

Complete Streets

“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.”

-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 of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets policies include 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, 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, drive or take public transit around their community. They keep buses and trains 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. Construction projects that build biking and walking infrastructure also [create more jobs](#) than do traditional road projects.

A comprehensive study of walkability has found that [people in walkable neighborhoods did about 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

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 seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals and families are disproportionately likely to face challenges travelling by car.

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. These policies can prevent chronic diseases, reduce and prevent motor-vehicle-related injury and deaths, improve environmental health, all while stimulating economic development and ensuring access for all people.

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.

Complete Streets encourage an active lifestyle by creating opportunities to integrate exercise into daily activities, 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. Some studies show walkability improvements are associated with [lower body mass indexes \(BMIs\) among children](#).

Complete streets policies have been shown to [reduce traffic speed and the risk of injury](#) for pedestrians and cyclists.

Because of their ability to boost physical activity and prevent injury, complete streets are also one of the [CDC's recommended transportation policies](#).

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. This same study found a net increase to 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, increased sense of community, and reductions in crime and stress, and may reduce vehicle miles traveled](#).

ISSUES FOR FUTURE POLICY IMPROVEMENT

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, as 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 and a higher concentration of streets with faster-moving and/or higher-volume traffic.

RESOURCES FOR CITIES ON IMPLEMENTING COMPLETE STREETS POLICIES

[LHC-Toolkit 2009](#) - Leadership for Healthy Communities (LHC). Action strategies toolkit: A guide for local and state leaders working to create healthy communities and prevent childhood obesity. Princeton: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF); 2009.

[WHO-Edwards 2008](#) - Edwards P, Tsouros AD. A healthy city is an active city: A physical activity planning guide. Copenhagen, DK: World Health Organization Europe (WHO-E); 2008.

[SGA-Complete streets](#) - Smart Growth America (SGA). National Complete Streets Coalition resources.

[NCSC-Seskin 2013](#) - Seskin S, Gordon-Koven L. The best Complete Streets policies of 2012. Washington, DC: National Complete Streets Coalition (NCSC), Smart Growth America (SGA); 2013.

[UNC-Bushell 2013](#) - Bushell MA, Poole BW, Zegeer CV, Rodriguez DA. Costs for pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure improvements: A resource for researchers, engineers, planners, and the general public. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Highway Safety Research Center; 2013.

[ChangeLab-Zimmerman 2013](#) - Zimmerman S, Kramer K. Getting the wheels rolling: A guide to using policy to create bicycle friendly communities. Oakland: ChangeLab Solutions; 2013.

[WFC-Resources](#) - Walk Friendly Communities (WFC), Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center. Resources.

[ChangeLab-CS](#) - ChangeLab Solutions. What are Complete Streets (CS)?

[Change Lab Solutions Model Policy](#)