Costs of Complete Streets: Collecting Examples

Statement: “We can’t afford to build Complete Streets”

How often have we heard that? The National Complete Streets Coalition is working to address this concern, and we need your help. We’ve developed several points based on what we’ve learned around the country – but we believe the best argument comes straight from those real-life stories: and we need more of them.

Please look at our list of points and sub-points and the examples and quotes we’ve given, and the examples we’re asking for. See if you can write a sentence or two from a real-life example that illustrates that point, or provide a quote, and, best yet, a photograph! While we are asking for examples from places with Complete Streets policies, if you work for a consulting firm feel free to mention your role.

Please send your stories, quotes, and photos to info@completestreets.org, fax them to 202-955-5592, or mail them to us at:

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Note: We’re not looking for wordsmithing this document, or a debate about which points are the best ones to make, but are seeking real life examples from projects and communities that we can share. Please attach source documents when possible.

Thanks!

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**Point 1: COMPLETE STREETS POLICIES ARE NECESSARY TO ACCOMMODATE EXISTING USERS**

The most basic argument in favor of investing in Complete Streets is that they are necessary to accommodate existing users of the road.

- Example: photo of ‘goat trail’
- ILLINOIS The state passed a Complete Streets law after a teenager trying to get to work was killed bicycling across a bridge built with no sidewalk or pedestrian path. His family sued, and the state had to go back and spend close to a million dollars to put in a separate sidepath – when they could have built it right – and likely for less – the first time.
- “If you ever saw someone in a wheelchair going down a busy lane of traffic, it scares you to death. You can see their vulnerability.” – Rhonda Frisby, of the Anderson, South Carolina chapter of the Physically Handicapped Society
- “The idea of making streets more accessible to walkers, bikers, wheelchairs, bus riders and everyone else isn’t about service to “special interests.” Complete streets is about being inclusive — recognizing that quality of life requires more than four-lane arterials and chip sealed avenues.” – Billings Gazette Editorial Board, July 25, 2011
- **Examples needed**: Jurisdiction that identified a community need (via survey or other documentation) for bicycling or walking infrastructure and then passed a Complete Streets policy.
Many states and local governments with similar fiscal constraints are deciding that Complete Streets are the more cost effective investment. They have taught us three things about handling the costs of Complete Streets:

- Complete Streets projects can often be achieved within the context of existing transportation budgets; and sometimes they can even save money
- Complete Streets projects can make transportation projects more popular and garner more support for transportation funding;
- Changing to a Complete Streets approach adds lasting value to the community and to the transportation network.

Below are some examples from communities that illustrate these three principles.

**Point 2: COMPLETE STREETS CAN BE ACHIEVED WITHIN EXISTING BUDGETS**

a) Complete Streets projects can often be achieved within the context of existing transportation budgets; and sometimes can even save money.

- “When we talk about ‘Complete Streets,’ we aren’t necessarily talking about expensive widening projects or major redesigns of our roadways. These concepts can often be applied to existing streets by simply re-thinking how we approach traffic flow and how we accommodate all modes of transportation.” – Phil Broyles, Director of Public Works, Springfield, Missouri
- CHARLOTTE has discovered that the year-to-year variation in costs is greater than in incremental cost of sidewalks, bike lanes, or streetscaping.
- **Examples needed:** Jurisdictions that have adopted Complete Streets policies and made improvements without a significant change in their overall transportation budget (provide location, prior budget, new budget, short list of improvements.)

b) Many Complete Streets improvements are modest in size and low-cost

- NEW YORK CITY was able to improve safety with many low-cost solutions. The city created 35 pedestrian refuge islands; 55 new left turn lanes to better manage traffic; 12 curb extensions to shorten crossing distances; 8 median tip extensions to provide safer crossings; 4 pedestrian fences to encourage pedestrians to use crosswalks; and 600 intersections allowed for more time to cross the street. The initiative was an enormous success, with the numbers to prove it. Fatalities and pedestrian crashes decreased in almost all areas, by as 9 to 60 percent. Targeted spending to make walking safer has tangible results.
- **Examples needed:** Jurisdictions that can point to low-cost solutions; preferably with dollar amounts.
c) Thinking ahead can save money and avoid costly mistakes.

- **MINNESOTA** 76th Street in Richfield was destined to be torn up to accommodate necessary expansion and reconstruction of sewer lines. According to consulting engineer Jack Broz of H.R. Green Co., the original estimate for the sewer work and reconstruction of the roadway was approximately $6 million. A collaborative approach to reallocate the existing roadway space resulted in a better balance point in serving Complete Streets goals and the needs of all users as well as meeting the needs for wastewater and water management, and a regional trail linkage. The “road diet” resulted in an approximate reconstruction cost savings of $2 million, or one-third of the original cost that had been estimated for reconstruction. This “road diet” approach still satisfies the mobility and safety needs of motorists, freight haulers and transit riders while greatly improving mobility and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and the quality of life for the adjoining community.

- “If we think we don’t have the time and money to do it right, what makes you think we have the time and money to do it over?” – Dr. Mark Nicholson, testifying in favor of a Complete Streets policy in Billings, Montana

- **Examples needed**: Jurisdictions that have been able to reduce costs with a Complete Streets approach, either on a single project or system-wide.

d) Some of the strategies employed to integrate Complete Streets with existing projects are road diets, combining projects to lower costs, incremental installation, and simply thinking through small improvements

- **COLORADO SPRINGS** The city has created much of its bicycle network within its existing budget for maintenance and repaving. The city repaves 7-10 percent of its network every year, and has created many miles of bikeways by converting undivided four lanes to road diets that include bike lanes. Before- and after- evaluations have found that the new configurations reduce speeding and improve community satisfaction with the roadway. (update needed)

- **Examples Needed**: Jurisdictions that have lowered costs by combining projects, managed costs by installing new infrastructure incrementally, or been able to make small adjustments without changing a project budget.
Point 3: COMPLETE STREETS CAN LEAD TO NEW TRANSPORTATION FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

a) Complete Streets projects can make transportation projects more popular and garner more support for transportation funding;

- **SEATTLE** City residents passed the Bridging the Gap measure in 2006 in part because of its promise to fill in gaps in the transit, bicycle, and pedestrian networks. Since the measure passed, the city has been able to build many projects to improve school access, as well as hundreds of crosswalks, curb bulbs, curb ramps, traffic calming devices, pedestrian countdown signals, pedestrian/bicycle road, sidewalk, and trail segments.\(^1\) (insert numbers)

- **NASHVILLE** Community support for the value of Complete Streets can unlock resources. In the 2010-2011 capital spending plan, Mayor Karl Dean set aside $12.5 million dollars for sidewalks, $3 million for bikeways, and more than $10 million for mass transit. Nashville overall is spending nearly 60 percent of its local transportation dollars on walking, biking and transit infrastructure.

- **Examples Needed:** Jurisdictions that have used their Complete Streets approach to gain support for additional funding, for bicycling, walking, and public transportation.

- **Examples Needed:** Jurisdictions that have conducted polls or surveys that demonstrate support for increased spending on bicycling, walking, public transportation, or that show support for providing for the needs of children, older adults, or residents with disabilities.

b) Complete Streets can inspire a search for additional funds from new sources to achieve the Complete Streets vision.

- **PIPESTONE** The process of developing a Complete Streets policy in this rural community inspired a successful application for SRTS funding.

- **Examples Needed:** Jurisdictions that have adopted a Complete Streets policy and then found new funding sources to help support improvements.

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\(^1\) Just one example of Seattle’s progress: Annual Report 2009. Seattle Department of Transportation.

http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/sdotreports.htm
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**Point 4: COMPLETE STREETS ADD LASTING VALUE**

Some communities have concluded that whether it costs more or less, a Complete Streets approach adds lasting value to the community and to the transportation network.

- “In a period when every tax dollar must be carefully spent, state policymakers would be wise to require planning that considers more than vehicles in designing roads.” – Fort Wayne Journal Gazette, December 10, 2010

**a) Complete Streets can be a cost-effective long-term strategy to provide for traffic congestion, particularly when balancing a system that had been tilted toward automobiles.**

- **PORTLAND** has kept the growth of automobile traffic in check in part through growing its bicycle network. The city was able to avoid an expensive bridge widening project by providing more room for bicyclists and pedestrians. Looked at over the long term, the city’s entire bicycle network cost less than constructing a mile of urban freeway. (Bicycle network, in 2008 dollars, was conservatively estimated to cost $60 million. A four-lane urban freeway can cost between $20 and $80 million; in areas with severe restrictions, a four-lane freeway can cost between $67.2 million to nearly $300 million for a four-lane mile.)

- **BOULDER** focuses on mobility rather than cars. By making bicycling, walking and riding the bus attractive and available options, Boulder has avoided expenditures and impacts of widening roads to accommodate more traffic. Instead, Boulder has invested in making its major arterials into Complete Streets that accommodate all modes. While Boulder has grown over the past ten years, the level of congestion on our streets has stayed steady while bicycling, walking and transit use has increased.

- **VANCOUVER, BC**’s Burrard Bridge reallocation of auto-only travel lane to bike-only travel lane and resulting increase in bicyclists and little/no disruption for autos.

- **Examples Needed:** Places that have used bicycle, pedestrian, or increased bus service to avoid costly road projects.

**b) Safety benefits:**

- **SEATTLE** One project to create Complete Streets along a major arterial, Aurora, included the installation of new crossings, bus plazas, and redesign of the street. Total crashes dropped by 21 percent In another, Stone Way was redesigned to better accommodate both freight vehicles and bicycles. After the redesign: Speeding dropped by 75 percent; bicycle traffic increased by 35%, the collision rate for bicyclists declined, and pedestrian collisions dropped 80%. Peak traffic volumes remained consistent with citywide levels, and no traffic diversion to parallel streets occurred.

- In **ORLANDO**, a road diet on Edgewater Drive reduced the frequency of crashes involving injuries from every nine days to once every 30 days.

- In **VANCOUVER, WA**, Fourth Plain Boulevard was converted from four lanes with poor provisions for people walking, biking or in wheelchairs into a street with two through lanes, a center turn lane, two bicycle lanes, curb ramps and improved sidewalks. After this inexpensive treatment, vehicle collisions dropped 52 percent, and the number of pedestrian crashes dropped from two per year to zero.

- **Examples Needed:** Places with statistics about safety improvements, projects are good, but system-wide improvements are even better.
c) Equity benefits:
   - **Examples Needed:** place where a Complete Streets project helped give lower-income residents better access

d) Health benefits
   - **SOUTH CAROLINA** The state Complete Streets policy was used to help win addition of bicycling and walking access to the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge in Charleston, and a subsequent study found that two-thirds of people who walk, run, or bike on the new bridge say they’re exercising more since the opening of the very popular pedestrian path. Exercise levels are even higher among African Americans.
   - **Examples Needed:** Jurisdictions with Complete Streets policies that have shown an increase in physical activity following adoption of the policy and/or installation of infrastructure.

e) Economic benefits
   - **Examples Needed:** Places that have used Complete Streets treatments to revitalize main streets.

f) Air quality/environment benefits:
   - **Examples Needed:** Communities that adopted a Complete Streets policy as a way to meet environmental sustainability goals, with a calculation of its benefit in reducing pollution or greenhouse gases.

g) Complete Streets provide multiple benefits with one investment:
   - **Examples Needed:** Jurisdictions that found that a Complete Streets approach helped achieve several specific goals, such as providing additional mobility, improving safety, meeting physical activity targets, etc. This can be project or community-wide. Quotes from elected officials are also helpful here.