

Complete Streets

Introduction

Complete Streets legislation, or 2010 PA 135, considers all the legal users of roadway—automobiles, bicyclists, and pedestrians—during roadway planning and design to determine if any relevant accommodations are necessary or appropriate within the project. This is a national movement, with numerous states, local governments, and even the U.S. Transportation Secretary espousing these ideals for federal transportation projects.

What is the purpose of the Act?

The legislation provides additional tools for communities to plan road projects and offers educational resources to make their communities more walkable. A critical component includes language that requires the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) or a road commission to take the desires of a local community into consideration during the planning and design of a project within a municipality. The legislation does not mandate any local road agency to adopt a Complete Streets policy or spend any additional dollars for non-motorized facilities.

Summary of the Legislation

Changes to Act 51 under PA 135:

- Requires counties, cities, villages, and MDOT to consult with one another when planning a non-motorized project affecting a transportation facility that belongs to another road agency.
- Identifies non-motorized facilities contributing to complete streets as eligible for funding.
- Requires the State Transportation Commission (STC) to adopt a Complete Streets policy for MDOT, and to make model Complete Streets policies available to municipalities and counties.
- Requires state and local road agencies to consult with each other and agree on how to address Complete Streets for projects that affect a roadway under another road agency's jurisdiction.
- Allows MDOT to provide technical assistance and coordination to local agencies in the development and implementation of their policies.
- Requires MDOT to share expertise in non-motorized and multi-modal planning in the development of projects within municipal boundaries.
- Allows agencies to enter into agreements with one another to provide maintenance for facilities constructed to implement a Complete Streets policy.

Changes to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act under PA 134:

- Modifies the definition of “streets” to include all legal users, including bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Expands the elements that may be included in a master plan to encompass all transportation systems that move people and goods.
- Specifies that transportation improvements identified in a plan are appropriate to the context of the community and considers all legal users of the public right of way.
- Ensures that transportation elements of the master plan will be implemented in cooperation with applicable county road commission or MDOT.

COMPLETE STREETS POLICY

Preamble

A Complete Streets Policy for the City of Kalamazoo is needed for the following reasons:

The City of Kalamazoo is constrained by historical development patterns and cannot expand by acquisition of territory from other jurisdictions;

The City's future prosperity and livability depends on more intense utilization of land and infrastructure within its present boundaries;

The relatively compact built environment of the City coupled with current traffic flow patterns justifies revisiting design decisions concerning City rights of way to more fairly accommodate the needs of all users whenever opportunities present themselves.

Definitions:

All Users – pedestrians, bicyclists and other active transportation, transit riders, motorists, emergency, freight and commercial vehicle operators.

Active Transportation – skateboarding, roller blading, and other non-motorized transportation.

Green Storm-water Infrastructure - (GSI) implementations that assist in diverting water from entering the municipality's sewerage system.

Healthy Activities – walking, biking, running, and other physical activity that promotes a healthy lifestyle.

Maintenance Activities – any project carried out by the City in the right-of-way to maintain infrastructure at or below grade.

Vision:

This Complete Streets Policy recognizes that the last half-century of transportation planning and design has created many miles of "incomplete" streets within Kalamazoo – those without safe places to walk, bike, or take public transportation. Such streets are particularly dangerous for people of color, older adults, children, and those living in low-income neighborhoods. The aforementioned populations suffer disproportionately from poor street design in many ways including: increased likelihood of illness, injury, and death, being cut-off from jobs, and access to healthcare professionals, family, and friends. Additionally, the populations mentioned above tend to spend a larger proportion of their budget on transportation than other populations in the city.

The City of Kalamazoo envisions a connected network of safe streets that provides convenient access to all parts of the City. City streets are designed for equitable access, comfort, and mobility of any and all users regardless of ability, age, income, or race.

The City of Kalamazoo recognizes complete streets as a valuable opportunity to further many of its strategic goals as laid out in the City's Strategic Vision.

Connected City – By creating and implementing a complete street policy, the City works toward a network of connected streets designed for all users.

Inviting Public Spaces – Streets make up approximately 25% of the public realm in Kalamazoo. This policy will work to make this public space more comfortable and safe for all users and expand opportunities for use of the right-of-way.

Environmental Responsibility – Complete Street design offers the City the opportunity to make streets more environmentally friendly. Whether through tree and native flower plantings, using permeable pavement, or installing more complex GSI treatments, there are many options for incorporating environmental practices into complete street designs.

Safe Community – The focus of the City’s Complete Street Policy is to create right-of-ways that are safe for all users. This policy works to improve the overall design and configuration of streets to promote the safety of all users.

Complete Neighborhoods – Through the Complete Streets Policy the City promotes completed networks of street and pedestrian infrastructure that connect to the whole city, street designs that provide safe accommodations for any and all users, thus creating comfortable spaces for residents to walk, run, bike, and enjoy other physical activities.

Economic Vitality – Street design plays an integral role in creating economically viable places. Through increasing the walkability and over all pleasantness of streets, it makes a place where people want to go to and explore. Complete Street design also often slows traffic, giving drivers the chance to notice businesses that would have otherwise been a blur out of their window as they passed through the commercial corridor.

Core Commitment:

The City of Kalamazoo recognizes that while some in our City can choose to leave their car at home on a nice day and bike or walk to their destination, there are many who do not have a choice. It is for those users that this policy acknowledges that not every user who moves by a certain mode is the same. The needs of a father bicycling with his child are different from a woman who can speedily ride her bicycle. Older adults benefit from clear markings and signage when driving, people with vision impairments require audible and tactile stimuli to travel independently and those using wheelchairs, scooters, and strollers need curb ramps and sidewalks that can accommodate them. This policy endeavors to design streets that will meet these needs to the maximum extent possible.

The City of Kalamazoo also recognizes that all projects, new, maintenance, or reconstruction, are potential opportunities to apply Complete Streets design principles for the equity and safety of all users. The City will, to the maximum extent practical, design, construct, maintain, and operate all streets to provide for a comprehensive and integrated network of streets, trails, and rights-of-way for people of all ages and abilities throughout the city.

In order to create a complete network, this policy will apply to all publicly and privately funded projects including: new construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, repair, and maintenance of transportation facilities on streets and redevelopment projects. All transportation infrastructure and street design projects requiring funding or approval by the City of Kalamazoo, as well as projects funded solely or in part by the state and/or federal funding, shall comply with the City of Kalamazoo’s Complete Streets Policy. Private developments and related street design components or corresponding street-related components shall also incorporate the Complete Streets Policy.

Context:

The Complete Streets Policy works toward a network of context sensitive infrastructure designed for all types of users, regardless of abilities, age, income, or geographic location. The project implementation shall first and foremost be applied in a sensitive to the community’s physical, economic, and social setting. This approach considers the immediate goals of those most impacted related to livability with greater participation of community members. The overall goal of this approach is to balance the needs of all users rather than to make each street perfect for every mode of travel.

Projects:

Implementation and designing for all abilities and users requires the City of Kalamazoo Complete Streets Policy to be carried out cooperatively within all departments in the City of Kalamazoo with multi-jurisdictional cooperation, to the greatest extent possible, among private developers, state, regional, and federal agencies, and neighboring municipalities.

All projects and street improvements are opportunities to create safer, more accessible streets for all users. Complete Streets may be achieved through single projects or incrementally through a series of smaller improvements or maintenance activities over time. All transportation infrastructure and street design projects requiring funding, easements, or approval by the City of Kalamazoo, as well as projects funded by the state and/or federal government, for street and infrastructure design shall comply with the City of Kalamazoo's Complete Streets Policy. Projects and street improvements on roadways classified as Sub-Urban Corridors, Neighborhood Connectors, Main Streets, and/or Priority Streets by the Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 Master Plan shall be reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission, and presented for consideration and approval by the City Commission.

All projects and street improvements will be reviewed using the Complete Street Checklist to ensure all design elements including but not limited to pedestrian access, bike rack locations, and ADA compliant ramps are thoroughly considered. Projects and street improvements associated with site developments will be reviewed during the site plan review process. If a project is not associated with a development it will be reviewed by the Complete Street Committee.

Exceptions:

Street projects whether new, maintenance, or reconstruction, shall be reviewed through the Complete Streets checklist.

Any project may request exception from the Complete Street Policy design and infrastructure recommendations if data and documentation show one or more of the following:

1. The facilities are where specific users are prohibited by law, such as interstate freeways or pedestrian malls. An effort will be made in these cases for accommodations elsewhere.
2. Where the cost or impact of accommodation is excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use or probable future use.
3. Where historic, cultural, or other artifacts would be harmed or destroyed in the process of implementation. An effort will be made in these cases for accommodations elsewhere.

To request exemption, proper data and documentation must be submitted to the Complete Streets Committee. The committee will review the request and make a recommendation to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission will review and either approve or deny the exemption. If approved, the City Commission will review the request and have final authority to approve or deny the request. Any supporting data and documentation will be made publicly available.

The Complete Street Committee shall consist of:

- (1-2) Community Planning and Economic Development Staff
- (1-2) Public Services Staff
- (1) Metro staff
- (1) Parks and Recreation Staff
- (1) KDPS Public Safety Officer

The committee will review all road projects and provide annual reports to the Planning Commission. Reports shall include, but not be limited to, examining the needs for bicyclists, transit users, motorists, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities; conduction of a baseline study of current practices and accommodations; developing appropriate inter-departmental performance measure including review of performance measures, community engagement plans, and advising appropriate agencies on best practices for Complete Streets implementation. The Traffic Board may add the additional members needed to take on the role of the Complete Street Committee.

An advisory committee of residents, advocates, and a planning commissioner will provide the committee with up-to-date recommendations on national best practices, lead outreach and educational efforts in the community, and provide guidance on project prioritization for equitable access across the city. Committees will meet quarterly, or more if needed. The Complete Street Coalition may choose to take on the role of advisory committee.

Design Guidance & Engagement:

The creation of a connected network of streets accommodating each mode of travel that is consistent with and supportive of the local community, requires recognition that all streets are different and that the needs of users will be balanced in a context sensitive manner. To ensure the needs of users are understood, each project will utilize the City of Kalamazoo's Public Participation Plan. This will provide insight on the appropriate approach to community outreach and involvement for each project. This policy requires that a minimum of two community or neighborhood meetings be held for each project. The first meeting is recommended during project design to understand the context and unique characteristics of the street and community surrounding it.

The second meeting is to be held before the project begins to inform the community about what to expect during project construction and restate community feedback. At a minimum, a community meeting should be held when the project are being submitted for funding to ensure time to adjust project design with community input in mind.

In order to create Complete Streets, the latest design guidance, standards, and recommendations available shall be used in the implementation including, but not limited to:

- The Michigan Department of Transportation [Project Design and Development Guidebook](#)
- The latest edition of the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guide
- The latest edition of American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) [A Policy on Geometric Design of Highway and Streets](#)
- The United States Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Design Controls (2009).
- The Architectural Access Board (AAB) 521CMR Rules and Regulations
- Documents and plans created for the City of Kalamazoo, such as bicycle and pedestrian network plans, street type design guides, landscape and streetscape design guides.
- MMUTCD – Most recently adopted.
- Kalamazoo Code of Ordinances; Construction standards that match the design guide. Standard spec book.

Performance Measures:

Complete Streets implementation and effectiveness should be evaluated for success and opportunities for improvement. Furthermore, the City will develop performance measures to gauge implementation and effectiveness of the policy. These measures will set the baseline understanding for where the City's infrastructure is currently at. The metrics will also inform goals and project selection for future years.

Metrics to be considered:

- a. Linear feet of new or reconstructed sidewalks
- b. Miles of new or restriped on and off-street bicycle facilities
- c. New or reconstructed curb ramps
- d. New or repaired crosswalks
- e. New wayfinding or safety signage installed
- f. New street trees/ percentage of streets with tree canopy
- g. Percentage complete of bicycle and pedestrian networks in Non-Motorized Master Plan
- h. Efficiency of transit vehicles on routes
- i. Percentage of transit stops with shelters
- j. Percentage of transit stops accessible via sidewalks and curb ramps

- k. Multimodal Level of Service (MMLOS)
- l. Auto trips generated
- m. Decrease in rate of crashes, injuries, and fatalities by mode
- n. Pedestrian and bicycle counts (chart increase in people biking and walking)
- o. Vehicle Miles Traveled trip reductions
- p. PASER rating; pavement conditions
- q. Satisfaction/ Comfort levels expressed on a preference survey
- r. Number, size, and gallons of water diverted from GSI installations

Implementation:

The City of Kalamazoo shall make Complete Streets practices a routine part of everyday operations including but not limited to site plan review, maintenance activities, and after action evaluation.

The City of Kalamazoo will train pertinent city staff and decision-makers on the content of Complete Streets principles and best practices for implementing policy through workshops, professional development opportunities, and other appropriate means;

The City of Kalamazoo shall review and either revise or develop proposed revisions to all appropriate planning documents (master plans, street design guides, landscape, open space and recreation plan, etc.), zoning and subdivision codes, laws, procedures, rules, regulations, guidelines, programs, and templates to integrate Complete Streets principles into all Right-of-Way Projects on and off streets that carry pedestrians, bicyclists, equestrians, and motor vehicles; and include guidance from the 2025 Master Plan Street Classifications.

The City of Kalamazoo shall develop and maintain a comprehensive inventory of pedestrian and bicycle facility infrastructure that will prioritize projects to eliminate gaps in the sidewalk and bikeway network in the city's graphical information system (GIS). Every five years, during the City Master Plan review, the Non-Motorized Plan shall be reviewed and updated by the community.

The City of Kalamazoo will evaluate Capital Improvement Projects prioritization to encourage implementation of Complete Streets.

The City of Kalamazoo will utilize inter-departmental coordination to promote the most responsible and efficient use of resources for activities within the right of way.

The City of Kalamazoo will seek out appropriate sources of funding and grants for implementation of Complete Streets policies.

COMPLETING MICHIGAN'S STREETS

By Jennifer Eberbach

A growing initiative to “Complete Streets” nationwide has Michigan thinking about the value of adopting pedestrian and bicycle-friendly policies and improving the infrastructure for non-motorized transportation. The nationwide movement, which is being fueled by the National Complete Streets Coalition, contends that improving safety conditions and accessibility for walkers and bikers can solve traffic problems, encourage a healthier lifestyle, protect the environment, and increase foot traffic to many types of downtown businesses. The mantra could be, “what’s good for walkers is good for business.”

In 2009, two cities in Michigan got the ball rolling toward implementing Complete Streets practices. Lansing joined the fray of cities nationwide that have adopted Complete Streets non-motorized network ordinances, and this month it will be the first city in Michigan to present a draft of a Complete Streets network plan. Mt. Pleasant is also utilizing the Complete Streets model in a road reconstruction project that aims to slow traffic and make downtown more accessible to walkers and bikers.

The Complete Streets concept has also reached the desks of Michigan’s state legislators, who are considering the value of raising the bar statewide. Proponents of creating more walkable communities and supporting alternatives to motorized travel are working to get a bill passed that would require the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to work with communities across the state to implement Complete Streets best practices.

Completing the Picture in Michigan’s Capital

As the Complete Streets model is being mulled over by state legislators, Lansing’s Transportation and Parking Office and the Lansing Master Plan Team are preparing to be the first city in Michigan to present a draft of a Complete Streets Network Plan.

Support for a more walkable, bike-friendly Lansing grew from grassroots public engagement, spurred along by the Walk and Bike Lansing! Task Force. This is a partnership between the Mid-Michigan Environmental Action Council and Michigan Complete Streets community organizers, including the League of Michigan Bicyclists and the Michigan Environmental Council. Proponents of Lansing’s ordinance united under

Complete Streets’ mission, arguing for increased safety conditions for walkers and bikers, environmentally friendly alternatives to motorized traffic, improved traffic conditions, and healthier people. More than 100 volunteers collected over 4,500 signatures in order to petition for Complete Streets policy making. In August 2009, when the ordinance was on the table, residents in Lansing were impassioned by the cause—writing letters to Lansing City Council and speaking up at public meetings.



Complete streets mean including bicyclists in the street equation. Photo by Jhenifer Pabillano.

The Lansing City Council adopted the Lansing Complete Streets Ordinance, in a unanimous decision, on August 17, 2009. According to the ordinance, required improvements to Lansing’s non-motorized network include “at a minimum, accommodations for accessibility, sidewalks, curb ramps and cuts, trails and pathways, signage, and bike lanes, and shall incorporate principles of Complete Streets and maximize walkable and bikeable streets within the city.” It also requires, “to the extent financially feasible, future construction or reconstruction of city rights of way or any part thereof shall be in conformity with the non-motorized network plan.” Lansing will update the plan every five years.

Another significant impact of the ordinance will be an increased minimum requirement for state transportation fund allocation in Lansing. Michigan law currently requires that a minimum of 1 percent of state funds be allocated to non-motorized networks, like bike lanes and sidewalks. Before adopting the Complete Streets Ordinance, Lansing was already spending more than the state required, about 2 percent. The new plan will raise the bar to 5 percent.

Making Mt. Pleasant More Pleasant for Walking and Biking

The city of Mt. Pleasant decided to incorporate Complete Streets principles into the reconstruction of Michigan Street, which is scheduled for the summer of 2010. The decision follows the city's unanimous decision, in October 2009, to reject MDOT's recommendation to address a high accident rate and congestion by banning left-hand turns at the corner of Mission and Broomfield Streets and putting in "Michigan Lefts."

Concluding that MDOT's solution was not the best option for the commercial neighborhood, the city found a solution that they argue is more conducive to their master plan for the city's design. Improved safety conditions for walkers and bicyclists will include "narrower driving lanes, new bike lanes, 'bump out' parking areas (also known as designated parallel parking areas), and wider sidewalks," in order to slow motorized traffic and make the streets safer and more convenient for pedestrians and bicyclists, according to the city of Mt. Pleasant.

Taking it to the Streets, and the State

Complete Streets legislation at the state level proposes that "a transportation network that provides active options for people holds many benefits," including improving public health, according to a resolution put forth in December 2009. Efforts to create Complete Streets legislation, by proponents like Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan, have contended that an "active transportation infrastructure" will support a healthy lifestyle, and reduce childhood obesity.

The proposed legislation also takes the stance that a well-planned non-motorized network increases "safety" for walkers and bikers, "reduces pollution, and holds great potential for revitalizing communities and spurring economic development."

As communities and lawmakers in Michigan endeavor to put Complete Streets concepts into practice, now is the perfect time to get educated about the benefits of non-motorized traffic networks. The Complete Streets initiative seeks to define a new standard. Every community has



Complete streets are designed and operated so they work for all users—pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders. Photos by Matt Bach.

different needs and each must approach physical design and transportation planning from their own, unique perspective, however, the Complete Streets initiative supposes that everyone can be doing more to encourage environmentally conscious, safe, healthy and active modes of travel.

Follow these links to find out more:

National Complete Streets Coalition <http://www.completestreets.org/>

Michigan Complete Streets <http://michigancompletestreets.wordpress.com/>

Bike Walk Lansing! <http://www.walkbikelansing.com/>



Jennifer Eberbach is a freelance journalist and professional copywriter. You may contact her at 734-929-2964 or jen@jenthewriter.info. Visit her online at www.jenthewriter.info.