

Issue Brief

COMPLETE STREETS *Venues for Safety and Wellness in Kentucky*

Everyone needs to be able to travel safely on roads in their communities. However, many roads are built with only drivers of cars or trucks in mind, making streets difficult and often dangerous for bicyclists, pedestrians, and public transportation users to navigate safely. Children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities are particularly vulnerable on Kentucky roads as they commonly walk, bicycle, or utilize public transportation. Implementing a complete streets approach in a community is one solution to increase roadway safety and encourage active living.



Complete streets accommodate all users of the road

Complete streets are designed to accommodate everyone using the road, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation users of all ages and abilities.¹ Complete streets may include sidewalks, bike lanes, wide paved shoulders, bus lanes, crosswalks, and/or pedestrian signals. However, implementing complete streets does not mean that every road must have a sidewalk or bike lane. Streets have various types of users depending on the geographic area where they are located, so there is not one concrete description of a complete street. In rural areas, for example, a wide paved shoulder may constitute a complete street. On the other hand, complete streets in urban areas may require more elements such as bike lanes and sidewalks.

Communities experience many benefits of complete streets

- **Increased Safety** – Elements such as sidewalks and wide paved shoulders enable bicyclists and pedestrians to travel securely. Complete streets also increase motorists' awareness of other users of the road, making travel safer for everyone. One study found that pedestrian risks are reduced by 28 percent when streets are redesigned to include sidewalks and proper crosswalks at intersections.²
- **Improved Health** – People with safe places to walk in their communities are more likely to meet recommended physical activity levels. In addition, people are more likely to walk in a neighborhood that has sidewalks.^{3,4}
- **Reduced Traffic Congestion** – With alternative transportation options available, fewer motorists will be on the roadway, thus easing traffic. This can also reduce traffic emissions and improve air quality.

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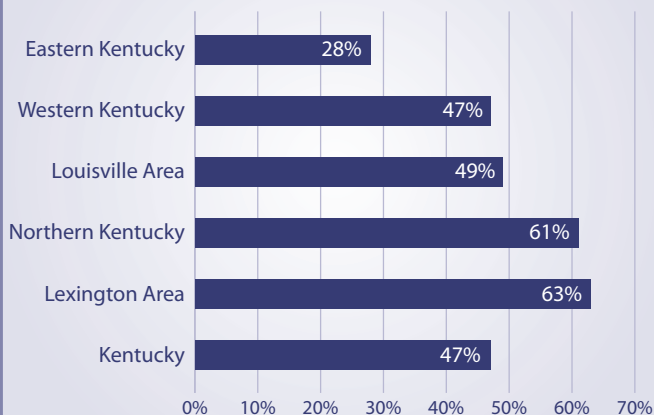
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Opportunities exist to provide safe access for all users of Kentucky roads

Kentucky has made many strides to provide safe access for all users of the road, yet there is more to be done. In 2007, only 72 percent of children living in Kentucky urban areas had sidewalks or walking paths in their neighborhoods, and less than half of children in rural areas did.⁵ A 2010 Kentucky Health Issues Poll revealed that only one in three Kentucky adults felt there were many destinations within walking distance from their homes.⁶ In addition, less than half of Kentucky adults live in communities with elements such as sidewalks or shoulders that allow for safe walking or bicycling.⁷ Results were vastly different in various regions of the state. (See chart below).

Kentucky adults who agree there are sidewalks or shoulders on streets that allow for safe walking, jogging, or bicycling in their community



Source: Kentucky Health Issues Poll, 2010.

According to the 2008 Kentucky Highway User Survey, 58 percent of respondents indicated the need for additional safe pedestrian elements such as sidewalks and crosswalks.⁸ Some 69 percent indicated the need for additional safe bicycle elements such as bike lanes and wide paved shoulders.⁹ Almost half of respondents indicated the need for additional safe elements for children walking to school.¹⁰ There are also close to 8,000 drivers in Kentucky who have “Share the Road” license plates on their vehicles, indicating their support for other users of the road.¹¹

In 2002, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet adopted the Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel Policy Manual, which states that bicycle and pedestrian elements will be considered if certain conditions are met. However, this internal policy does not require that bicyclists and pedestrians be given full consideration in the planning and development of transportation. The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet also included language concerning the need for safety of bicyclists and pedestrians in the 2011-2014 Strategic Highway Safety Plan. While this does not require bicycle and pedestrian elements to be included in road projects, it is a step forward as the previous Kentucky Strategic Highway Safety Plan included no mention of bicycle and pedestrian safety. Complete streets legislation was introduced during the 2008 Kentucky General Assembly and passed the Senate Transportation Committee but was never voted on by the full Senate.

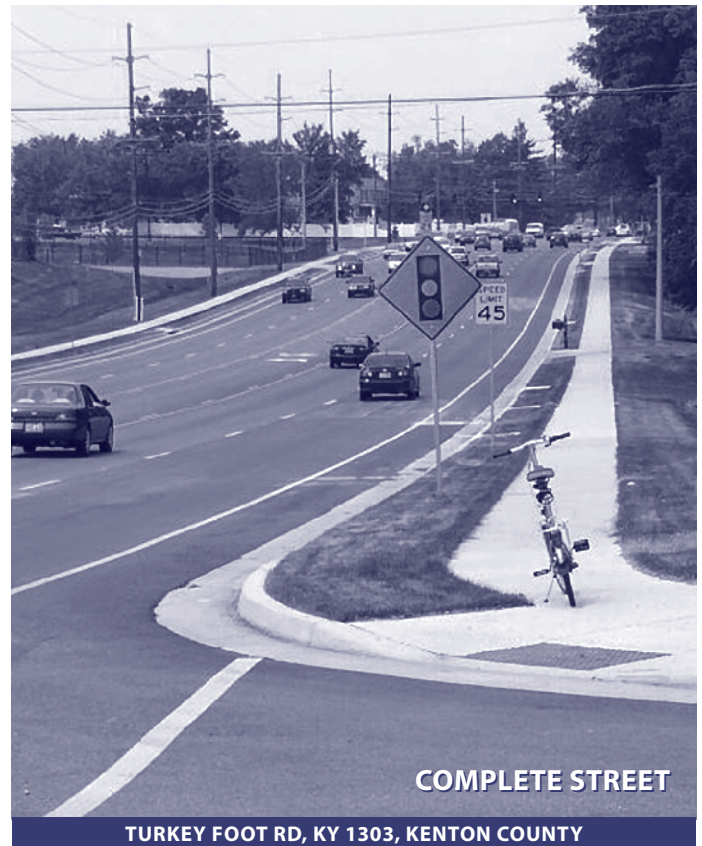
Some communities in Kentucky are joining the complete streets movement. In 2008, Louisville adopted a complete streets ordinance requiring new roadway construction to consider all users. Lexington is in the planning process of adopting a complete streets policy. Although Frankfort does not have a complete streets policy, a local group of advocates produced a Bicycling and Walking Plan. This lays the groundwork and could be a precursor to complete streets. Bowling Green has taken many steps to become bicycle-friendly and is currently working towards recognition as a Bicycle-Friendly Community by the American League of Bicyclists. Both Louisville and Lexington hold this recognition. In addition, other communities across Kentucky such as Ashland are working towards complete streets policies in their communities.

Because Kentucky is primarily a rural state, implementing complete streets across the state will look different than in cities such as Louisville and Lexington. In rural areas, the need is usually for wide paved shoulders to provide pedestrians and bicyclists a safe place to travel. While the design of complete streets will vary, it is important to consider that people walk and bicycle in all parts of the state whether on a busy city street or a rural county road. All people deserve the right to be safe wherever they are traveling.

Complete streets elements can be incorporated inexpensively

When complete streets are included in the early stages of transportation planning and design, there is often little to no cost to implement.¹² The key to implementing complete streets inexpensively is to ensure elements such as bike lanes or crosswalks are included in the original project plan and budget. An important cost-containment strategy is to seize opportunities and implement complete streets incrementally, as a full scale change could take years. For example, incorporating a complete streets approach when new streets are being designed and when existing streets are ready to be resurfaced alleviates expensive retrofit projects to add bicycle and pedestrian elements after a street is constructed.

There are multiple, low-cost measures to help a community develop more complete streets. For example, painting extra stripes at intersections causes drivers to stop sooner which increases safety for pedestrians. In addition, traffic signals can be timed to a desired speed on a street to ease vehicle speeds, thus increasing safety for all users. Another low-cost way to incorporate complete streets is through “road diets.” A road diet involves restriping a four-lane street to be a two-lane street with a center turn lane and two bike lanes.¹³ If a roadway is already being resurfaced and does not need four lanes, incorporating a road diet simplifies streets, calms traffic, and allows for bike lanes in a cost-effective manner.¹⁴



The need to protect all users of Kentucky roads is clear

People use roadways regardless of whether or not they contain elements such as sidewalks, bike lanes, and crosswalks. Therefore, it is critically important to design safe roads for all users. On average, three pedestrians/bicyclists were injured or killed every day in Kentucky during 2009.¹⁵ This statistic includes over 300 children (ages 14 and under) injured or killed while walking on roads in Kentucky.¹⁶ Although collisions with pedestrians accounted for less than 1 percent of all collisions in Kentucky, pedestrian fatalities accounted for more than 5 percent of all fatal collisions.¹⁷ In addition to safety, road design is also important in promoting active living among community members. Kentucky currently has the 4th highest rate of adult obesity and the third highest rate of childhood obesity in the nation.^{18,19} According to a recent survey asking respondents about their behavior, 30 percent of Kentucky adults said they did not participate in any exercise during the past month.²⁰

Kentucky communities should consider adopting complete streets policies

A complete streets policy helps change the way roads are designed and built. It requires transportation agencies to evaluate the types of users of the streets they construct and repair and ensure they are designed to promote safety for everyone.



Complete streets policies can be adopted through state legislation, executive orders, public ordinances, resolutions, internal policies, and rewrites of manuals and standards. Across the United States, over 200 jurisdictions have adopted complete streets policies or committed to do so.²¹ This includes 15 states with statewide complete streets laws or ordinances.

Successful complete streets policies involve a variety of stakeholders in the policy adoption process including government agencies, elected officials, and community members. This collaborative process helps the community develop a sense of ownership in the adoption of a complete streets policy.

Communities are encouraged to adopt model complete streets policies so that all people can safely use the road.²² The National Complete Streets Coalition identifies 10 key components of a model complete streets policy.²³ (See box to the right).

Once adopted, transportation planners need training and education to understand how to incorporate complete streets as they repair and build new roads. This process will ultimately transform roadways in Kentucky to accommodate everyone, including bicyclists and pedestrians.

Model Complete Streets Policy Elements

1. Includes a vision for how and why the community wants complete streets
2. Specifies that "all users" includes pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and motorists of all ages and abilities
3. Encourages streets to be connected
4. Is adoptable by all relevant agencies to include all roads
5. Applies to new, maintenance, and resurfacing projects
6. Clearly explains any exceptions
7. Directs the use of the latest design standards while also recognizing the need for flexibility
8. Focuses on the positive community impact as a result of complete streets
9. Establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes
10. Includes specific next steps for implementing the policy

Endnotes

- 1 National Complete Streets Coalition. *Complete Streets FAQ*. Available at <http://www.completestreets.org>. Accessed January 2011.
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- 6 Kentucky Health Issues Poll. (2010). *Kentuckians' Experiences with Walkable Communities*. Available at <http://www.healthy-ky.org/duedates.aspx?id=24132108>. Accessed April 2011.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 University of Kentucky, Kentucky Transportation Center. (2009). *Kentucky Highway User Survey 2008*. Available at http://www.ktc.uky.edu/Reports/KTC_09_01_SPR_367_08_1F.pdf. Accessed April 2011.
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- 19 National Survey of Children's Health Data Resource Center. (2007). Available at <http://www.nschdata.org/Content/Default.aspx>. Accessed January 2011.
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- 21 An atlas of all communities, cities, and states with complete streets policies is available at <http://www.completestreets.org>. Accessed January 2011.
- 22 Complete streets model policies are available at <http://www.nplanonline.org/nplan/products/model-complete-streets-laws-and-resolutions>. Accessed January 2011.
- 23 American Planning Association. (2010). *Complete Streets: Best Policy and Implementation Practices*. Available at <http://www.planning.org/apastore/search/Default.aspx?p=4060>. Accessed January 2011.