



Blair County Planning Commission
Complete Streets Policy

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Table of Contents

Preamble 3
Vision Statement 3
Rationale for Complete Streets 3
Health 4
Safety 4
Environment 5
Fiscal Impact 5
Exemptions 5
Objectives and Guiding Principles: 5
Action Items: 6

Preamble

The term complete street means designing, building and operating the streets to routinely accommodate safe travel by all modes and all people. A complete street serves everyone who travels, be it by driving, walking, bicycling, riding transit or other means while connecting to a larger transportation network. People of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across streets, regardless of how they are traveling. Complete streets are essential for access by people who cannot drive. Streets without safe access for non-motorized transportation represent a barrier for people who use wheelchairs, and for older adults and children. A complete street may look quite different on different sides of the same city, but are designed to balance safety, access and mobility for everyone using the street.

The Blair County Planning Commission recognizes the need for complete streets and will accommodate elements that create a complete street where possible. Some of the elements under consideration for inclusion on a complete street can be sidewalks, shared use paths, bike lanes, fewer travel lanes, narrower lane widths, improved street crossings, bump outs, pedestrian signals, signs, street furniture, street trees, and transit shelters, access and facilities. All designs should be context-sensitive to meet the needs of the community and surrounding area while emphasizing safe and accessible travel for all people.

Every city, state and federally funded transportation improvement and project phase should be approached as an opportunity to create safer, more accessible streets for all users. Project phases include planning, programming, design, right-of-way acquisition, construction, construction engineering, reconstruction, and operations as well as any change to transportation facilities within street rights-of-way such as capital improvements, re-channelization projects, and major maintenance.

Vision Statement

Region-wide attention is being given to the concept of complete streets, which impacts the safety, health and vibrancy of our communities. The Blair County Planning Commission Complete Streets Policy will encourage the development of a complete streets network throughout the community to create a more balanced transportation system. The Complete Streets Policy shall be consistent with, and assist in achieving the goals and recommendations set forth in the Comprehensive Plan and other policy documents. The Policy shall ensure that new and updated public and private projects are planned, designed, maintained and operated to enable safe, comfortable and convenient travel to the greatest extent possible for users of all ages and abilities including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders.

Rationale for Complete Streets

The integration of land use and transportation is critical to the livability of a community and region. In a highly competitive global economy, regions and communities must learn to address each in a balanced manner to maintain a high quality of life for existing and future residents, business and visitors. New and existing residents and employees have an expectation for a high quality of life, which often includes a walkable, bikeable and vibrant community. Incorporating complete streets into a community can assist in achieving this high quality of life.

“Complete street” designs are a routine approach for accommodating all travel modes for all users, regardless of age or ability. This results in a balanced transportation system providing choices of where people can go and how they can get there. Complete streets may include elements such as defined pedestrian and bicycles spaces, street trees and benches, pedestrian scaled lighting, and transit stop shelters. These elements allow people to safely walk to the library, take the bus to the grocery store or bike to the park. They also enable seniors in our communities to “age in place.” Complete Streets

elements have the capacity to increase bicycle, pedestrian and transit use of the street system, which would positively impact the physical health and safety of the community, the environmental quality of our neighborhoods and the economic vitality of the region.

This Complete Streets Policy is not about building sidewalks and bicycle lanes on every street. It is not about massive takings of rights of way. It is about site-specific planning decisions that help to reconfigure existing road space in a manner that better accommodates the needs of users. Sometimes, it's as simple as moving the white line to create more space on the shoulder, or making sure the crosswalk light stays on long enough for an older pedestrian to get across the road.

Health

Public health officials have become increasingly aware of our nation's declining physical fitness and the resulting increase in diseases such as diabetes and obesity.ⁱ Much research has been conducted to identify a link between auto-dependent sprawl and an increase in sedentary lifestyle diseases. Research indicates that countries that invest in a more inclusive transportation system (biking, walking, transit, and buggies) have higher rates of bicycling and walking, lower rates of obesity, and better overall health. It is believed that the most practical and effective way to improve public fitness is to increase walking and bicycling.ⁱⁱ

The people of Blair County overwhelming identified obesity as the number one issue facing the County today – more urgent than jobs, potholes, and government services. Walking, biking, and transit use can decrease the risk of diseases related to inactivity such as asthma, hypertension and obesity. In addition to their health benefits to individuals, walking and biking decrease automobile dependence, in turn improving air quality and the overall health of the environment we live in.

Safety

A generation ago, walking and bicycling to school or work was a common practice. Today, however, the number of people walking and bicycling to local destinations has dwindled. A major factor in this trend is a concern for safety. Recent Department of Transportation statistics note that 743 pedestrians were killed on Pennsylvania streets in the three years from 2008-2012. 75 of these fatalities were in Blair County. From 2008-2012, there were 22,192 pedestrian injuries in Pennsylvania. Providing well-defined pedestrian and bicycle facilities coupled with an educational program is a way to help address the safety concerns often raised. The following data paint a bleak picture in Pennsylvania:ⁱⁱⁱ

- Pedestrian/vehicle crashes account for 3.3 percent of all reported crashes, but are responsible for 13.9 percent of all traffic crash deaths.
- The number of pedestrian/vehicle crashes substantially decreased in 2014 from what they were in 2010, but the number of fatalities increased.
- More injuries and deaths occurred when pedestrians were entering the roadway or crossing a street at a specified location such as an intersection, driveway entrance or mid-block crossing area than an unmarked area.
- Male pedestrians are more likely to be killed or severely injured than females with men making up 66 percent of all pedestrian deaths.
- Pedestrians are more likely to be injured during daylight hours, but more likely to be killed during evening and non-daylight hours.
- Most injuries and deaths occurred when pedestrians were crossing roads where there were no traffic control devices contributing to 122 deaths and 2,066 injuries.
- Senior citizen pedestrians are involved in fewer accidents, but are more likely to be killed when they are involved in an accident.

Environment

Increased greenhouse gas levels are negatively impacting the earth. Transportation accounts for 34% of greenhouse gases and for every gallon of gasoline burned, 20 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions is produced.^{iv} The auto-centric manner in which our communities have grown is a critical factor supporting the consumption of carbon-based fuels in the U.S. Implementing a complete streets policy can have a positive impact on our environment by reducing the community's reliance on a vehicular mode of transport and offering viable transportation options such as walking, bicycling and public transit.

Fiscal Impact

Designing complete streets is not additional work for planners, architects and engineers; it is different work. The practitioners of these disciplines have in the past been asked to solve a particular problem—namely, safely and efficiently moving the maximum number of cars past a given point in the shortest time. The Complete Streets Policy simply redefines the problem. Under this Policy, these professionals are required to use their knowledge and skills to design roads and a road network that safely and efficiently move all users, motorized and non-motorized. The fiscal impact is mitigated by the use of updated planning practices, prevention of delays in the design process and elimination of the need for costly retrofits.

The costs associated with the routine inclusion of all transportation modes generally represent a small percentage of a community's overall budget. Infrastructure costs are reduced by requiring less pavement per user, which in turn reduces long-term maintenance costs. The resources that are spent equate into a long-term investment in the financial and physical health of Blair County residents.

Additionally, the choices that can result from a complete streets policy can improve and maintain the economic vitality as well as support the economic vibrancy of Blair County. Our downtown areas can continue to be a target for growth and to support tourism in the region. Streets accommodating pedestrian and bicycle activity are welcoming and encourage residents and visitors to linger at local businesses, providing an important contribution to the tax base.

Exemptions

Where the government or a private developer decides that accommodating all users is impractical or burdensome, they may document their determination to be exempt from the policy's requirements. This documentation will be filled out and posted for each new street and sidewalk project. It lists who the decision makers are on the project, and the ways in which all users were accommodated, or the reasons they were not.

Objectives and Guiding Principles:

- A. Incorporate locally sensitive "best practices" from United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials, Institute of Transportation Engineers, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Americans with Disabilities Act, Centers for Disease Control and other appropriate entities to enable citizens to safely travel by all transportation modes, including bicycling, walking, transit ridership, and buggies.
- B. Promote the safe use of our multi-modal transportation system by increasing the awareness of all users through appropriate educational programming and literature.
- C. Reinforce collaboration with partners at the local, school district, county, state and federal levels to ensure appropriate connectivity for all travel modes.

Action Items:

Short-Term

1. The Blair County Planning Commission shall appoint a Complete Streets Advisory Committee to provide input on public projects to further this complete streets philosophy. The Board will be solely advisory in nature and will consist of seven members, ideally one from each planning region. The Committee will meet a minimum of twice per year and on an as-needed basis or at the inception of public transportation projects within Blair County.
2. Promote the safe use of an inclusive transportation system by increasing the awareness of all users through an appropriate educational program. The Complete Streets Advisory Committee could lead this effort with assistance from the planning staff, local organizations, and the school districts. Planning staff shall attend periodic workshops and training to remain well-informed of changes in the field.
3. Develop a "complete streets" checklist for all public projects undertaken within Blair County to be reviewed by the Complete Streets Advisory Committee during the project planning and design phase. The checklist may also be included in applications for the review of private development projects. The Complete Streets Advisory Committee, in conjunction with the planning staff and municipalities, will develop the checklist.

Mid-Term

4. Conduct a complete streets audit examining the accessibility, safety, connectivity and quality of place for an area in Blair County that includes key community features and destinations. The planning staff will lead this effort in coordination with the municipalities. This information could be incorporated into a complete streets gap analysis map and a future Bicycle, Pedestrian and Public Transit Plan.
5. Complete a Bicycle, Pedestrian and Public Transit Plan including a map, illustrating gaps in pedestrian, bicycle and transit friendly components. The results of the complete street audit could be the basis for this plan and could assist in identifying complete streets needs and priorities within the City. Such a plan may also include recommendations for enforcement throughout the City related to complete streets.
6. Encourage and assist the Blair County municipalities in adopting appropriate Complete Streets policies reflecting the needs of each individual community.

Long-Term

7. Coordinate with the school districts to achieve shared goals related to Safe Routes to School. The Blair County Planning Commission Complete Streets Policy will ideally result in a fully-connected transportation network for all modes of transportation. While not every street can be designed perfectly for every user, the development of Safe Routes to School will allow for "an interwoven array" of streets which adequately serve all modes of transit.
8. Identify current regulations within the current regulatory structure which are consistent with a "complete streets" approach to roadway and streetscape development. Provide recommendations to further enhance guidelines and requirements for private development projects. Also identify possible amendments that can further support complete streets.

i Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, Healthy Blair County Coalition, 2016

ii "If Health Matters: Integrating Public Health Objectives in transportation Planning." Todd Litman. Victoria Transport Policy Institute. Aug. 2009.

iii "Pennsylvania Pedestrian Accident Statistics," Solnick & Associates, LLC, 3/21/2016

iv "Growing Cooler: Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change." Reid Ewing, et al. Urban Land Institute.