

SAFE ROUTES TO PARKS IN COMPLETE STREETS POLICIES



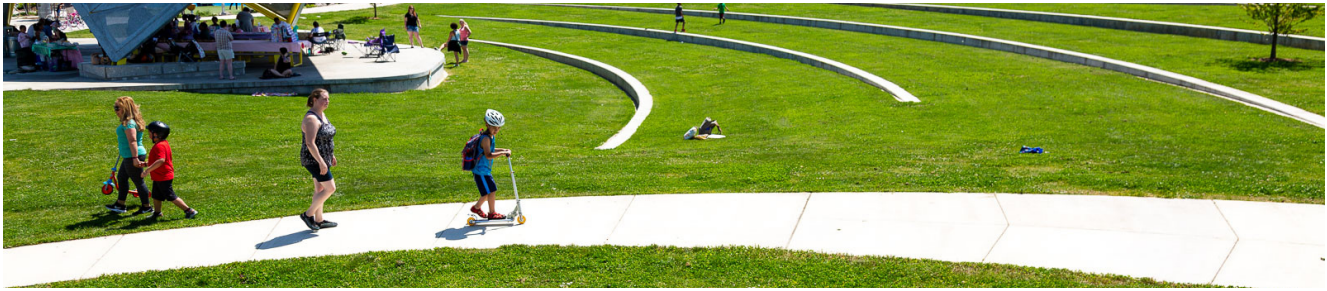
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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes the best way to get something done is to get a commitment, in writing, that it will happen. That's why including Safe Routes to Parks priorities in documents like Complete Streets policies can be an effective strategy to implement and ensure the sustainability of Safe Routes to Parks efforts. Asking your city to take on Safe Routes to Parks as a standalone initiative may be daunting and even out of the question for overcommitted staff with limited funding. Instead, you can find ways that Safe Routes to Parks goals can align with a variety of other transportation and health priorities. This fact sheet will offer suggestions for how to incorporate Safe Routes to Parks strategies and priorities into Complete Streets policies and implementation.

Incorporating Safe Routes to Parks priorities into Complete Streets policies can help shape daily operations and funding decisions, drastically increasing the likelihood of sustainable funding and consistent implementation. This integrated approach also allows advocates and city staff to use funding and staff time more efficiently to reach mutual goals. Specific priorities and policies will vary based on your community, so take time to understand what elected leadership and city staff are focusing on. Show them that these priorities all support a common goal of a healthy, equitable, and thriving community.

WHAT IS A COMPLETE STREETS POLICY?

Complete Streets policies demonstrate a commitment to consider all modes of travel, especially walking and rolling, during the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of our transportation networks.¹ Complete Streets policies can come in a variety of forms: ordinances or resolutions adopted at the state or local level; executive orders adopted by elected officials; or policy of the jurisdiction's department of transportation.² Find out if your city or state has a Complete Streets Policy by looking at [this map](#) from the National Complete Streets Coalition.



HOW COMPLETE STREETS POLICIES CAN SUPPORT SAFE ROUTES TO PARKS

Many communities across the United States are built for people to safely and efficiently move from place to place in a car and unsafe for people who are walking or rolling. Complete Streets policies are a means to change this default way of designing transportation networks. Although Complete Streets policies can have varying levels of enforceability, at a minimum, they demonstrate a commitment to consider users other than people using cars in decision-making. Strong Complete Streets policies can change the process of building, maintaining, and retrofitting roads so that they are safe and convenient for people using active modes of transportation, especially in the communities that need that investment the most.

The following pages will highlight three strategies communities can use to ensure that Complete Streets policies improve connections to local parks for people walking, rolling, and taking transit.



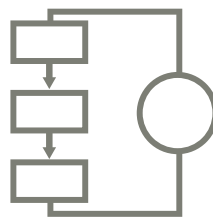
Photo: Bri Covington

Three Ways to Connect Parks and Complete Streets



Project Prioritization

Allocate resources to projects that address disparities built into communities of color and low-income communities.



Process Changes

Align goals and schedules with city departments such as public works, parks & rec, and transportation.



Performance Measures

Coordinate measures of success with community-identified goals.

I. Project Prioritization

Allocate greater priority to projects and funding that addresses the disparities built into communities of color and low-income neighborhoods because of years of underinvestment and disinvestment. People walking and biking in these communities are at a significantly higher risk of injury and fatality due to lack of supportive infrastructure for walking and biking and far less likely to have safe access to local parks.³

In their guide, [Elements of a Complete Streets Policy](#), the National Complete Streets Coalition recommends specifically identifying and prioritizing “vulnerable users” based on community composition and priorities.⁴ Advocate for a project selection process that automatically and consistently prioritizes safe infrastructure for active transportation and transit along the routes between important destinations like parks, grocery stores, and schools in communities that need it most. These networks can also include trails that connect points of interest. This project prioritization guidance can be included directly in the Complete Streets policy. However, if the project prioritization and selection process are not spelled out in the Complete Streets policy, it will typically be the role of the department of public works or a similar department to develop one. Connect with them to learn about how they prioritize and select projects and what could be incorporated to advance safety and access goals.

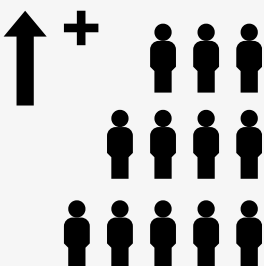


PROJECT PRIORITIZATION IN ACTION



Prioritize important connections

Sioux Falls, South Dakota’s Complete Streets policy sets guidance to prioritize street improvements on specific corridors during the project development process. This includes corridors to “significant destinations” such as parks, schools, commercial areas, and employment centers. This early consideration of the roadway context helps fill gaps in the network to everyday destinations.



Prioritize populations that need investment

Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) identified Environmental Justice areas based on seven metrics: nonwhite population, car-less households, households in poverty, single heads of households with children, households with person(s) over 65, limited English proficiency (LEP), and persons with a disability.⁵ In 2018, The City of Des Moines then adopted that Environmental Justice area map as a part of their project prioritization process.



II. Process Changes

Advocate for city departments (public works, transportation, and parks and recreation) to publish maintenance and project schedules so that all of the city departments can align their work. If they coordinate capital and maintenance projects, they can save money on operational costs by working on the same portion of the transportation network at the same time. Typically, these departments have major projects planned years in advance, but many do not currently coordinate internally. If these schedules are not publicly available, contact these departments to ask about the documents and why they are not easily accessible.

Committees that review projects and implementation for the Complete Streets policy should include a representative from parks and recreation as well as representatives that can offer a public health perspective and speak to other specific community concerns. The parks and recreation representative, acting as a liaison from their department to other city departments, can bring content knowledge on trails as connections between everyday destinations and potential programming to advance the jurisdiction's Complete Streets work during community engagement and other implementation activities.

PROCESS CHANGES IN ACTION

Figure out the repaving schedule

In Birmingham, Alabama, two neighborhoods with rich histories of Black residents, small business enclaves, and churches are very close to Memorial Park. The park has great amenities, but there was virtually no bicycle infrastructure that allowed people to safely ride to the park. REV Birmingham, a non-profit community development organization, saw an opportunity to leverage the city's new Complete Streets policy to advocate for safer bike routes. They reviewed the paving plans and schedules to identify opportunities where bike improvements could be made to connect these neighborhoods to the thriving park. Two years later, when the city repaved a portion of that corridor, they striped a bike lane and narrowed the travel lanes to slow car travel.



III. Performance Measures

Align measurements of success with community-identified goals. Do not limit measurement to measuring infrastructure, such as how many miles of sidewalks are installed. Although that is an important indicator of progress on infrastructure improvements, there are a variety of other process changes that are going to be crucial for increasing safety, equity, and access. For example, if community engagement is a stated priority, measure both the quality and quantity of engagement throughout all of the phases of transportation projects. Measure participation and whether it is representative of the communities affected by the projects and policy decisions. Record whether community input was integrated into projects and policies. Work with department staff to find specific measures that are not going to overwhelm staff members tasked with implementation and make sure that measurement is incorporated into budgets and timelines.



TIP: Begin with the end. It can be overwhelming to figure out measurable outcomes for a variety of outcomes that go beyond simple-to-measure infrastructure improvements. Work with community members and department staff to identify what success could look like. Then, work backward to identify potential ways to measure progress toward that end goal.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES IN ACTION

Use multiple categories to measure success

In their 2019 [Complete Streets policy](#), The City of Tucson, Arizona included recommended performance measures for the following categories: changes to the transportation planning process, new Complete Streets investments and community benefits by project and in the long-term. They recommend a variety of measurements such as the percentage of staff trained in Complete Streets principles, change in shade tree canopy incorporated in transportation projects, and changes in the perceived quality of life of residents in neighborhoods adjacent to implemented projects.⁶ This variety of measurements sets them up for a more well-rounded understanding of how well their Complete Streets initiatives are matching up with their goals.





Photo: Cultiva La Salud



Photo: Living Streets Alliance

CONCLUSION

Incorporating Safe Routes to Parks into policy, even if it is not specifically focused on Safe Routes to Parks, is a great way to move toward implementing improvements that increase safety and equitable access. This will also open opportunities to collaborate with existing initiatives and allies who share the same vision of safe, equitable access to everyday destinations.

References

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