

The law further goes on to outline typical design features for complete streets:

“(B) Complete street design features are roadway design features that accommodate and facilitate convenient access and mobility by all users, including current and projected users, particularly pedestrians, bicyclists and individuals of all ages and abilities. These features may include, but need not be limited to: **sidewalks, paved shoulders suitable for use by bicyclists, lane striping, bicycle lanes, share the road signage, crosswalks, road diets, pedestrian control signalization, bus pull-outs, curb cuts, raised crosswalks and ramps and traffic calming measures;** and recognize that the needs of users of the road network vary according to a rural, urban and suburban context.”

The law does provide some exceptions, including:

- Not required for roads, like interstate highways, where use by pedestrians and bicyclists is prohibited;
- Cost is disproportionate to need, based on land use context, traffic volumes, and population density

- Demonstrated lack of need, based on the above factors; or lack of community support;
- Design features would have an adverse impact on public safety.

Given those requirements, there are a number of examples of complete streets design features, based on the understanding that there is no singular design prescription for such a street. Each one is unique and responds to its community context. However, one constant with all features is that safety considerations must always be factored into any Complete Streets design.

While many people associate Complete Streets with an urban or suburban context, there is a place for these strategies in rural areas too. Complete Streets will look different in rural communities than they do in urban, and care should be given to ensure roadways in these villages and hamlets are designed to fit their setting. In town centers, narrower streets, well-marked pedestrian crossings, sidewalks, and street trees can all work to improve safety while maintaining a pleasant, small town feel. On streets where homes are located along one side of the street, sidewalks with accessible curb cuts lining just that side may be the best fit. Sometimes a rural road can be completed by simply providing wide shoulders to allow safe bicycling and walking.

## A Complete Street May Include:

- Narrower travel lanes, which contribute to slower vehicle speed and free up space for other uses in the existing right-of-way. A design called a “road diet” may convert a four lane street to two through lanes, a center two-way left turn lane, and space for bicycle lanes. In an urban setting with lower speed limits and a low volume of trucks and buses, ten foot lanes are often sufficient for two lane roads.
- Sidewalks that are wide enough and without obstacles so they can be used comfortably by all pedestrians, including those with visual or mobility impairments. Providing sidewalks that are five feet wide is considered best practice. Four foot wide sidewalks meet current standards, but require additional width at regular intervals per ADA standards to allow wheelchairs to pass one another. Special design attention is necessary where spaces like sidewalk cafes will share the public right-of-way.
- Proper accommodation of pedestrians at intersections, including crosswalks, curb ramps as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, and accessible pedestrian signals. The latter are designed to accommodate visually impaired pedestrians with a locator tone and computer generated spoken messages. Crossing distance can be reduced through use of curb extensions and median refuge. (see NYSAMPO Fact Sheets on Designing Signalized Intersections to Accommodate All Users and Timing Traffic Signals to Accommodate Pedestrians at NYSAMPO website: <http://www.nysmpos.org>).
- Bicycle lanes or wide paved shoulders, depending on local policy. A new pavement marking called a “sharrow” may also be used when there is not enough pavement width for a bicycle lane. It consists of a bicycle and chevrons pointing in the direction of travel. It guides the cyclist to the proper location on the street, and alerts motorists that cyclists may be there.
- Transit accommodations including special bus lanes or bus pull-outs, and comfortable and accessible transit stops. Bus stops should have shelters, and must be designed so the bus driver can deploy the wheelchair lift or ramp.
- Landscape elements that help curb stormwater runoff such as bioswales, planters, rain gardens and street trees – are mutually beneficial for mobility and the environment. Such green elements contribute to a more comfortable and visually interesting environment for all users. Numerous trees reduce the heat island effect and offset CO<sub>2</sub> while widened sidewalks and increased pedestrian features make the street friendlier to those walking by. Traffic-calming elements like chicanes, pedestrian islands, and curb extensions provide site opportunities for bioswales, street trees, and rain gardens.
- Complete streets are often used to stimulate economic development, ideally as compact mixed-use with both retail, commercial, and residential spaces. Designers must consider how stores and restaurants will receive deliveries, and where visitors and residents will park their cars without interfering with the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, or transit. Concepts include rear delivery access, and strategically placed loading zones with time restrictions.



The National Complete Streets Coalition is an excellent source of information on the design and benefits of Complete Streets.

<http://www.completestreets.org/complete-streets-fundamentals/factsheets/>



New York State Association of  
Metropolitan Planning Organizations  
<http://www.nysmpos.org/>