

The Complete Streets Act of 2008 (S. 2686)

What the Bill Does:

The Complete Streets Act of 2008 would add a provision to Title 23 to ensure that future transportation investments made by state Departments of Transportation and Metropolitan Planning Organizations create appropriate and safe transportation facilities for all those using the road – motorists, transit vehicles and riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

More than 50 jurisdictions spanning all regions of the country have adopted complete streets policies that direct transportation planners to consider the needs of all users when transportation investment decisions are made. They ensure streets don't create barriers for children, disabled users, older persons, or those who do not drive. They make sure that roads are designed and updated to allow everyone to travel safely.

The Complete Streets Act of 2008 builds on these existing successful state and local policies to define effective complete streets policies, and to direct state DOTs and MPOs to adopt such policies and apply them to upcoming transportation projects. The bill also authorizes needed research and dissemination of complete streets best practices.

The Complete Streets Act of 2008 was introduced by Senators Harkin and Carper and has been referred to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

The Benefits of Complete Streets

Complete Streets **fight climate change** and **reduce our dependence on foreign oil**– they are essential if we are serious about helping people drive less and **save money on gas**. The 2001 National Household Transportation Survey reveals that 50% of all trips in metropolitan areas are three miles or less, 28% of all metropolitan trips are one mile or less – distances easily traversed by foot or bicycle. Yet 65 percent of those trips under one mile are now made by automobile, in part because of incomplete streets that make it dangerous or unpleasant to walk, bicycle, or take transit. Complete streets policies should be an element of the nation's strategy for addressing climate change and energy security. As gas prices rise, complete streets help people avoid the pain at the pump.

Complete streets **improve pedestrian safety**. About one-third of Americans do not drive, including an increasing number of seniors and low income Americans who cannot afford cars. Yet just like everyone else, they require access to a variety of other transportation options in order to get to work, school, shops and medical visits, and to take part in social, civic and volunteer activities. In 2006, nearly one quarter of pedestrian fatalities were children (8 percent) and older adults (15 percent)¹. Designing the street with pedestrians in mind -- sidewalks, raised medians, better bus stop placement, traffic-calming measures, and treatments for disabled travelers -- may reduce pedestrian risk by as much as 28%².

Complete streets can help **increase the capacity of the transportation network** by giving people more choices. The Texas Transportation Institute found that providing more travel options, including public transportation, bicycling and walking facilities, are important elements in reducing congestion³.

Complete Streets direct **a better use of taxpayer dollars**. In Illinois, the statewide complete streets law was passed last year to avoid unnecessary expense. Lawmakers had heard the story of a bridge near Cary, Illinois that was built without any safe way to cross it via foot or bicycle. After several deaths, and a successful wrongful-death lawsuit filed by the parents of a teenager killed on the bridge, the state DOT had to go back at great expense and retrofit the existing bridge, adding a path to the span. It would have far less expensive to do it right, the first time.

Complete streets **encourage healthy and active lifestyles**. One study found that 43% of people with safe places to walk within 10 minutes of home met recommended activity levels, while just 27% of those lacking safe options were active enough⁴. Nearly one third of transit users meet the Surgeon General's daily activity recommendations just through their routine travels⁵.

Groups supporting federal complete streets policies:

AARP	National Association of REALTORS
America Bikes	National Center for Bicycling and Walking
America Walks	National Recreation and Parks Association
American Planning Association	Natural Resources Defense Council
American Public Transportation Association	Rails to Trails Conservancy
American Society of Landscape Architects	Reconnecting America
Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals	Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Bikes Belong	Smart Growth America
Campaign to End Obesity	Surface Transportation Policy Partnership
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund	Thunderhead Alliance
Easter Seals	Transportation Equity Network
Environmental Defense	Transport Worker's Union
Friends of the Earth	Trust for America's Health
League of American Bicyclists	U.S. Public Interest Research Group
	YMCA of the USA

¹ Fatality Analysis Reporting System, Bureau of Transportation Statistics

² King, MR, Carnegie, JA, Ewing, R. (2003) *Pedestrian Safety Through a Raised Median and Redesigned Intersections*, Transportation Research Board 1828 pp 56-66

³ Schrank, D. and Lomax, T. (2005) *Urban Mobility Report*. Texas Transportation Institute.

⁴ Powell, K.E., Martin, L., & Chowdhury, P.P. (2003). Places to walk: convenience and regular physical activity. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93, 1519-1521.

⁵ Besser, L. M. and A. L. Dannenberg (2005). *Walking to public transit steps to help meet physical activity recommendations*. *American Journal Of Preventive Medicine* 29(4): 273-280.