

Complete Streets Lower Transportation Costs



Complete Streets are designed and operated so they work for all users— pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Communities that adopt complete streets policies are asking transportation planners and engineers to consistently design and alter the right-of-way with all users in mind. Contact the National Complete Streets Coalition (www.completestreets.org) to learn about the diverse groups working together to enact complete streets policies across the country!

A recent poll by Coldwell Banker revealed a vast majority of the real estate agents - 78% - said their clients are interested in living in areas that help reduce their gasoline bill.¹ Furthermore, the majority of the surveyed agents agree that walkability and access to public transportation are appealing to clients. With increased transportation costs and time spent in gridlock, Americans are starting to realize that the benefits of living in places where they don't always have to drive add up.



Right: Poyon Chung
Left: Eric Richardson

When the built environment discourages the use alternate modes of transportation, Americans are forced to pay high premiums for transportation.

Incomplete streets lead to higher costs

Transportation is the second largest expense for American households, costing more than food, clothing, and health care. Even before the recent run-up in gasoline prices, Americans spent an average of 18 cents of every dollar on transportation, with the poorest fifth of families spending more than double that figure. The vast majority of this money, nearly 98%, is for the purchase, operation, and maintenance of automobiles. Drivers spent \$186 billion on fuel last year, and without improvements to fuel economy, Americans will spend an estimated \$260 billion in 2020 on gasoline.²

This high cost is unavoidable for those who live in sprawling areas that lack sidewalks, bike lanes, and convenient public transit. Incomplete streets leave many commuters with no alternatives. Families living in auto-reliant environments, such as Houston, spend an even larger percentage of their household income on transportation, about 20%. In communities with more transportation options, costs are as low as 14%.³

Most families spend far more on transportation than on food, and transportation costs continue to rise. When gas prices rose to \$3.00 a gallon, the Brookings Institution estimated this would result in an increase in the average household's transportation spending of 14% per year.⁵ With higher energy costs, this means families are cutting back on weekend outings, restaurant meals, and long-distance travel.

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The Benefits of Complete Streets 10



Complete Streets Steering Committee Organizations

AARP
Alliance for Biking and Walking
America Bikes
America Walks
American Council of the Blind
American Planning Association
American Public Transportation Association
American Society of Landscape Architects
Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals
City of Boulder
HNTB
Institute of Transportation Engineers
Kimley Horn and Associates, Inc.
League of American Bicyclists
McCann Consulting
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Center for Bicycling and Walking
Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Smart Growth America

National Complete Streets Coalition

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Complete streets give choices

Transportation expenses can be reduced if local infrastructure encourages active transportation, which helps families replace car trips with bicycling, walking, or taking public transit. Transit use soared across the country as people sought alternatives to high gas prices and has sustained at high levels. Nevertheless, many users may be discouraged by long waits at inadequate bus stops or by dangerous street crossings.

Households that locate near public transportation drive an average of 16 fewer miles per day compared to a similar household without access to public transportation, which results in hundreds of dollars in savings each year. In fact, a two-person adult household that uses public transportation saves an average of \$6,251 annually compared to a household with two cars and no public transportation accessibility.⁶

When residents have the opportunity to walk, bike, or take transit, they have more control over their expenses. In Wisconsin, public transit riders save almost \$7 per trip over driving.

Because of these individual savings, additional money is invested in the economy, resulting in 11,671 new jobs, \$163.3 million in tax revenue, and \$1.1 billion in total output.⁷ Households in auto-dependent communities devote 20% more to transportation than communities with complete streets, which hinders potential economic growth.⁸

When roads are re-designed and maintained to attract pedestrians, the local economy improves and diversifies from increased buyers, which creates job growth and increased investment in the area, including surrounding property values. One study in Lake Worth, FL found that people were willing to pay \$20,000 more for homes in pedestrian-friendly communities.⁹ In the Chicago area, homes within a half-mile of a suburban rail station on average sell for \$36,000 more than houses located farther away.¹⁰ Complete streets create attractive streets, enticing people of all ages and to spend time in communities with active transportation choices.



Complete streets allow people to choose how they travel, whether by bus, bike, afoot, or in a car.

Photo: John LaPlante

¹ Interest in Urban Homeownership Survey, Coldwell Banker, June 2008.

² Friedman, David et al. "Drilling in Detroit: Tapping Automaker Ingenuity to Build Safe and Efficient Automobiles," Union of Concerned Scientists, June 2001, p. 15, Table 4.

³ Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP). *Transportation Costs and the American Dream: Why a Lack of Transportation Choices Strains the Family Budget and Hinders Home Ownership*. STPP, July 2003.

⁴ Lipman, Barbara. *A Heavy Load: The Combined Housing and Transportation Burdens of Working Families*. Center for Housing Policy, October 2006.

⁵ The Center for Transit-Oriented Development and the Center for Neighborhood Technology. *The Affordability Index: A New Tool for Measuring the True Affordability of a Housing Choice*. Brookings Institution, January 2006.

⁶ Lipman, 2006.

⁷ Bekka, Khalid. *Economic Benefits of Public Transportation*. Wisconsin Department of Transportation, November 2003.

⁸ McCann, Barbara. *Driven to Spend: Sprawl and Household Transportation Expenses*. STPP, March 2000.

⁹ Pollock Shea, Cynthia. *Lake Worth: Reclaiming a Small Downtown*. Florida Sustainable Communities Network, October 1998.

¹⁰ *What Happens to a Capital Investment in Public Transportation?* American Public Transportation Association.