

Q: What are Complete Streets?

A: "Complete Streets" are roadways designed and operated to enable safe access for all users; pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation users of all ages and abilities.

Q: Why is TwinCATS concerned with Complete Streets?

A: The MPO has received consistent, impassioned public comments from residents throughout the Benton Harbor-St. Joseph area and beyond imploring the committee to consider modes of transportation other than single-passenger automobile driving when selecting projects for federal funds. The lack of interconnected, safe facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users- among others- poses serious risk for injuries and fatalities. Numerous injuries and fatalities have been documented throughout our region on roadways without safe facilities for all users. TwinCATS committee members are responding to intense public demand when they adopted the Complete Streets Policy.

Q. Traffic accidents are a problem everywhere. Why are Complete Streets an urgent solution in the Benton Harbor-St. Joseph area?

A. Berrien County has a higher percentage of older adults (Age 65+) than the nation as a whole. While many older adults will continue to operate motor vehicles for the rest of their lives, not all will be able to or want to. Having walkable, ADA-accessible spaces can help older adults maintain their independence, while thriving in a familiar place to them. At the same time, the generation of Americans born between 1981 and 1996 is showing a clear preference for living and working in areas with good walking, bicycling and transit facilities, where they may not need to own an automobile. Complete Streets may be critical in attracting new full-time residents to the area. There are also those individuals of all ages who cannot afford a car, and struggle to reach employment centers, grocery stores, and other life-sustaining services.

Q: What does the TwinCATS Complete Streets Policy state?

A: The TwinCATS Complete Streets Policy states that any transportation projects seeking federal funds through the MPO process must safely accommodate all users. The ability to meet the needs of all users is just one criterion on which the committee evaluates projects seeking the very limited federal funds that the MPO receives each year.

Q: The street I live on doesn't have much traffic, and the speed limit is 20 mph? Why does it need separate bike lanes?

A. It may not. The Complete Streets Policy is NOT a "one-size-fits-all" design prescription. The Policy is "context-sensitive", taking into account the traffic and aesthetic characteristics of specific neighborhoods and streets. On residential streets with low traffic volumes and slow speeds, Complete Streets may mean only signage designating that bicyclists are welcome. On higher speed, higher traffic roadways, separate facilities for all users may be needed. The Complete Streets Policy is concerned with the result of safe accommodation of all users as they travel to their destinations, rather than the means of getting there.

Q: Isn't adding bike lanes, sidewalks, non-motorized paths, ADA-compliant facilities, median islands, or streetscape elements going to cost more money?

A: In the short term, possibly. Complete Streets solutions may often only involve painting and striping an existing roadway, which is inexpensive. In some cases, the initial investment in adding complete streets elements is in fact more expensive than simply repaving the road for automobile traffic. However, in both the short- and long-term after project completion, complete streets solutions will likely save your community and your citizens money, and may actually lead to increased revenue in your area.

Here are just a few of the ways that Complete Streets have a good return on investment over time:

- **Improved safety**
Injuries and fatalities cost all taxpayers money.
- **Opportunities for increased physical activity**
Increased physical activity may lead to decreased healthcare costs in the future.
- **Reduced need for pavement maintenance expenditures**
By opening up options for other modes, complete streets may take some automobile traffic off the roads, reducing wear on pavement. In addition, some solutions involve removing some pavement entirely, reducing costs.
- **Increased property values**
A report from CEOs for Cities in 2011 found that in 13 out of 15 home markets surveyed, increased walkability led to increased property values.
- **Increased business revenues**
Existing businesses would be able to draw from an increased customer base, rather than only those individuals who drive automobiles. Cyclists and pedestrians tend to spend a longer time in downtowns, increasing the likelihood that they will spend money. Prospective businesses find walkability and bikeability to be attractive factors in choosing where to locate.

Q. I thought TwinCATS already passed a Complete Streets Policy a couple years ago? Why is this news now?

A. TwinCATS did pass a Complete Streets Policy in 2012. The 2014 version of the Policy significantly upgrades the previous version by aligning with the goals of Michigan's statewide Complete Streets Policy, and preparing for upcoming safety-related performance measures from the Federal Highway Administration that are tied to funding. The 2014 Complete Streets Policy spells out a clear vision and intent. The 2014 version also outlines a specific list of situations in which a project can be exempt from achieving Complete Streets, and incorporates an interconnected transit system into the Complete Streets requirements. Finally, the latest version of the Policy makes clear that TwinCATS is less concerned with the means of achieving Complete Streets as it is with the end goal of achieving safe accommodation for all users.

Q. What can my community do to maximize the benefits we get from Complete Streets?

A. The Complete Streets Policy, like all TwinCATS policies, applies to federal-aid roads within the MPO and is not designed to take away local authority regarding land use or planning on non-federal-aid roadways. Still, there are steps a local community can take, should it so choose, to ensure that complete streets are part of an interconnected system that serves its residents:

- Pass its own local complete streets policy that specifies a clear list of exemptions and requirements for transportation projects.
- Make sure that land use ordinances and zoning codes allow for compatibility with walking, bicycling, and transit use at appropriate facilities
- Explore opportunities to conduct retrofits of local roadways at the same time as those occurring on the federal-aid system.
- Pay special attention to tree plantings, signage, benches, transit shelters, bike racks, lighting and other streetscaping elements that often are not covered through transportation funding.

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