

# Complete Streets: Making Roads Safe and Accessible for All Users

## *Focus: Underserved Communities*



## Transportation: At the Center of Civil Rights

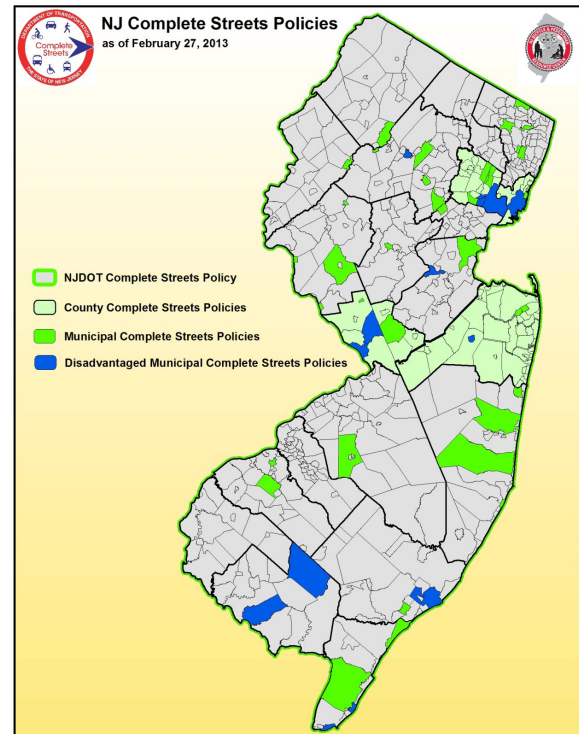
For decades, advocates for low-income people and communities of color have pushed to reform our nation's transportation policy. Whether it was Rosa Parks being arrested on a Montgomery bus, the Freedom Riders who challenged state segregation laws by riding public transportation in the South, or the role that busing played in school desegregation—transportation has long been a fundamental arena for civil rights and economic justice advocacy.<sup>1</sup>

Transportation is the second largest expense for American households, after housing, costing more than food, clothing and health care, and transportation costs continue to rise. By the early 2000s, Americans spent an average of 18 cents of every dollar earned on transportation, with the poorest fifth of families spending more than double that figure. This is largely due to the high cost of car ownership and the lack of viable public transit and active transportation alternatives.<sup>2</sup>

Today, millions of Americans continue to face basic mobility challenges. Too many neighborhoods across the nation lack quality public transit and walking and bicycling infrastructure that promotes community health and environmental sustainability. Due to lack of infrastructure, traffic safety is a big concern and urban communities with more racial and ethnic minority and lower-income residents generally lack specific features that support walking, such as clean and well-maintained sidewalks, trees and nice scenery, and connectivity.<sup>3</sup>

## Complete Streets: Making All Transportation Investments Serve All People

On average, only one to two percent of state and local transportation budgets are devoted to building and maintaining sidewalks, bike lanes, pathways, crosswalks and other facilities for active travel. Complete streets



Map provided by the NJ Complete Streets Working Group and the Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University

policies results in state and local transportation and planning agencies ensuring that the other 98-99 percent of transportation funds will also consider the needs of people walking, bicycling and taking transit.

The term 'complete streets' was first coined in the U.S. in 2003, and is part of an older international movement to increase roadway access and safety for everyone. Complete streets are designed and operated to enable safe, attractive, and comfortable access and travel for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, the disabled, motorists and public transport users of all ages and abilities.<sup>4</sup>

### Transform Existing Streets Into Complete Streets

*Complete Streets policies are not just about building new roads and communities, they are largely about simple resurfacing and maintenance of existing roadways to accommodate safer street crossings, signage and improved striping which benefits pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users.*

# SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

## Complete Streets: Making Roads Safe and Accessible for All Users

### Focus: Underserved Communities

In 2012 nearly 130 communities adopted new Complete Streets policies. These laws, resolutions, executive orders, policies, and planning and design documents encourage and provide safe access to destinations for everyone, regardless of age, ability, income, ethnicity or how they travel. At the end of 2012, there were 488 Complete Streets policies in place nationwide, at all levels of government. Statewide policies are in place in 27 states as well as the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. Forty-two regional planning organizations, 38 counties and 379 municipalities in 48 states now allow everyone, no matter how they travel, to safely use the roadway.<sup>5</sup>

## Road Diet: One Solution

One way to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists is to decrease the width of the road and number of lanes that they must cross, while also adding bike lanes. This has a relatively low cost and is an easy fix for a street with low car traffic volumes.

The cost of restriping a four-lane street to one lane in each direction, a two-way left-turn lane, and bicycle lanes is about \$5,000 to \$20,000 per mile, depending on the number of lane-lines that must be repainted. The cost of adding sidewalks and raised medians is higher, averaging \$100,000 per mile or more.<sup>6</sup> But these numbers still pale in comparison to building road lanes for motorized vehicles. An urban two-lane street averages \$6 million per mile, and the cost to construct one lane-mile of a typical four-lane divided highway can range from \$3.1 million to \$9.1 million in rural areas and \$4.9 million to an extreme of \$74.7 million in dense urban areas for each lane-mile!<sup>7</sup>

## References

<sup>1</sup> *Advancing Social and Economic Equity through the Surface Transportation Authorization*, Policylink, Transportation for America, [http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35af0%7D/SEE%20CAUCUS%20BRIEFING%20PAPER\\_FINAL\\_4-7-10.PDF](http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35af0%7D/SEE%20CAUCUS%20BRIEFING%20PAPER_FINAL_4-7-10.PDF)

<sup>2</sup> *Lower Transportation Costs fact sheet*, Smart Growth America; National Complete Streets Coalition, <http://tstc.org/reports/licsbx/cs-individuals.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *Do All Children Have Places to be Active?* Active Living Research Fact Sheet, [http://alrstaging.commonmediainc.com/files/Synthesis\\_Disparities\\_Factsheet\\_May2012.pdf](http://alrstaging.commonmediainc.com/files/Synthesis_Disparities_Factsheet_May2012.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Clifton, Kelly; Bronstein, Sarah; Morrissey, Sara. *The Path to Complete Streets in Underserved Communities- Lessons from U.S. Case Studies*, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/resources/complete-streets-in-underserved-communities.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Seskin, Stefanie; Gordon-Koven, Lily. *The Best Complete Street Policies of 2012*, Smart Growth America National Complete Streets Coalition, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs-2012-policy-analysis.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *Pedestrian Facilities Users Guide Publication No. FHWA-RD-01-102*, US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration March 2002, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/infrastructure/pavements/ltp/01102/01102.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> *Rails-to-Trails: What is the Cost of Constructing a Highway Mile?* <http://www.railstotrails.org/resources/documents/whatwedo/policy/07-29-2008%20Generic%20Response%20to%20Cost%20per%20Lane%20Mile%20for%20widening%20and%20new%20construction.pdf>

## Examples From New Jersey

In Trenton, NJ, 30 percent of residents do not own a car, 31 percent of residents live below the poverty level, and 36 percent of children live below the poverty level. The NJ Safe Routes to School Network Project launched in January 2012 and joined the NJ Complete Streets Working Group to promote Complete Streets policies statewide. In March 2012 a coalition of community organizations and residents worked with the city of Trenton to pass a Complete Streets policy which was just declared one of the top ten best policies in the nation.



Left: New Warren Street bike lane in Trenton, NJ  
Right: New crosswalk at Olden/N Clinton in Trenton, NJ  
Photos: Trenton Cycling Revolution

## Policy Language: Trenton, NJ

*"Recognizing the inter-connected multi-modal network of street grid, the City of Trenton will work with Mercer County, the Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission, traffic consultant AECOM and state agencies through existing planning efforts to ensure complete streets principles are incorporated in a context sensitive manner."*