

Regional Complete Streets Policy

Adopted by the MVRPC Board of Directors

January 6, 2011



Complete Streets Vision

The transportation network in the Miami Valley will become measurably better connected, safer, and more accessible for all users of the public right-of-way, regardless of their mode of transportation, age or abilities, as transportation projects throughout the Region are designed and constructed using complete streets principles. This effort to make the system more complete will take advantage of opportunities presented by necessary reconstruction and expansion of the system whenever practicable.

Complete Streets Defined

This policy defines Complete Streets by this outcome: All current and projected users of the public right-of-way should be able to safely and conveniently reach their destinations along and across a street or road, regardless of their chosen mode of transportation, in order for that street or road to be considered “complete.” “All users” include: pedestrians, cyclists, transit and school bus riders, people with disabilities, motorists, freight haulers, service personnel, and emergency responders. “All users” includes a wide range of ages from school-aged children to the elderly.

While some streets and roads may require changes to the right-of-way to better accommodate non-motorized users, many low volume streets and roads will require only minor changes, such as signage or restriping, or no changes at all, especially if speed limits are low and enforced. (see Context Sensitive, below)

The purpose of this policy is to encourage improvements to the transportation network so that more and more streets and roads in the Miami Valley meet this definition, and to encourage future designs which accommodate all users, thereby creating an increasingly safe and accessible transportation network for all modes and users.

Education and Enforcement

This policy focuses primarily on how streets are designed and built. However, it is also important that the issues of education and enforcement are addressed in regards to Complete Streets. Complete Streets can make the transportation network safer for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians if each knows the rules of the road and obeys those rules. As more cyclists and pedestrians share the right-of-way with automobiles, all parties need opportunities to learn the proper use of treatments like bike lanes, shared lane markings, sidepaths, etc. and how to interact safely. Project sponsors should consider whether a specific project requires special efforts in education or enforcement.

Consistent enforcement of traffic laws for cyclists, drivers and pedestrians is critical in order to ensure that posted speeds are obeyed, proper signals used when turning, and traffic lights and signs are respected. This is true in regards to drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. Bicycles are legal vehicles on all Ohio roads and streets, with the exception of limited-access highways, and are subject to vehicular traffic rights and responsibilities.

Pedestrians and transit riders also must take responsibility for walking along and across roadways in a safe and legal manner, using sidewalks or shoulders when available. If no such facility is available, pedestrians should walk on the left, facing traffic, as near to the outside edge of the roadway as is safe and practical. Pedestrians must yield the right-of-way to all vehicles on the roadway

Complete Streets Benefits

By providing, where appropriate, features such as accessible sidewalks, designated bike facilities and accessible transit stops, complete streets encourage walking, transit use and biking, all of which have important health benefits. By shifting a share of automobile traffic to walking, biking and transit, complete streets help reduce the demand for fossil fuels, ease automobile congestion, reduce wear on roadways, improve air quality and make streets more attractive for businesses and customers, increasing economic activity at the neighborhood level. Well-designed complete streets improve safety by reducing collisions between automobiles, pedestrians and cyclists. Complete streets are a logical extension of the Americans with Disabilities Act and improve access for people with disabilities and older citizens, allowing them to participate more fully in community life. (see section entitled Context Sensitive)

Emphasis on Connectivity

The purpose of a transportation network is to connect users of the network to their desired destinations and make it possible for all individuals to be mobile, engaged members of the community. A well-connected network provides safe and convenient transitions from one mode of transportation to another, from one jurisdiction to another and from one type of infrastructure to another. This can be accomplished by connecting sidewalks to bus stops, providing park and ride locations, providing bike-on-bus opportunities, making convenient connections from separated bike trails to the street grid and by making sure that all these connections are accessible to people with disabilities. Every effort should be made to provide a continuous, uninterrupted network accessible to all users and modes. A well-connected network considers connectivity throughout the lifespan of a transportation project, and takes into account the needs of both current and projected users.

Context Sensitive

There is no one design standard that achieves the complete streets outcome. Designs for particular projects will be context-sensitive, considering adjacent land uses and local needs, and incorporating the most up-to-date, widely-accepted design standards for the particular setting, traffic volume and speed, and current and projected demand. Each project must be considered both separately and as part of a connected network to determine the level and type of treatment necessary for the street to be complete. The need for complete streets treatments is greatest along urban and suburban corridors that connect populous residential settings with popular and important destinations, including,

but not limited to the following: medical, shopping, employment, educational and recreational destinations.

In settings where there are multiple destinations which currently attract pedestrians, cyclists, people with disabilities and transit riders, any or all of the following should be considered: reduced speeds, narrowed travel lanes, bike lanes, adequate shoulders, shared lane markers, sidepaths, accessible sidewalks, marked crosswalks, median refuges, accessible pedestrian controls and accessible and comfortable transit stops. It is also important that these features are included if there is a strong likelihood of future demand. If adjacent land use is changing to include more urbanized uses such as schools, medical facilities and shopping destinations, road design needs to anticipate future demand.

Certain factors, such as the existence of a fixed transit route or proximity to a school, clearly demonstrate the need for safe non-automobile travel. Well-worn foot paths in grassy/muddy areas along a road are also de facto evidence of the need for pedestrian facilities including sidewalks and crosswalks. Since part of every transit trip is made on foot or by using a mobility device, all transit stops should be accessible to pedestrians and people with disabilities. Because schools are natural concentrations of non-drivers, and school bus service is usually limited by a minimum distance from the school, and because bus service is usually not provided for before school or after school activities; walkers, people with disabilities and cyclists must be routinely accommodated within a minimum distance of two miles from a school facility.

MVRPC encourages school boards and jurisdictions to be proactive by considering complete streets principles when selecting schools sites. If new schools are located in areas that are accessible to walkers and bicyclists, school systems can better manage transportation costs and jurisdictions can avoid new congestion problems. Students can also enjoy the health benefits of walking or biking. The same can be true when shopping, medical, postal, governmental and other public facilities are built in locations that are accessible to pedestrians, cyclists, the elderly and people with disabilities. The most effective time to address these issues is early in the site selection and facility design process, therefore Complete Streets discussions should begin immediately when new facilities are being conceptualized.

It is important to note that many low-speed, low-volume residential streets can be considered complete with no additional treatment because pedestrians, people of all abilities, cars and cyclists can already interact safely. Likewise, many low-volume roads with limited current or projected demand from cyclists, transit riders, pedestrians and people with disabilities may require no additional treatment to be considered complete. In general, specific treatments are less necessary where average daily traffic volumes are less than 1,000 vehicles a day and legal speeds are 25 mph or less. Where traffic is light, but speeds are higher, motorists must have adequate sight distance and the opportunity to change lanes to pass a bicycle or pedestrian for a road to be complete without additional design elements.

Applicability of this Policy

This policy applies to all roadway projects that request MVRPC-controlled Surface Transportation Program (STP) and Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) federal funds. Projects that are within the federal aid urbanized area or within defined urbanized clusters will likely require different approaches than those in rural areas. Some projects, especially those in rural areas, may require no additional complete streets treatments if it is determined during the application review phase that no current or projected need justifies such treatment. Consistent with current federal law, the primary purpose of all projects funded under this policy will be to enhance transportation choices in the Region; no projects will be funded that are purely recreational in nature. Please note that this is a regional policy that does not, and cannot, address a wide variety of possible street treatments and amenities that may be desirable, but the specifics of which are beyond the purview of a regional policy.

MVRPC encourages local and state jurisdictions/ organizations to review and revise their local ordinances/policies to reflect complete street design guidelines and to apply these guidelines to local projects as appropriate. In addition, MVRPC encourages private developers to apply complete streets principles to their projects. We also encourage neighboring regions to utilize these principles in order to ensure connectivity across jurisdictions and regions.

The policy applies to all phases of project development, from initial planning through construction. How a project will address complete street requirements will be documented in the MVRPC project application for federal funds and be identified in the certified cost estimate. Only projects which qualify for one of the exceptions listed below will be allowed to deviate from the policy and still receive MVRPC-controlled STP/CMAQ funds.

Exceptions to this Policy

All MVRPC-funded STP/CMAQ projects will consider complete streets principles and possible treatments at the time of the initial application for funding. If the project sponsor determines that additional complete streets treatments are not warranted, they may request an exception for one or more of the following reasons:

1. **Where bicyclists and pedestrians are prohibited by law from using the roadway.** Bicycles and pedestrians are legally permitted to travel on or along all streets and roads in Ohio with the exception of limited access highways.
2. **Where the street or road is already adequately designed to accommodate all users, and thus is complete without further enhancements.** To qualify for this exception, the project sponsor must document how this street or road currently addresses the needs of

all users.

3. **Where the cost of establishing bikeways or walkways would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use.** In accordance with federal guidelines, excessively disproportionate is defined as exceeding twenty percent of the cost of the total transportation project (including right of way acquisition costs). This exception must consider probable use through the life of the project, a minimum of 20 years.
4. **Where the project consists of maintenance, repair or resurfacing of an existing cross-section only.** However, resurfacing projects often offer a low-cost opportunity to adjust lane width or add a bike lane simply by changing the pavement markings on a road, and therefore resurfacing projects should, at the discretion of the project sponsor, be considered an opportunity to make a street or road more complete. Projects that include adding lanes, shoulders or involve replacement of the full pavement structure are not considered maintenance or repair and do not qualify for this exception.
5. **Where the project consists primarily of the installation of traffic control or safety devices** and little or no additional right-of-way is to be acquired. However whenever new traffic control detection devices are installed they must be capable of detecting bicycles. All new pedestrian crossing devices must also meet the most current accessibility standards for controls, signals and placement.
6. **Where the Average Daily Traffic count (ADT) is projected to be less than 1,000 vehicles** per day over the life of the project and there is sufficient opportunity for a vehicle to change lanes to pass a cyclist or pedestrian.
7. **Where scarcity of population or other factors indicate an absence of need for current and future conditions.** This exception must take the long view and consider probable use through the life of the project, a minimum of 20 years.
8. **Where roadway standards or bicycle and pedestrian standards cannot be met.** There are times bicycle and pedestrian facility standards cannot be met due to roadway topographic constraints or if a project sponsor believes it is impractical to make the street safe for shared use. For example, roads with a combination of extremely high traffic volume (18,000+ cars a day), constrained and fixed right-of-way, and posted speeds of 45 mph or more may need special consideration.

Non-standard treatments for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations should be reviewed for possible inclusion into roadway projects like these to avoid not having any bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, or an alternate route in the same corridor should be identified and marked.

This type of exception is highly problematic because high traffic volume is often an indication that a road is the most direct connection between multiple origins and destinations, and pedestrians, cyclists and transit users should not be denied access to those destinations. In order for this exception to be granted, the project sponsor should identify alternate routes that are in the same traffic corridor and that allow pedestrians, cyclists and people with disabilities access to significant destinations and, as necessary, make improvements to those alternate routes (for example: signage, bike boulevard treatments, shared used spurs, shared-lane markings, etc.).

Cyclists, pedestrians, transit riders and people with disabilities must also be able to cross these high-volume roads safely so that these roads do not become barriers to non-motorized use. High-volume, wide roads often have the unintended impact of dividing a community. To accommodate crossing of very wide, multi-lane roads, signal timing may need to be adjusted to accommodate users who walk more slowly, countdown timers, and/or mid-point safety islands may need to be installed, and highly visible signage and crosswalk markings may need to be added. Accommodations for cyclists crossing these roads should also be considered, including bicycle detection devices at traffic signals and mid-point safety islands where multi-use paths cross busy roadways.

All requests for exceptions to complete streets treatments shall be documented with supporting data which indicates the basis for the request. Exceptions must be requested by resolution of the sponsoring body and will be granted after review by MVRPC staff, or, if not granted, the reason for not granting will be explained in writing by MVRPC staff. Staff will work with sponsors to identify a mutually acceptable alternative. If an agreement cannot be reached between the project sponsor and the MVRPC staff, the sponsor can appeal to the Complete Streets Review committee.

The Complete Streets Review Committee will consist of three members of the Technical Advisory Committee or Board, at least one being a representative of a municipality and at least one being a representative of a transit agency. Alternates will be named in case a project presents a conflict of interest for one of the members of the committee.

Policy Implementation

1. Beginning with applications submitted in calendar year 2011, project sponsors will adhere to this policy. Roadway improvement STP/CMAQ project applications for MVRPC attributable funds will address how the project will make the transportation network more complete. Project applications which do not include efforts to make a street or road more complete must request a specific exception(s) and document the rationale for that request. MVRPC staff will provide guidance on how to comply with this policy during the project solicitation process. MVRPC will also make project sponsors aware of training and educational opportunities concerning complete streets, including resources that address specific design issues.
2. The Project Evaluation System has been modified to reflect this policy and points will be awarded for the addition or improvement of complete streets elements to a project. In order not to penalize projects which have been granted legitimate exceptions, the same number of points will be awarded to those projects if the exception is granted and the sponsor can demonstrate that needs of all users are being addressed in the same transportation corridor. Note: As part of the initial review of project applications, MVRPC staff will determine whether appropriate complete streets elements are included, or whether a legitimate exception can be made.

Any application which does not address complete streets principles either by including appropriate design elements or by qualifying for an exception will be considered incomplete and the project will not be ranked unless the sponsor chooses to modify the application by including appropriate complete streets elements or by applying for and being granted one or more exceptions. If a sponsor applied for an exception in the initial application, but staff did not grant that exception, the project sponsor could also choose to appeal staffs' decision to the Complete Street Review Committee. If the sponsor chooses neither to modify the application nor to appeal, the application will be returned to the sponsor as incomplete. MVRPC staff will be available to consult with the project sponsor on what needs to be done in order to modify the application or apply for an exception. The intention of this policy is to support efforts to make the transportation network in the Region more complete by applying complete streets principles as appropriate. A process for applying for an exception is built into the policy. A timeline for review, modification or appeal will be built into the solicitation process.

3. Context-appropriate facilities will be designed to the best currently available standards and guidelines. See the Policy Guidance and Resources section below. Complete Streets elements will be included in the certified cost estimate for each project. MVRPC will coordinate educational opportunities for jurisdictional technical staff on current design standards and appropriate complete streets alternatives.

4. This policy will not dictate specific designs; rather it will ensure the outcome that: **All current and projected users must be able to safely and conveniently reach their destinations along and across a street or road, regardless of their chosen mode of transportation.**
5. This policy will be periodically reviewed and revised in parallel with the MVRPC Long Range Transportation Plan Update.

General Policy Guidance and Resources

- AASHTO Design Publications listed at:
https://bookstore.transportation.org/category_item.aspx?id=DS
- American Planning Association Publication: “Complete Streets: Best Policy and Implementation Practices” (www.planning.org)
- Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares:
(<http://www.ite.org/css/>)
- Multimodal Level of Service for Urban Streets
(http://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/Multimodal_Level_of_Service_Analysis_for_Urban_Str_160228.aspx)
- National Complete Streets Coalition (<http://www.completestreets.org>)
- ODOT Multi-modal Design Guidance
(<http://www.dot.state.oh.us/DIVISIONS/TRANSSYSDEV/MULTIMODALPLANNING/BICYCLE/Pages/PlanningandDesignResources.aspx>)
- TRB 2010 Highway Capacity Manual (soon to be available)
- US DOT Policy Statement: “Design Guidance Accommodating Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel: A Recommended Approach”
(<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/design.htm>)
- Wisconsin Department of Transportation
(<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/state/docs/bicycle-rural-guide.pdf>)

Accessibility

- FHA Office of Civil Rights <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/civilrights/programs/ada.htm>
- Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines <http://www.access-board.gov/prowac/>
- Accessible Pathways to Bus Stops and Transit Facilities: A Process Guide
https://secure2.convio.net/es/site/Ecommerce?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=6341&store_id=9663
- Toolkit for the Assessment of Bus Stop Accessibility and Safety [PDF]
https://secure2.convio.net/es/site/Ecommerce?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=4981&store_id=9663

Pedestrian and Bike Information

- Ohio Department of Transportation Bike and Pedestrian Plan (<http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/TransSysDev/MultiModalPlanning/bicycle/Pages/Default.aspx>)
- The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) (<http://www.walkinginfo.org>)
- Planning for Active Transportation in the Miami Valley (<http://www.mvrpc.org/tr/bikePed.php>)

Safe Routes to School

- National Center for Safe Routes to School (<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>)

Performance Standards

The success of this policy will be measured in the following quantitative ways:

- Increase in the percentage of STP and CM/AQ project applications which include complete streets elements
- Increase in number of on-street bicycle routes, defined by streets and roads with clearly marked or signed bicycle accommodations
- Increase in accessible, covered bus shelters added to the regional transit system
- Increase in member jurisdictions which adopt Complete Streets policies
- Increased number of jurisdictions in the Region achieving or pursuing Bike-Friendly Community status from the League of American Bicyclists .

The success of this policy will be measured in the following qualitative ways:

- Surveys of bicyclists, pedestrians, motorists, people with disabilities and transit users concerning their ability to reach desired destinations safely and conveniently
- Surveys of project sponsors concerning the value and fairness of this policy.