

Complete Streets

Transportation is the largest source of global warming pollution in Massachusetts, responsible for [39 percent of statewide emissions](#). Pollution from cars and trucks is [harmful to our health](#), contributing to diseases like asthma, bronchitis, and cancer.

Today, most of our transportation system is powered by oil. By promoting non-motorized forms of transportation like walking and biking, we can cut down on fossil fuel use and bring Massachusetts closer to 100 percent renewable energy economy-wide.

But often, our streets are designed for cars rather than people, with few sidewalks or bike lanes. As a result, walking and biking can seem unsafe, and a car can seem like the only way to get where you need to go.

Complete Streets is an approach to road design that requires planners to take into account the needs of all users, including pedestrians and cyclists, when building new streets or redesigning existing streets. By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities can increase opportunities for walking and biking, and reduce the need for residents to travel by car.

What is a Complete Street?

According to the [Massachusetts Department of Transportation](#), a Complete Street is “one that provides safe and accessible options for all travel modes - walking, biking, transit and vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities.”

Often, Complete Streets include the following elements:

- Sidewalks and crosswalks to encourage walking
- Bike lanes, protected bike lanes (lanes that are separated from traffic by parked cars, plantings, or other barriers), and sharrows (pavement markings) to encourage biking
- Transit stops and designated bus lanes, where appropriate, to encourage the use of transit
- Traffic calming measures to reduce the speed of cars in residential and commercial areas, including speed humps, curb extensions, and speed limit reductions
- Curb cuts and other features to ensure that everyone can get around, particularly people with disabilities and older adults

Complete Streets doesn't mean that every road needs to have all of the features above. Rather, local officials and planners should consider the needs of all users when they design streets, and make decisions that will promote the use of zero-carbon alternatives like biking and walking.

Developing a Complete Streets policy

Typically, the first step is for communities to adopt a Complete Streets policy. This policy provides guidance to local officials and planners to ensure that streets are designed to be safe and accessible for all users. Depending on the community, this policy may be adopted by the city council, the board of selectmen, or the mayor.

Smart Growth America and the National Complete Streets Coalition have developed guidelines for communities looking to adopt Complete Streets policies, as well as sample policies adopted by cities and towns across the country.

Funding and Support

- The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) has created a [Complete Streets Funding Program](#) to provide support for municipalities at various stages of implementation. Funding can be used to support developing a Complete Streets policy, creating a plan to prioritize Complete Streets implementation, and building roadways that meet Complete Streets goals. The funding program is set to expire at the end of the current fiscal year, but may be extended depending on the program's success.
- [What Works](#), a report from Transportation for Massachusetts, Livable Streets, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and WalkBoston, profiles communities in Massachusetts and across the country that have adopted successful, low-cost measures to promote walking, biking, and transit.
- Regional planning agencies such as the [Metropolitan Area Planning Council](#) (MAPC) may provide support for communities looking to adopt Complete Streets policies and develop bicycle and pedestrian network plans. MAPC has created a fact sheet outlining the benefits of Complete Streets and the steps for communities to qualify for funding from MassDOT.
- The Massachusetts Public Health Association has assembled a list of [Complete Streets resources](#).