

# Model Comprehensive Plan Language on Complete Streets

Developed by the National Policy & Legal Analysis Network  
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Public Health Law & Policy (PHLP)

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## Introduction

Good planning practice requires that communities establish long-range *comprehensive plans* for future physical development. A comprehensive plan provides a vision of how residents and stakeholders wish to see their community evolve, and acts as a policy guide for decision-making regarding future development. In different states, comprehensive plans are known by a variety of names, including community plans, master plans, and general plans. In some states, these plans are required; in others, they are optional. The plan's effect from a legal perspective also varies widely, and some states require that comprehensive plans address specific topics and undergo regular updates.

By including “complete streets” language in a comprehensive plan, a community can promote street design and land use policies that allow people to get around safely on foot, bicycle, or public transportation. Integrating complete streets practices into planning and policy decisions can help encourage safe and active transportation, decrease pollution, and reduce the incidence of childhood obesity, social isolation, diabetes, and heart disease.

This document is divided into three sections:

**Section I** suggests language for a transportation vision statement that sets out a vision of streets that are safe for travel by pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation riders of all ages and abilities.

**Section II** sets out a complete streets policy package, designed to be included in the comprehensive plan's transportation or streets chapter.

**Section III** provides additional language on complete streets tailored for other chapters of a comprehensive plan, in order to integrate the idea of complete streets into different arenas and encourage interagency planning.

Comprehensive plans generally are organized into an overarching *vision* with related *goals*, *objectives*, and *policy* or *action* steps. This model uses these terms, which are easily translated into the language of a given plan.

## Section I. Vision Statement

The vision statement of a comprehensive plan describes the community's general vision of how the community should function. This vision statement may be included in a chapter focusing entirely on the community's vision, or may appear at the beginning of the transportation chapter. Vision statements are generally developed as a consensus-driven, collaborative community engagement process. This model language is provided not to prescribe what a community's vision should be, but to offer an example of a detailed vision and demonstrate the range of goals that can be considered in setting out a vision statement.

**Transportation Vision Statement:** The community of [ Jurisdiction ] envisions a transportation system that encourages healthy, active living, promotes transportation options and independent mobility, increases community safety and access to healthy food, reduces environmental impact, mitigates climate change, and supports greater social interaction and community identity by providing safe and convenient travel along and across streets through a comprehensive, integrated transportation network for pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders and drivers, [*insert other significant local users if desired, e.g. drivers of agricultural vehicles, emergency vehicles, freight, etc.*] and people of all ages and abilities, including children, youth, families, older adults, and individuals with disabilities.

**COMMENT:** Communities may add new language to capture another vision, and may delete any of the concepts that do not represent the community's vision.

## Section II. Complete Streets Policy Package: Transportation Chapter

Communities may include this entire complete streets policy in the comprehensive plan as a complete policy package, or may selectively adopt specific objectives or policies. Communities are encouraged to tailor the policy and action items to local needs, concerns, and conditions, and to identify the agency or department responsible for implementation. This section fits naturally in the comprehensive plan's transportation chapter or element (which may also be known as the circulation, roadways, or streets chapter). If such a chapter does not exist, the section might be included in the land use chapter.

### COMPLETE STREETS POLICY

**Goal T1: Provide safe and comfortable routes for walking, bicycling, and public transportation to increase use of these modes of transportation, enable convenient and active travel as part of daily activities, reduce pollution, and meet the needs of all users of the streets, including children, families, older adults, and people with disabilities.**

**Objective T1.1: Integrate Complete Streets infrastructure and design features into street design and construction to create safe and inviting environments for all users to walk, bicycle, and use public transportation.**

- **T1.1.1.** In planning, designing, and constructing Complete Streets:
  - Include infrastructure that promotes a safe means of travel for all users along the right of way, such as sidewalks, shared use paths, bicycle lanes, and paved shoulders.
  - Include infrastructure that facilitates safe crossing of the right of way, such as accessible curb ramps, crosswalks, refuge islands, and pedestrian signals; such infrastructure must meet the needs of people with different types of disabilities and people of different ages.
  - Ensure that sidewalks, crosswalks, public transportation stops and facilities, and other aspects of the transportation right of way are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and meet the needs of people with different types of disabilities, including mobility impairments, vision impairments, hearing impairments, and others.<sup>1</sup> Ensure that the ADA Transition Plan includes a prioritization method for enhancements and revise if necessary.
  - Prioritize incorporation of street design features and techniques that promote safe and comfortable travel by pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation riders, such as traffic calming circles, additional traffic calming mechanisms, narrow

vehicle lanes, raised medians, dedicated transit lanes, transit priority signalization, transit bulb outs, road diets,<sup>2</sup> high street connectivity,<sup>3</sup> and physical buffers and separations between vehicular traffic and other users.

- Ensure use of additional features that improve the comfort and safety of users:
  - Provide pedestrian-oriented signs, pedestrian-scale lighting, benches and other street furniture, bicycle parking facilities, and comfortable and attractive public transportation stops and facilities.
  - Encourage street trees, landscaping, and planting strips, including native plants where possible, in order to buffer traffic noise and protect and shade pedestrians and bicyclists.
  - Reduce surface water runoff by reducing the amount of impervious surfaces on the streets.
- **T1.1.2.** In all street projects, include infrastructure that improves transportation options for pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation riders of all ages and abilities.

**COMMENT:** This provision, which requires that all street projects on new or existing streets create Complete Streets, is a fundamental component of a commitment to Complete Streets.

- Ensure that this infrastructure is included in planning, design, approval, construction, operations, and maintenance phases of street projects.
- Incorporate this infrastructure into all construction, reconstruction, retrofit, maintenance, alteration, and repair of streets, bridges, and other portions of the transportation network.
- Incorporate multimodal improvements into pavement resurfacing, restriping, and signalization operations where the safety and convenience of users can be improved within the scope of the work.
- Develop systems to implement and monitor incorporation of such infrastructure into construction and reconstruction of private streets.
- Allow exclusion of such infrastructure from street projects only upon approval by [*the City Manager or a senior manager of an appropriate agency, such as the Department of Transportation*], and only where documentation and supporting data indicate one of the following bases for the exemption: (a) use by non-motorized users is prohibited by law; (b) the cost would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable future use over the long term; (c) there is an absence of current and future need; or (d) inclusion of such infrastructure would be unreasonable or inappropriate in light of the scope of the project.

**COMMENTS:** This provision provides crucial accountability in the exceptions process by requiring documentation, a transparent decision-making process, and written approval by a specified official.

By including this fourth exception, exception (d), a jurisdiction gains considerable flexibility, but at the cost of potentially implementing Complete Streets practices less thoroughly. Jurisdictions should consider this trade-off in determining whether to include this exception.

Other exceptions can also be included in this list, for example: “Significant adverse environmental impacts outweigh the positive effects of the infrastructure.”

In evaluating whether the conditions of (b) and (c) are met, a jurisdiction may need to conduct latent demand studies, which measure the potential level of use by bicyclists, pedestrians, and others should appropriate infrastructure be provided.

- **T1.1.3.** Develop policies and tools to improve [Jurisdiction]’s Complete Streets practices:
  - Develop a pedestrian crossings policy to create a transparent decision-making policy, including matters such as where to place crosswalks and when to use enhanced crossing treatments.
  - Develop policies to improve the safety of crossings and travel in the vicinity of schools and parks.
  - Consider developing a transportation demand management/commuter benefits ordinance to encourage residents and employees to walk, bicycle, use public transportation, or carpool.
  - Develop a checklist for [Jurisdiction]’s development and redevelopment projects, to ensure the inclusion of infrastructure providing for safe travel for all users and enhance project outcomes and community impact.
- **T1.1.4.** Encourage transit-oriented development that provides public transportation in close proximity to employment, housing, schools, retailers, and other services and amenities.
- **T1.1.5.** Change transportation investment criteria to ensure that existing transportation funds are available for Complete Streets infrastructure.
- **T1.1.6.** Identify additional funding streams and implementation strategies to retrofit existing streets to include Complete Streets infrastructure.

**Objective T1.2: Make Complete Streets practices a routine part of [Jurisdiction]’s everyday operations.**

- **T1.2.1.** As necessary, restructure and revise the zoning and subdivision codes, and other plans, laws, procedures, rules, regulations, guidelines, programs, templates, and design

manuals, including [*insert all other key documents by name*], in order to integrate, accommodate, and balance the needs of all users in all street projects on public [and private] streets.

**COMMENT:** By opting to apply the requirement to private streets in addition to public streets, a jurisdiction will generally expand the effectiveness of the complete streets policy. However, such a requirement may be more practical in certain jurisdictions than in others. For example, the requirement might be very important in a jurisdiction where there are many private streets in central locations.

- **T1.2.2.** Develop or revise street standards and design manuals, including cross-section templates and design treatment details, to ensure that standards support and do not impede Complete Streets; coordinate with related policy documents [such as Pedestrian/Bicycle Plans, *insert other relevant documents*].
- Assess current requirements with regard to road width and turning radii in order to determine the narrowest vehicle lane width and tightest corner radii that safely balance other needs; adjust design guidelines and templates to reflect ideal widths and radii.
- **T1.2.3.** Make training available to planning and public works personnel and consulting firms on the importance of Complete Streets and on implementation and integration of multimodal infrastructure and techniques.
- **T1.2.4.** Encourage coordination among agencies and departments to develop joint prioritization, capital planning and programming, and implementation of street improvement projects and programs.
- **T1.2.5.** Encourage targeted outreach and public participation in community decisions concerning street design and use.
- **T1.2.6.** Establish performance standards with measurable outcomes to assess safety, functionality, and actual use by each category of users; include goals such as:
  - By [2020], facilitate a transportation mode shift so that [20] % of trips occur by bicycling or walking.
  - By [2015], reduce the number of injuries and fatalities to bicyclists and pedestrians by [  ] %.
  - Reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled by [  ] % by [*insert year*].
  - Provide a high proportion of streets ([  ]%) with sidewalks, low design speeds, tree canopy, and street furnishings.
  - Increase the miles of bicycle lanes and other bikeways by [  ] % by [*insert year*].
  - Increase the miles of sidewalks by [  ] % by [*insert year*]

**COMMENT:** Other standards could include user satisfaction, percentage reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and reduction in gaps in the sidewalk network.

- **T1.2.7.** Replace automobile level of service as a dominant determinant with multimodal level of service assessment criteria.
- **T1.2.8.** Collect baseline data and regularly gather follow-up data in order to assess impact of policies.
  - Collect data regarding the safety, functionality, and actual use by each category of users of the neighborhoods and areas within [Jurisdiction].
  - Track public transportation ridership numbers.
  - Track performance standards and goals.
  - Track other performance measures such as number of new curb ramps and new street trees or plantings.
  - Require major employers to monitor how employees commute to work.

**Objective T1.3: Plan and develop a comprehensive and convenient bicycle and pedestrian transportation network.**

**COMMENT:** Jurisdictions with existing bicycle or pedestrian plans may have already addressed the policy/action items under this objective. In such jurisdictions, it is not necessary to restate these policy and action items verbatim. Such plans should be reviewed, and, if necessary, revised to complement the Complete Streets approach. If existing plans address this objective sufficiently, a jurisdiction may incorporate its bicycle and pedestrian plans with language such as: “The provisions set forth in the [Pedestrian/Bicycle Plan] are incorporated into this plan.”

For jurisdictions that have not developed a detailed bicycle or pedestrian plan, the policies and actions in this section provide a good way to begin addressing those needs in an integrated fashion.

- **T1.3.1.** Develop a long-term plan for a bicycle and pedestrian network that meets the needs of users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders, *[insert other appropriate users if desired]* and people of all ages and abilities, including children, youth, families, older adults, and individuals with disabilities.
  - Conduct a demand analysis for each category of user, mapping locations that are already oriented to each mode of travel and type of user and those for which there is latent demand.

- For each category of user, map out a preferred transportation network with routes that will enable safe, interconnected, direct, continuous, and efficient travel from each major origination area to each major destination area.
- Encourage public participation in community decisions concerning the demand analysis, preferred route network, and street design and use to ensure that such decisions: (a) result in streets that meet the needs of all users, and (b) are responsive to needs of individuals and groups that traditionally have not participated in public infrastructure design. Include pedestrians, bicyclists, individuals with disabilities, children and youth, families, older adults, public transportation riders, low-income communities, communities of color, and other distinct social groups, and their advocates. Establish ongoing advisory committees and public feedback mechanisms.
- Identify and prioritize necessary changes in order to implement the preferred network; prioritize neighborhoods with the greatest need and projects that significantly alleviate economic, social, racial, or ethnic inequities.
- Ensure that the networks provide ready access to healthy sources of nutrition.
- Explore the use of non-standard locations and connections for bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation facilities, such as easements, restored stream corridors, and railroad rights-of way.
- **T1.3.2.** Evaluate timeline and funding of the plan.
  - Assess the degree to which implementation of the plan can be coordinated with planned reconstruction of streets, development projects, utility projects, and other existing funding streams.
  - Develop funding strategies for addressing additional needs; actively pursue funding from state, federal, and other sources.
  - Explore imposing development impact fees and dedication requirements on new development to create paths and other Complete Streets infrastructure.
- **T1.3.3.** In collaboration with [*appropriate local and regional agencies*], integrate bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation facility planning into regional and local transportation planning programs and agencies to encourage connectivity between jurisdictions.
- **T1.3.4.** Develop programs to encourage bicycle use, such as enacting indoor bicycle parking policies to encourage bicycle commuting, or testing innovative bicycle facility design.

**Objective T1.4: Promote bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation rider safety.**

**COMMENT:** As noted for the previous objective, jurisdictions with existing bicycle or pedestrian plans may also choose to omit these items if already addressed in those plans and instead reference those plans.

- **T1.4.1.** Identify physical improvements that would make bicycle and pedestrian travel safer along current major bicycling and walking routes and the proposed future network, prioritizing routes to and from schools.
- **T1.4.2.** Identify safety improvements to pedestrian and bicycle routes used to access public transportation stops; collaborate with [*local transit agency*] to relocate stops where advisable.
- **T1.4.3.** Identify intersections and other locations where collisions have occurred or that present safety challenges for pedestrians, bicyclists, or other users; consider gathering additional data through methods such as walkability/bikeability audits; analyze data; and develop solutions to safety issues.
- **T1.4.4.** Prioritize modifications to the identified locations and identify funding streams and implementation strategies, including which features can be constructed as part of routine street projects.
- **T1.4.5.** Collaborate with schools, senior centers, advocacy groups, and public safety departments [*insert additional specific departments as appropriate*] to provide community education about safe travel for pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders, and others.
- **T1.4.6.** Use crime prevention through environmental design strategies<sup>4</sup> to increase safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other users.
- **T1.4.7.** As necessary, public safety departments should engage in additional enforcement actions in strategic locations.

**Objective T1.5: Make public transportation an interconnected part of the transportation network.**

- **T1.5.1.** Partner with [*local transit agency*] to enhance and expand public transportation services and infrastructure throughout [Jurisdiction] and the surrounding region; encourage the development of a public transportation system that increases personal mobility and travel choices, conserves energy resources, preserves air quality, and fosters economic growth.

- **T1.5.2.** Work jointly with [*local transit agency*] to provide destinations and activities that can be reached by public transportation and are of interest to public transportation-dependent populations, including youth, older adults, and people with disabilities.
- **T1.5.3.** Collaborate with [*local transit agency*] to incorporate infrastructure to assist users in employing multiple means of transportation in a single trip in order to increase transportation access and flexibility; examples include, but are not limited to, provisions for bicycle access on public transportation, secure bicycle racks at transit stops, access via public transportation to trails and recreational locations, and so on.
- **T1.5.4.** Ensure safe and accessible pedestrian routes to public transportation stops; relocate stops if safe routes are not feasible at current location.
- **T1.5.5.** Work with [*local transit agency*] to ensure that public transportation facilities and vehicles are fully accessible to people with disabilities.
- **T1.5.6.** Explore working with [*local transit agency*] to provide travel training programs for older adults and people with disabilities, and awareness training for vehicle operators.
- **T1.5.7.** Explore creation of public transportation priority lanes to improve travel time.
- **T1.5.8.** Partner with [*local transit agency*] to collect data and establish performance standards related to these steps.

### **Section III. Complete Streets Concepts for Inclusion within Other Chapters/Elements/Sections of the Plan**

Communities may also find it beneficial to include complete streets concepts in other chapters of their plans to increase the integration of the plan as a whole.

#### **LAND USE CHAPTER**

**Goal LU1: Ensure that land use patterns and decisions encourage walking, bicycling, and public transportation use, and make these transportation options a safe and convenient choice.**

**Objective LU1.1: Plan, design, and create complete and well-structured neighborhoods whose physical layout and land use mix promote walking, bicycling, and public transportation use as a means of accessing services, food, retail, employment, education, childcare, recreation, and other destinations.**

- **LU1.1.1.** Encourage mixed-use development to allow siting of residential, retail, office, recreational, and educational facilities within close proximity to each other to encourage walking and bicycling as a routine part of everyday life.
  - Maximize the proportion of residences within [ $\frac{1}{4}$ ] mile of uses like parks, schools, grocers, retailers, service providers, employment, public transportation, and other desirable community features.
- **LU1.1.2.** Encourage transit-oriented development by developing public transportation in downtown areas and encouraging dense infill development near public transportation facilities.
- **LU1.1.3.** Promote infill development and redevelopment; new construction should occur in a compact form in developed locations whenever feasible.
- **LU1.1.4.** Encourage the creation of high-quality community plazas, squares, greens, commons, community and neighborhood parks, and rooftop gardens; explore creation of shared streets.
- **LU1.1.5.** Require safe and convenient walking, bicycling, and public transportation features in new or renovated development.
- **LU1.1.6.** Require transportation demand management strategies in development plans.
- **LU1.1.7.** Explore imposing development impact fee, use fee, and dedication requirements on new development to fund multimodal transportation.

- **LU1.1.8.** Consider conducting health impact assessments when designing streets or undertaking policymaking with regard to public infrastructure and development, in order to understand and address public health implications of actions in this realm.

**Objective LU1.2:** Require street design that creates public space that is safe and welcoming for pedestrians.

- **LU1.2.1.** Encourage street-oriented buildings; locate parking lots, if provided, in rear of retail and business centers.
- **LU1.2.2.** Provide pedestrian-scale lighting.
- **LU1.2.3.** Encourage a high proportion of streets where building façades have abundant windows and entrances facing the street and create a human-scaled wall near the lot line.
- **LU1.2.4.** Encourage ground-level business uses that support pedestrian activity, such as retail, restaurants, and services.
- **LU1.2.5.** Reduce the proportion of street frontages and rights of way lined by parking lots, blank walls, or empty lots.
- **LU1.2.6.** Where parking lots are located between commercial buildings and streets, require or encourage creation of a pedestrian path from the street to the entrance.
- **LU1.2.7.** Increase street connectivity.

## **SCHOOLS/PUBLIC FACILITIES CHAPTER**

**Goal S1:** Increase children’s physical activity to benefit their short- and long-term health and improve their ability to learn.

**Objective S1.1:** Provide children with safe and appealing opportunities for walking and bicycling to school in order to decrease rush hour traffic and fossil fuel consumption, encourage exercise and healthy living habits in children, and reduce the risk of injury to children through traffic collisions near schools.

- **S1.1.1.** Support Safe Routes to Schools programs.
  - Work with [*School District(s)*] to pursue encouragement programs such as Walk and Bike to School Days, as well as “Walking School Bus”/“Bike Train” programs at elementary schools, where parents take turns accompanying a group of children to school on foot or via bicycle.

- Gather baseline data on attitudes about and levels of walking and bicycling to school, through student tallies and parent surveys; gather additional data each spring and fall to measure progress.
- Work with [*School District(s)*] and advocates to obtain Safe Routes to School funding to implement educational programs.
- Work with [*School District(s)*] to encourage educational programs that teach students safe walking and bicycling behaviors, and educate parents and drivers in the community about the importance of safe driving.
- Work with law enforcement to enforce speed limits and traffic laws, assist in ensuring safe crossings, and promote safe travel behavior within the schools.
- Encourage parents to get children to school through active travel such as walking or bicycling.
- **S1.1.2** Prioritize safety and roadway improvements around schools.
  - Conduct walkability and bikability audits along routes to schools to identify opportunities and needs for infrastructure improvements.
  - Ensure that speed limits in areas within [*1,000 feet*] of schools are no greater than 15 to 25 miles per hour.
  - Assess traffic speeds, volumes, and vehicle types around schools; implement traffic calming in areas immediately around schools where indicated by speed and volume; consider closing streets to through traffic during school hours if other methods cannot reduce threat to safety.
  - Pursue Safe Routes to School funding to implement infrastructure improvements.
- **S1.1.3.** Work with [*School District(s)*] to improve transportation safety around schools, including drop-off and pickup zones, as well as locations where interactions occur between pedestrians, bicyclists, automobiles, and buses.
- **S1.1.4.** Work with [*School District(s)*] to locate and design new and remodeled schools to be easily accessible by foot or bicycle for the largest number of students possible by taking steps such as locating new schools in or near neighborhoods where students live, providing safe and secure bicycle parking within school facilities, and allowing convenient access to schools from public streets.
- **S1.1.5.** Locate sports fields near schools, or pursue joint use agreements with [*School District(s)*] to allow school fields to be available for public use outside of school hours.

## PARKS/RECREATION CHAPTER

**Goal P1: Increase use of parks and open space for physical activity and encourage residents to access parks by walking, bicycling, or public transportation.**

**Objective P1.1: Create safe routes to parks and open space.**

- **P1.1.1.** Encourage the development of parks and open space with a network of safe and convenient walking and bicycle routes, including routes that access other popular destinations, such as schools.
- **P1.1.2.** Implement traffic-calming measures near parks where advisable due to vehicle speeds and volumes.
- **P1.1.3.** Improve intersections at access points to parks to create greater visibility for all users, and provide accessible curb ramps and additional time to cross the street.
- **P1.1.4.** Improve public transportation connections to trails, parks, and other recreational locations.
- **P1.1.5.** Ensure that all parks and open space can be reached through safe routes for bicycling, walking, and public transportation.
- **P1.1.6.** Ensure that trails, parks, and open spaces have secure bicycle parking facilities.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAPTER

**Goal H1: Improve health, safety, and mental well-being of residents by creating convenient and safe opportunities for physical activity.**

**Objective H1.1: Ensure that residents of all ages and income levels can walk and bicycle to meet their daily needs.**

- **H1.1.1.** Improve bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation access to residential areas, educational and childcare facilities, employment centers, grocery stores, retail centers, recreational areas, historic sites, hospitals and clinics, and other destination points.

**Objective H1.2: Reduce asthma levels, social isolation, violent street crime incidents, and the severity and number of pedestrian and bicycling collisions by decreasing vehicular traffic and increasing pedestrian activity.**

- **H1.2.1.** Provide comfortable environments and destinations for walking and bicycling to integrate physical activity into daily routines.

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- <sup>1</sup> Note that many types of accommodations for people with disabilities are mandated by federal law under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- <sup>2</sup> A road diet is a transportation technique in which the number or width of lanes dedicated to motor vehicle traffic is decreased, often by combining the two central lanes into a single two-way turn lane, in order to create additional space within the right of way for features such as bicycle lanes, sidewalks, or buffer zones.
- <sup>3</sup> Connectivity describes the directness of routes and density of connections in a street network. A street network with high connectivity has many short links, numerous intersections, and few dead-end streets. As connectivity increases, travel distances decrease and route options increase, allowing more direct travel between destinations.
- <sup>4</sup> Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) involves designing the built environment to deter criminal behavior. CPTED aims to create environments that discourage the commission of crimes by influencing offenders to not commit a contemplated crime, usually due to increased fear of detection.