

EPA Technical Assistance for Sustainable Communities: Building Blocks

Technical Assistance Tool: Complete Streets

New Orleans – March 8 2012

To: Jennifer Ruley, Louis Haywood, Dan Jatres
CC: Roger Millar, Smart Growth America
From: Michael Ronkin and Michael Moule, National Complete Streets Coalition instructors
Date: March 16, 2012
Re: Suggested Next Steps as Outcome of Technical Assistance

1. Key Issues Addressed during the Site Visit

The City of New Orleans requested the workshop to find ways to implement its recently adopted Completed Streets policy. A major focus of the workshop was to gather key staff from various City departments (primarily DPW), Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, the Regional Planning Commission, the regional Transit authority, and other concerned parties such as public health. They sat together in small groups to learn and discuss how they can better work together to implement the city's Complete Streets policy. There were small group activities to discuss current practices and identify possible change areas as well as areas to interconnect different divisions' activities.

In the evening a public presentation was given to the public at large; a 30-minute overview of Complete Streets was followed by a Q & A with participation from local staff

2. Targeted Policies/Ideas/Strategies Discussed during the Workshop

The workshop included several activities that addressed current policies and practices; these are some of the results:

Exercise 1: Identify current NOLA practices that already support Complete Streets

Participants were asked to identify existing practices that already helped provide elements of Complete Streets:

- Sidewalks are required for new development
- City replaces sidewalks (spot repair) with pavement overlays
- Include ADA compliant ramps during new construction
- Try to do stormwater and sewer with projects, but funding sometimes limits this or delays/cancels projects.
- DPW is allowing travel lanes to be narrowed below 12 feet to make room for bike lanes
- DOTD is considering Complete Streets during reconstruction
- DOTD sometimes provides paved shoulders on state roads
- City Zoning board requires sidewalks to approve waivers
- NOLA applies for federal bike/ped grants for retrofit projects.
- Departments talk to each other across silos – more and more interagency coordination
- Have a permitting and review process for land developments for sidewalks
- Have a compact, well-connected system of streets.
- Have pedestrian and bicycle design expertise on loan to Public Works.
- Have neutral grounds (medians) that provide access management and help pedestrian crossing
- Have a provision for no left turns on some streets, which improves biking and walking conditions.
- Projects have to go before design advisory committee, which helps ensure complete streets

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- Submerged roads projects have included some bicycling and walking facilities.
- Community Development Block Grants include sidewalks and streetscape elements (bump-outs, etc.)

Exercise 2: Proposed Complete Streets Performance measures for New Orleans

Participants were asked to imagine performance measures that capture the goals of Complete Streets

- Safety: collect data for all modes AND analyze the data – it has been difficult getting crash data from the Police Department
- Utilization: How much and how frequently streets are being used by various modes. Focus on more than quantitative data, but also the qualitative aspects, although it is more difficult to measure
- Measure whether the tree canopy is protected during the design and construction, and whether it can be maintained; add trees where possible
- Physical activity levels
- Ensure there is no significant delay to motorists
- Resident satisfaction
- Traffic volume – demonstrating that Complete Streets have a similar capacity
- Economic activity: Tax receipts at shops on the streets
- Bike parking utilization
- Reduction of the top motor vehicle speeds
- Percentage of trips taken by different modes; trips is a better measure than reduced VMT because walking and biking trips are very short
- Square yards of sidewalks installed or miles of streets that are rehabbed that aren't torn up by utility work in 5 years
- Increase in annual city budget for sidewalk improvements

Exercise 3: Devise a new street reclassification system for New Orleans

Participants were asked to come up with a nomenclature that describes the role of streets in their community, taking into account context, users and expected outcomes:

- Group 1
 - Neighborhood street – mostly residential; ped and bike use; low motor vehicle volumes.
 - Main Street – mix of uses. Example Oak Street
 - Neighborhood connector – Example: Harrison Avenue
 - Classic streets – Example: French quarter streets
- Group 2
 - Classification by speed: <20; 20-30; 30-45; >45.
- Group 3:
 - Throughlevard; Strollevard; Trollevard
- Group 4:
 - Retail street (E.g. Oak Street)
 - Residential street
 - Commuter route
 - Commercial street (CBD type streets rather than small retail).
 - Tourism/Entertainment streets

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Exercise 3: how are project decisions made now?

Participants were asked to answer questions regarding current project development processes:

1. What current documents are relevant to implementing your complete streets policy?
 - Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance
 - Master Plan
 - Public Works General Specifications
 - Parkways Specifications
 - Standard design guides
 - Standard drawings
 - Transportation Guides (NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide; PROWAG; AASHTO Guides)
 - Subdivision regulations
 - Design Manual
 - LADOTD Stage Zero Checklist
 - LADOTD Complete Streets Policy
 - LADOTD Access Management Design Guides
 - ADA Transition Plan
 - Capital Improvement Program
 - Transportation Improvement Program
 - City Code
2. What existing policies support complete streets?
 - Zoning Ordinance
 - Subdivision Regulations
 - Policies in place that require design reviews
 - Revised standard details and lane widths
 - Last round of bond funding included dedicated bike and pedestrian funds.
 - Ramps and sidewalks are required on projects
 - Street tree policy
 - Coordination between agencies.
3. What is the process used to make decisions now?
 - Overlay projects include internal plan and project development
 - Beautification projects involve a lot of neighborhood involvement
 - Within DPW there is a Bike and Ped Engineer reviewing projects
 - Compare projects to planning documents
 - Pre-design meeting may include a discussion of inclusion of complete streets elements.
 - Bike/ped engineer and Traffic signs off on the street retrofit plans
 - Overlay process – final decision about striping and layout tends to happen toward the end of the project, and there is not a lot of public input on these projects.
4. What in this process is keeping you from creating complete streets?
 - Decisions are sometimes left to an individual, with no set policies that ensure consistency, so there may be very different outcomes depending on the individual.

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- Seems to be limited opportunity to expand the project scope, especially on mill and overlay projects. Part of this may be due to the submerged roads program limitations.
- It doesn't seem that LADOTD Complete Streets policy is being applied on LADOTD streets in New Orleans (there wasn't complete agreement in the room on this point).
- Challenge with getting ahead of the curve on projects, so that decisions can be made early in the design process.
- Lack of a consistent review process among various agencies
- Challenge with getting consistent quality crash data
- City's sidewalk maintenance policy puts responsibility on property owners, which is not necessarily enforced
- Privatizing signing and striping creates a lot of red tape.
- Lack of cooperation of utility companies
- Right-of-way constraints
- Higher than anticipated construction costs.
- Funding for future maintenance.

3. Actions to Address Policies/Strategies

The groups were asked to identify next steps to implement the Complete Streets policy, both short- and long-term. The results are consolidated by subject matter, as many groups came up with similar ideas. The order is more or less from "broad and general principles" to "specific actions":

Policy:

- Develop program goals & metrics
- Apply Complete Streets principles
- Apply of Traffic Calming measures
- Review internal project delivery process

Organization/Create an oversight committee:

- Include the following groups in pre-design meetings: RPC; CPC; *Place on PM list;* Chief Engineer Memo.
- Develop well thought-out project scope: weigh magnitude & scope versus cost: review and discuss scope by multiple entities
- Create a Complete Streets Council
- Create a Transportation Advisory Committee, modeled after Design Advisory Committee.
- Coordinate with Mayors Interdepartmental meetings

Educate the Public:

- Leverage ongoing activities to promote program outreach
- Promote complete streets by showing before and after photos in user-friendly format on city website, etc.

Funding:

- "Fenced funding" 1% set aside Bond Fund
- Budget complete streets into DPW operating and capital budgets
- Review how FEMA funded/FHWA ER funded projects get impacted by this ordinance; will FEMA funds be allowed for curb ramps, sidewalks, restriping?
- Review sidewalk funding (eligibility)

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- Set aside a percentage in bond program for pedestrian improvements:
 - Push through (Councilman Palmer) Transportation Sustainability Committee;
 - Council person sets bond fund amount

Design: review, update and develop standards:

- Develop Complete Street approaches for various street classifications
- Review and update standard details, policies, procedures
- Revise standard DPW design plans & specs.
- Create one unified “public rights-of-way” design manual for all departments.

Develop Metrics for:

- Speed Reduction
- Multi-modal counts
- Integrating health outcomes:
 - Injury prevention,
 - Health/ fitness,
 - Aesthetics – (benches, trash cans, trees, etc)
 - CPTED (Crime Prevention through Community Design) e.g. integrate lighting repairs into street projects instead of doing separately.)
- Create an inventory of sidewalk condition and use this to inform project selection and develop sidewalk improvement plan for next 5 years.

Training:

- Offer design workshops (DPW & contractors)