

Policy Assessment for: Complete Streets; Physical Activity Built Environment

Complete Streets: are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and bus riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a complete street; applies to new construction and retrofitting.

Exist in Wisconsin Already:

Yes No

Comments:

Rationale for Legislation:

One of the easiest ways to increase physical activity is to make walking and bicycling easy and appealing. If people of all ages and abilities can walk or bike to daily destinations, they can add physical activity without needing to access special facilities or set aside time to "exercise". Unfortunately, too many communities are difficult places to walk or bike, and common destinations are on roads without sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, traffic lights that make crossing easy, or other infrastructure that would make walking and biking easy and natural.

A Complete Streets policy at all levels of government, from the local municipality, through state government, up to the federal level, would mandate that all new roads and reconstructions accommodate all methods of travel. Roads and streets would cease to be only for motorized traffic, and would be for all users.

Other States/Communities with Similar Legislation:

- From the Thunderhead Alliance web page on Complete Streets:
"The best model we have seen for true complete streets policy language was passed by the City of Chicago on October 10, 2006. This single-sentence policy effectively focuses street design for the most vulnerable users. We encourage you to start your policy development with Chicago's language and build from there:

"CHICAGO'S COMPLETE STREETS POLICY

The safety and convenience of all users of the transportation system including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, freight, and motor vehicle drivers shall be accommodated and balanced in all types of transportation and development projects and through all phases of a project so that even the most vulnerable – children, elderly, and persons with disabilities – can travel safely within the public right of way."

See press release: http://www.biketraffic.org/content.php?id=1024_0_16_0_C

- The Madison Area MPO included language in the updated Regional Transportation Plan 2030, under Streets and Roadways, policy # 9 was:
"Provide bicycle and pedestrian accommodations along and across all streets in conjunction with street construction and reconstruction where feasible and appropriate in accordance with the U.S. Department of Transportation Policy on Integrating Bicycling and Walking into transportation Infrastructure."

Other Important Resources/Notes:

- Good information on a national Complete Streets campaign, including links to local and state policies and legislation can be found on two web sites:

Thunderhead Alliance - an association of bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organizations - has many links and also an abbreviated guide to complete streets campaigns:

<http://www.thunderheadalliance.org/completestreets.htm>

The Complete the Streets Coalition:

<http://www.completestreets.org/>

- Robbie Webber, WI PAN Environment Co-Chair, is continuing to collect information on campaigns around the country in an effort find out the best strategies, both as to state policy and legislative efforts. Several states have had recent successes, especially PA and IL.
- Governor's Bicycle Council is hoping to make Wisconsin a Bicycle Friendly State

Potential Legislative Language:

Several states have started out with a policy first then went for legislation. Per a recent meeting with Tom Huber (WI DOT) and Robbie Webber, the following outlines three potential steps:

1. Strengthen and broaden the guidance and requirements that DOT has. This would involve being more specific about what DOT recommends and requires for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations for state and local roads of different functions, sizes, traffic volumes, and locations. EG: A local urban roadway would have different recommendations to follow than a rural town road. A rural state highway would have different recommended features and specifications than a city street with low traffic volumes.

2. Support a strong DOT policy and allow limited exceptions for not following DOT suggestions. State and federal funded projects would comply with the policy, but would lack the inherent support and strength that a law would produce. All exceptions would need to be reviewed to assure that local jurisdictions or local planners are not ignoring a need that exists.

3. Legislate that the DOT policy is to be followed any time state or federal funds are used for a project. It might even be possible to require that local projects without state funds follow the same requirements, but that would be harder. Without this condition, DOT policy would be just a recommended practice for local roads.