



INFLUENCING COMPLETE STREETS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL



Safe
Routes
PARTNERSHIP

WHY COMPLETE STREETS

Transportation plays a critical role in the health and economic development of a metropolitan area. When people have the ability to walk, bike, or take transit safely to a destination, the whole region benefits from healthier people, better air quality, and reduced traffic fatalities.



Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are transportation planning agencies that focus on urban areas. They develop plans that guide their region's land use and transportation systems, and also decide how to spend federal transportation funds. Given that more than 70 percent of people in the United States live in the jurisdiction of an MPO, active transportation advocates can have a broad impact by focusing their efforts on MPOs.

Regional policies have a profound impact on the safety, convenience, and ability of children to be able to walk and bicycle to schools and be more physically active in daily life. Over the past ten years, the Safe Routes Partnership has partnered with Kaiser Permanente to implement a Regional Network Project in targeted metropolitan areas. Through this project, we advocated for healthy transportation options at the regional level by influencing policy, plans, and funding for large populations.

In the course of the decade-long Regional Network Project, the Safe Routes Partnership has identified three primary avenues to build more biking and walking infrastructure. A series of three fact sheets will lay out success stories, best practices, and resources for more information on each of these three areas.



POLICY

Establishing policies that encourage or require counties and cities across a region to implement active transportation projects.



PLANS

Directing the spending of existing federal and regional transportation funds towards active transportation and transit projects through regional planning processes.



FUNDING

Securing new funding sources either at the regional level or city/county level to benefit active transportation, Safe Routes to School, and transit.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS



An Effective Regional Policy: Complete Streets

Complete Streets are streets that are safe, comfortable, and convenient for everyone who uses them – people walking, bicycling, driving, or taking public transportation, whether they are children, teens, or older adults, and people of all abilities, genders, races, and income levels. Complete Streets policies require that each new road construction and reconstruction project ensures that streets that are safe and comfortable for everyone. These policies ensure that governments routinely plan streets that safely accommodate people walking, biking, and taking transit—as well as driving.

While Complete Streets policies are most often implemented at the local or state government level, MPOs can use regional Complete Streets policies to encourage their local jurisdictions to follow suit, or even tie local funding to the adoption of local Complete Streets policies. Early in our Regional Network Project, we had a strong focus on securing Complete Streets policies at the MPO level.



Case Study

Bay Area Requires Complete Streets Policy for Funding Eligibility

Over a two-year period, the Safe Routes Partnership advocated that the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), which serves as the MPO for the San Francisco Bay Area, adopt a Complete Streets policy for the region. We spearheaded a group of advocates and health officials who testified about how a stronger focus on active transportation would help improve the safety and health of people across the region. We also worked with MTC staff to develop a sample resolution and nine minimum criteria that local resolutions must meet to ensure effectiveness.

As a result, in 2012, MTC voted to require that all cities and counties in the Bay area that were seeking funding from the One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) program, which provides \$200 million per year for regional transportation projects, pass a strong Complete Streets policy. Local governments were also given four years to amend their general plan to incorporate Complete Streets language, providing an even stronger commitment to making roads accessible to all users. This approach used funding as an incentive to ensure that jurisdictions seeking regional transportation funding must align their internal policies with walking and biking. As a result, all 101 jurisdictions in the region adopted Complete Streets policies.



Case Study

Adopting a Strong Complete Streets Policy in Greater Washington, DC

Starting in 2011, the Safe Routes Partnership regularly participated in several committees of the National Capitol Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB), which serves as the MPO for the greater Washington, DC area, to push for a regional Complete Streets policy. In June 2011, the committees requested that TPB develop and approve a regional Complete Streets policy. As a result, TPB held a public workshop in early 2012 to get input from local transportation agency representatives and the public; Safe Routes Partnership participated in the workshop and subsequent committee meetings to guide the writing of the Complete Streets policy to ensure it met national standards for effectiveness.

In June 2012, TPB officially adopted the regional Complete Streets policy and strongly encouraged local member jurisdictions to follow suit with their own Complete Streets policy. To ensure implementation, when local jurisdictions request that a project be included on the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funding list, they must indicate whether they have a Complete Streets policy and how the project complies with Complete Streets principles. Starting in 2014, the region also made Complete Streets a priority for any projects funded through the regional component of the federal Transportation Alternatives Program, which funds biking and walking projects.

BEST PRACTICES

Based on our experience working at the regional level, we have identified several best practices important to securing a regional Complete Streets policy. Know that regional policy does take time as the MPO often attempts to balance the sometimes competing interests of localities across a large metropolitan area.

1. Build a broad set of allies.

One organization cannot successfully advocate for a broad-based policy like this alone. A coalition of allies will help ensure the breadth of the issue and its impact is covered, as well as the geographic area of the MPO. In terms of the issue and impact, look beyond just the transportation space to include organizations representing people with disabilities, equity and environmental justice organizations, and health agencies and providers. This broad set of coalition partners can help turn out speakers at hearings to testify to the health, safety, and environmental benefits of Complete Streets policies. Since MPOs cover not only the main city within its region, but many outlying counties and cities, advocates must be able to show they have support across the entirety of the region. And there again, having numerous coalition partners will make it more likely that they are able to tap into residents of various parts of the MPO's coverage area.



2. Get to Know Your MPO.

MPOs have different structures around membership, committee setup, and voting. It is critical to understand how a policy proposal generally moves through the MPO's structure and who will have the ultimate say on whether the policy is passed. If all policy proposals start in an advisory committee, start regularly attending those meetings to understand who participates, how the process works, and get to know the leaders of that committee—before the push for a Complete Streets policy begins. Secure meetings with the MPO's professional staff to explore their interest in a regional Complete Streets policy. They can be a good ally in identifying potential roadblocks or avenues to pursue. Take a look at the MPO board and engage in power-mapping to identify which members of your coalition would be the best leads to meet with each board member for support. Keep track of each MPO board member's position on Complete Streets, and identify whether stronger measures such as a constituent or media campaign is needed to bring them to a position of support.

BEST PRACTICES

3. Aim for a Policy with Teeth

Complete Streets policies are most effective when they apply to all road projects (new and repair), have clear and minimal exceptions, and include performance measures and implementation steps. Good Complete Streets policies must also intentionally include equity, such as prioritizing projects in high-need communities and providing meaningful community engagement. To ensure the policy will actually be implemented, the MPO should include in its policy things like requiring jurisdictions in their area to have Complete Streets policies in order to access regional funding and regular surveys of member jurisdictions to assess their compliance with Complete Streets principles in their transportation projects. Be familiar with key elements of effective Complete Streets elements and fight for their inclusion in a regional policy.

4. Track Implementation

A regional Complete Streets policy must be implemented for there to be a demonstrable impact on people's ability to walk, bike, and take transit to key destinations. Ensure that a specific MPO committee is charged with overseeing implementation, and stay engaged in that committee's meetings. For example, the committee may need to incorporate Complete Streets requirements into the region's transportation grant programs or the region's transportation planning processes. Continuing to engage with the MPO once the Complete Streets policy is passed will help ensure it is a routine part of the MPO's planning and funding responsibilities.

Resources for More Information

- [Fact Sheet: Complete Streets Policies](#)
- [Publication: Complete Streets Policies & Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans: Key Tools for Supporting Healthy, Active Communities](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Complete Streets for Underserved Communities](#)
- [Fact Sheet: The Economic Benefits of Complete Streets](#)
- [Publication: Metropolitan Planning Organizations & Health 101: The Nuts and Bolts of Regional Transportation Agencies](#)
- [Publication: Metropolitan Planning Organizations & Health 201: Best Practices & Promising Opportunities for Health](#)
- [Publication: Investing in Walking, Biking, and Safe Routes to School: A Win for the Bottom Line](#)

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