



**Smart Growth America**  
Making Neighborhoods Great Together



**National Complete  
Streets Coalition**

To: City of Huntsville  
From: Emiko Atherton, National Complete Streets Coalition  
Date: August 1, 2016  
RE: Complete Streets Technical Assistance Report and Suggested Next Steps

## Overview

In December of 2015, Smart Growth America awarded the City of Huntsville a technical assistance workshop to support the development of a Complete Streets Policy. Huntsville was one of only seven communities nationwide selected to receive one of Smart Growth America's 2016 [free technical assistance workshops](#). The program, made possible through a five-year Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Sustainable Communities, seeks to develop local planning solutions that help communities grow in ways that benefit families and businesses while protecting the environment and preserving a sense of place.

Smart Growth America selected Huntsville for the workshop because of their commitment to Complete Streets, as demonstrated through the City of Huntsville's new comprehensive planning effort, BIG Picture Huntsville. Huntsville is a dynamic and diverse city. Known as an epicenter for aerospace and biotechnology, Huntsville attracts people from around the world. At the same time, Huntsville retains its history and culture as a "small town in the South." With that said, Huntsville can use Complete Streets to create a transportation network for all users that maintains the character and context of this vibrant community.

## Workshop and Public Meeting

On June 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, John Robert Smith, Senior Policy Advisor for Smart Growth America, and Emiko Atherton of the National Complete Streets Coalition visited Huntsville to deliver the workshop and speak at a public meeting.

The purpose of the public meeting was for Mayor Tommy Battle to share his support for the work; educate the public about the value of creating communities that support all modes of transportation, provide an overview of Complete Streets from Mayor Smith and Ms. Atherton, and provide an opportunity for the public to ask questions of the speakers.



The following day, Smart Growth America delivered a technical assistance workshop.

Key transportation and planning staff, public health and safety officials, parks and recreation staff, members of the Huntsville housing authority, and community advocates all attended the workshop. For a full list of attendees of the workshop, please see Appendix B.

### **Key issues addressed during the workshop**

- Building the case for Complete Streets and Active Transportation in Huntsville
- Adopting Complete Streets policy at the local level
- Barriers to Complete Streets implementation in Huntsville
- Ten Elements of an Ideal Complete Streets Policy for Huntsville
- Bringing Complete Streets to life through group exercise on two pilot projects in Huntsville.

Smart Growth America and City of Huntsville staff concluded the workshop by highlighting some of the key points addressed in the workshop and setting the tone for the Next Steps Memo.

## **Next Steps**

The remainder of this memo covers the following:

- Recommendations for moving forward to adopt a Complete Streets policy
- Recommendations to include in the City's Complete Streets policy
- Recommendations to implement Complete Streets in Huntsville

## **Recommendations**

### **Moving towards a Complete Streets policy**

Building off of the energy and ideas of from the Complete Streets Policy Development workshop, Smart Growth America recommends the City of Huntsville should develop and adopt a Complete Streets policy(s).

To do this, the city should:

1. Create a timeline for the adoption of a Complete Streets policy within three to six months. The timeline should consider:



- Who needs to be involved in the development of the plan.
  - Smart Growth America recommends that the city include the following people in the initial draft of the plan:
    - Mayor Tommy Battle
    - John Hamilton, City Administrator
    - Michelle Jordan, Director of Planning
    - Shane Davis, Director of Urban Development
    - Dennis Madsen, Director of Urban and Long Range Planning
    - Chris McNeese, Director of Public Works
    - Dan Sanders, Interim Director of Traffic Engineering
    - Kathy Martin, P.E. City Engineer
    - Paige Colburn, Planner II
  - Smart Growth America recommends the city work to bring seniors and people with disabilities together with the state transportation agency, ALDOT, to work on accessibility issues
    - It is recommended that a meeting and tour with ALDOT be set up to demonstrate the accessibility issues some citizens face on a regular basis when interacting with state highways
    - This is a fantastic opportunity to affect change not only at a local level but also at a state policy level
- When to release a draft of the plan to the public.
  - The timing of this release is critical to project success
  - The public should see a draft version
- What type of feedback it will ask from the community and what it will do with the feedback.
  - To create community buy-in, Smart Growth America recommends sharing a draft of the plan with the public and asking for their buy-in. However, Huntsville must be clear on exactly what type of feedback they are looking for (high level, such as does this fit your vision for the city, or more details-oriented, such as what do you think of this sentence) and how Huntsville will use the feedback. This will create transparency and manage expectations for residents.
  - During the workshop, participants asked whether the city engaged the public enough. In addition, there were questions about how to do this. Based on the feedback and best practices, Smart Growth America recommends:

- Hosting open houses within the community, otherwise known as meeting people when and where they are at. For example, Huntsville could reach out to local church groups or have meetings on weekends, which may be easier for some residents to attend.
2. Determine the type of plan(s) to adopt
    - Complete Streets policy will change and add value to Huntsville decision-making process. The City should identify the type of policy that would be most effective in sparking change, while being realistic about the type of policy that can be passed and implemented successfully. Many communities begin with a simple resolution that then leads to a more complex internal policy. Based on the feedback from the workshop, Smart Growth America recommends that within three months Mayor Tommy Battle issues a Mayoral Resolution authorizing the Department of Urban Development to draft a Complete Streets plan to be offered to the City Council for Adoption. The City Council should adopt this ordinance within six months.
      - A Mayoral Resolution will allow the mayor to lead the initiative on Complete Streets and leverage his leadership to highlight the importance of Complete Streets with the public and the media.
      - A Council-adopted ordinance will codify the policy into city law.
  3. Plan a community/press event
    - Huntsville should celebrate the success of the adoption of a Complete Streets policy with a public event. This will help educate the public and media about Complete Streets, as well as allow the city and the community to celebrate the passage of the policy.

### Drafting a Complete Streets policy

Huntsville's draft policy statement could and should be strengthened in line with best practices in the Ideal Elements of a Complete Street, as discussed during the workshop. With that said, Huntsville's policy should include the following elements:

**Huntsville should include a vision for how and why the community wants to complete its streets.**

Attendees of the workshop expressed a strong vision for the city that will inspire both the residents and government agencies to create transportation networks for all users of all abilities. Based on the feedback from the workshop, as well as best



practices from the National Complete Streets Coalition, Huntsville's vision should address and support:

- Inclusivity of all users
- Flexibility
- Context sensitivity
- Retaining Huntsville's big city amenities with a small-town feel
- Creating a good quality of life
- Sustainability
- Connecting magnets
- Greater public accessibility to data
- Addressing private and existing infrastructure

**Specifies that 'all users of all abilities' will include pedestrians, bicyclists and transit passengers of all ages and abilities, as well as trucks, buses, and automobiles.**

A true Complete Streets policy must apply to everyone traveling along the road. However, the strongest Complete Streets policies identify, and sometimes, prioritize the users it wants to include in its transportation network. This allows transportation plans and decisions to think specifically about what users to include in the planning, development, and implementation process, as well as provides guidance when trade-offs are needed.

Based on comments from the workshop, Huntsville's policy should specifically call out the following users:

- Commuters
- School children, buses, parents and staff
- Emergency services
- People living with disabilities
- Utility and maintenance vehicles
- Cyclists
- Motorcycles
- Strollers
- Cars
- Pedestrians
- Transit users and the transit dependent

**Applies to both new and retrofit projects, including design, planning, maintenance, and operations, for the entire right of way.**

To truly realize Complete Streets, Huntsville's policy should include both new and retrofit projects. This allows the city to take advantage of every opportunity to improve the transportation network.

**Makes any exceptions specific and sets a clear procedure that requires high-level approval of exceptions.**

Huntsville's Complete Streets policy should include a clear exceptions process that required either Mayor or City Council to approve any and all exceptions. As one workshop participant expressed, "too many exceptions could lead to loopholes."

**Encourages street connectivity and aims to create a comprehensive, integrated, connected network for all modes.**

Huntsville's Complete Streets policy should result in the creation of a complete transportation network for all modes of travel. A network approach helps to balance the needs of all users. Instead of trying to make each street perfect for every traveler, Huntsville can create an interwoven network that emphasizes different modes and provides quality accessibility for everyone.

**Is adoptable by all agencies to cover all roads.**

Creating Complete Streets networks is difficult because many agencies control our streets. To address this, Huntsville should identify and determine within the policy plan which agencies and departments the city can partner with to implement Complete Streets. Based on the discussion in the workshop and Smart Growth America's observations, Huntsville's policy should recognize the following agencies' roles in Complete Streets:

- Alabama Department of Transportation
- Utilities providers, such as Huntsville Utilities and TVA
- Madison County and Madison City
- Local schools and universities
- Emergency response services
- Public Works Department
- Department of Transportation, Engineering, and Traffic
- Public Safety

In addition, Huntsville's Complete Streets policy should apply to all public and private developments. Participants acknowledged that everyone should be held responsible to the same standard in the planning, design, and construction of projects.



**Directs the use of the latest and best design criteria and guidelines while recognizing the need for flexibility in balancing user needs.**

Huntsville should review their design policies to ensure their ability to accommodate all modes of travel, while still providing flexibility to allow designers to tailor the project to unique circumstances. During the workshop, participants suggested Huntsville refer to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets "Green Book," the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), and ALDOT standards.

In addition, Smart Growth America recommends that Huntsville consider including the guidelines and standards offered by:

- National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG)
- American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)

Huntsville should also recognize that addressing the needs of all users requires a flexible, innovative, and balanced approach. For example, participants expressed a desire to incorporate visually appealing designs, such as public art, within transportation projects.

**Directs that Complete Streets solutions will complement the context of the community.**

An effective Complete Streets policy must be sensitive to the surrounding community, its current and planned buildings, as well as its current and expected transportation needs. Given the range of policy types and their varying ability to address this issue, Huntsville's policy, at a minimum, should mention context sensitivity in making decisions.

**Establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes.**

The traditional performance measure for transportation planning has been vehicular Level of Service (LOS) – a measure of automobile congestion. Complete Streets planning requires taking a broader look at how the system is serving all users. Huntsville can measure success through a number of ways: the miles of on-street bicycle routes created; new linear feet of pedestrian accommodation; changes in the number of people using public transportation, bicycling, or walking (mode shift);



number of new street trees; and/or the creation or adoption of a new multi-modal Level of Service standard that better measures the quality of travel experience.

Participants at the workshop identified an extensive list of potential performance measures:

- Number of bikes
- Pedestrian volumes
- Transit ridership
- Change in the amount of car crashes
- Change in Vehicle Miles Traveled
- Retail sales in walkable areas
- Vacancies
- Sale price
- Property value
- The number of ADA compliant businesses
- Shift in mode share
- Public opinion
- Building permits

Huntsville should identify which measures can be implemented in the short- and long-term and assign responsibility and a timeline for implementation. The following considerations can help guide Huntsville's conversations:

- What does the City collect now for performance measures, if anything?
- Which department/process/plan would implement the measures? In what ways (i.e., for Complete Streets projects, system-wide, etc.)? At which phase(s) of implementation?

**Includes specific next steps for implementation of the policy.**

## Other considerations

### Addressing cost issues

At the public meeting and workshop, residents of Huntsville expressed concerns about the cost of Complete Streets projects. Huntsville can achieve projects that conform with Complete Streets principles by further integrating this approach into



how the City prioritizes projects, uses existing funds and identifying opportunities as part of other roadwork (e.g., routine maintenance such as resurfacing, utility upgrades, etc.).

Specifically, Huntsville can advance Complete Streets implementation by taking advantage of upcoming resurfacing projects or other ongoing efforts. An annual and multi-year Complete Streets Improvements Plan would identify a mix of “low-hanging fruit” projects like sidewalk gap in-fills, resurfacing projects, neighborhood or city-wide wayfinding and major bond-backed projects. The following questions can help guide the identification process:

- Which agency or entity would lead the development of the Complete Streets Improvements Plan?
- How does this plan relate to other plans or processes, such as the capital improvement process?
- Have these improvements been identified as part of other planning efforts, such as small area plans or economic development strategies?

Another way to jumpstart implementation in a cost-effective way is to institute a culture of innovation, where small projects to improve the public right-of-way can be deployed quickly and cheaply—outside a general capital improvements program. Changes with paint, bollards, and planters can be moved or removed easily if the intended goals aren’t achieved.

## Funding

Although Huntsville can and should implement Complete Street without additional financial resources, other sources of funding include:

- Federal funding, such as TIGER grants
- State funding, including the Transportation Alternatives program and any remaining Safe Routes to School funds
- Special levies and taxes, including the creation of Tax Increment Financing, Business Improvement and Public Improvement Districts. Leveraging the use of New Market Tax Credits, Historic Tax Credits and TIFIA funding for other downtown development projects in co-operation with the private sector can be a plus.

## Appendix A: Complete Streets Resources

### General implementation

- Complete Streets Implementation resource hub, including examples of plans, policies, and programs that support changing process and procedures, offering training and educational opportunities, reviewing and updating design guidance, and measuring performance.  
[www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/implementation](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/implementation)
- Taking Action on Complete Streets: A Toolkit for Implementation, a 2013 report from the National Complete Streets Coalition:  
<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/implementation>
- Complete Streets in the Southeast—A Toolkit, from the National Complete Streets Coalition and AARP, features best practices in policy development and implementation from the Southeast United States. It also includes customizable outreach tools, such as letters to the editor and op- eds.  
[www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/complete-streets-southeast-toolkit.pdf](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/complete-streets-southeast-toolkit.pdf)
- Completing Our Streets: The Transition to Safe and Inclusive Transportation Networks.
- [www.completingourstreets.com](http://www.completingourstreets.com). Barbara McCann's book on the Complete Streets implementation process told through the stories of practitioners.

### Costs

- Complete Streets Guide to Tackling the Costs Question. Guide with companion Powerpoint file. [www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/implementation/cost-concerns](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/implementation/cost-concerns)
- Shapard, J. and Cole, M. (2013). "Do complete streets cost more than incomplete streets?" Proceedings, Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting, 2013. Paper 13-4283. <http://amonline.trb.org/2ve3qr/1>

### Funding priority systems and programs

- Project solicitation & evaluation: Scoring criteria. Mid-America Regional Council (Kansas City, MO region).  
[www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/impl/mo-marc-evaluation.pdf](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/impl/mo-marc-evaluation.pdf)

- New Jersey Complete Streets program, with links to Local Assistance program:
- [www.state.nj.us/transportation/eng/completestreets/implementation.shtm](http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/eng/completestreets/implementation.shtm)
- Atlanta Regional Commission Livable Centers Initiative. See case study in The Innovative DOT. [www.smartgrowthamerica.org/the-innovative-dot](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/the-innovative-dot)

#### Street design and typology examples

- Urban Street Design Guidelines. Charlotte, NC.  
<http://chameck.org/city/charlotte/transportation/plansprojects/pages/urban%20street%20design%20guidelines.aspx>
- Implementing Complete Streets: Major and Collector Street Plan. Nashville, TN.
- [www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/impl/tn-nashville-streetplan.pdf](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/impl/tn-nashville-streetplan.pdf)
- Right-of-Way Improvements Manual. Seattle, WA.
- [www.seattle.gov/transportation/rowmanual/manual/](http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/rowmanual/manual/)

#### Road diets

- Federal Highway Administration. (2010). "Evaluation of Lane Reduction 'Road Diet' Measures on Crashes" [Summary report]. Publication Number FHWA-HRT-10-053.  
[www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/10053/10053.pdf](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/10053/10053.pdf)
- Federal Highway Administration. (n.d.). "Proven Safety Countermeasures: 'Road Diet.'" Publication Number FHWA-SA-12-013.  
[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/fhwa\\_sa\\_12\\_013.htm](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/fhwa_sa_12_013.htm)
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center. (2013). "Road Diet Conversions: A Synthesis of Safety Research." Reported prepared for the Federal Highway Administration DTFH61-11-H-00024. <http://bit.ly/14KJfJq>

#### Policy development

- A helpful document for others reviewing your draft policy is included here: <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/changing-policy/policy-elements>
- Complete Streets Local Policy Workbook. Provides a step-by-step guide to the 10 elements of an effective complete streets policy.  
<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/guides/complete-streets-local-policy-workbook>
- Complete Streets Policy Analysis Report (issued annually) ranks every written policy in the United States.  
<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/cs-policyanalysis.pdf>



- The Coalition also provides downloadable PowerPoints that explain Complete Streets as a concept, policy adoption and policy implementation, as well as fact sheets on the benefits of Complete Streets.  
[www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/a-to-z](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/a-to-z)

## Appendix B: Workshop Attendees

- Dan Sanders – Interim Director, Traffic Engineering
- Rod Ellis – Pre Construction Engineer, ALDOT Guntersville Office
- Tanjie Kling – MPO Planner II, City of Huntsville Planning Division
- Paige Colburn – MPO Planner II, City of Huntsville Planning Division
- Les Hopson – Division Engineer, ALDOT Huntsville Office
- Gary Whitley – Public and Government Affairs Liaison, Huntsville Utilities
- Carson Smith – MPO TCC Member, Huntsville Utilities
- Dennis Madsen – Director, Urban and Long Range Planning
- Connie Graham – Planner III, Urban and Long Range Planning
- Ken Newberry – Planner III, Urban and Long Range Planning
- James Vandiver – Planner II, Urban and Long Range Planning
- Beverly Lowe – Parking Services Manager, Parking and Public Transit
- Ken Rex – Chair, **Bicycle Advisory and Safety Committee**
- Marc Byers – Forestry and Horticulture Supervisor, Landscape Management
- Chief Howard McFarlen – Chief, Huntsville Fire Department
- Joey Torcar – Traffic Officer, Huntsville Police Department
- Tonya Haggard – Property Manager, Huntsville Hospital Systems
- Karen Hill – Practice Developer and Business Manager, Crestwood Hospital
- Andrew Davenport – Assistant CEO, Crestwood Hospital
- Chad Emerson – CEO, Downtown Huntsville Inc.
- Marie Bostik – Executive Director, Land Trust of Northern Alabama
- Jeffrey Wilson – Director of Operations, Huntsville City Schools
- Scott Gillies – Transportation Coordinator, Huntsville City Schools
- Nancy Robertson – Executive Director, TARCOG
- Quisha Riche – Director of Real Estate Development, Huntsville Housing Authority
- Jennifer Thornton Hines – CEO and Principal Architect, Sparkman Homes
- Melissa Stokes – ADA Coordinator, City of Huntsville Legal Department
- Donna Dutton – Coordinator, Rocketview Neighbor Association
- Larry Mason – Retired Planner, Code the South
- Elizabeth Estopinal – Community Volunteer
- Ben Payment – Founder, Bikes and Brews