

Federal Complete Streets Legislation

SENATE ASK: Co-sponsor and support S. 584, The Complete Streets Act of 2009, introduced by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA)

HOUSE ASK: Co-sponsor and support H.R. 1443, The Complete Streets Act of 2009, introduced by Congresswoman Matsui (D, CA-5).

Overview of Legislation

The legislation would require states and MPOs to establish complete streets policies and apply them to federally-funded projects. The bill clarifies what a complete streets policy should contain (information on the policy standard is available at <http://www.completestreets.org/policies.html>) and clarified reasons a street would be exempted from the policy. The legislation would also strengthen research and technical assistance on complete streets.

Congress has already indicated its support for complete streets. A provision in the recently enacted energy bill states a “sense of Congress” that complete streets provisions should be adopted. This legislation clarifies what a complete streets policy should include and makes it part of the transportation planning process at the state and MPO levels.

Issue Overview

Complete streets policies simply require that the safety, interests, and convenience of all users – drivers, bicyclists transit users and pedestrians of all ages and abilities – be considered in the design and construction of transportation projects. The public right-of-way – our roads – should be designed and built for safe travel by everyone. These policies are not new; states and regions across the nation have enacted successful complete streets policies or legislation and more communities are adopting policies every day.

The Problem

- Millions of Americans are walking and bicycling and catching the bus along roads that are not properly designed – most everyone has seen the pathways tramped in the grass alongside a major roadway. This is a problem on many levels, making our streets more dangerous and encouraging more people to drive everywhere—which means more congestion and more pollution, among other problems.
- We need to provide for the one-third of Americans who do not drive—many of these people are elderly, or poor, or young—and without walking, biking, or transit, they have no opportunities for mobility.
- 25% of walking trips on roads with no sidewalk or shoulder; bike lanes are available for only 5% of bike trips.
- Roads designed only for cars hamper development of compact, walkable communities.

- Incomplete streets are a barrier to helping people drive less and avoiding the high cost of gas. 50% of trips in metro areas are three miles or less and 28% are one mile or less, yet 65% of these trips now take place in a car.

The Complete Streets Solution

- Transportation engineers know how to design roads that are safe for everyone – but in most places only do so for ‘special’ projects. A federal complete streets policy would result in better state and local projects – and better use of the billions of dollars invested every year in road infrastructure.
- Citizens want more travel options that are safe and convenient. A new poll from the National Association of REALTORS® found that 83% of respondents would like communities built so they can use their cars less.
- Complete streets policies are vital to improving the mobility and access of senior citizens, children and people with disabilities.
- Complete streets can be a vital tool in improving chronic public health problems such as obesity by enabling more active lifestyle.
- Complete streets increase the capacity of the road network by providing more choices.
- Complete streets policies support local, state and national efforts to increase energy efficiency and meet greenhouse gas emission targets.
- Dozens of jurisdictions, including the states of Virginia, Massachusetts, and California, and the cities of Chicago, Seattle, and Salt Lake have successfully adopted complete streets policies. Most say that since accommodation for all users is integrated from the beginning, any additional costs are minimal.
- Massachusetts’ complete streets design manual won many national awards, including one from AASHTO.

Personalize the Information for your lawmaker:

Use relevant state/local examples to discuss the problem and solution

- Use examples of state/local complete streets policies in your area (if you don’t know of any, ask us: email info@completestreets.org or call 202-207-3355 x115)
- Tell stories that demonstrate local demand for bicycle/pedestrian ways; tell stories of recent bicycle/pedestrian fatalities on roads without facilities; tell stories of the need for alternatives to driving because of high gas prices
- Look up local or state bicycle/pedestrian fatality rates

- Pedestrian crash factsheet:
http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/nhtsa_static_file_downloader.jsp?file=/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/NCSA/Content/TSF/2006/810810.pdf
 - Bicyclist crash factsheet:
http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/nhtsa_static_file_downloader.jsp?file=/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/NCSA/Content/TSF/2006/810802.pdf
 - Other factsheets (including children, older people, and schools):
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/menuitem.6a6eaf83cf719ad24ec86e10dba046a0/>
- Tell stories of the disconnect between road design and plans to build compact housing developments

Read through the complete streets issue fact sheets posted at <http://www.completestreets.org/benefits.html> and pick out statistics you think would be appealing to your member of Congress.