

## What are Complete Streets? How does it align with our goals of the long-range transportation plan?

Complete Streets is an approach to planning, designing, building, operating, and maintaining streets that enables safe access for all people who need to use them, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. The concept of Complete Streets is often spotlighted in urban contexts, but its core objectives extend to rural communities like those in the Upper Valley. The adoption of a Complete Streets policy can lead to safer, more equitable, and walkable communities that improve the quality of life for all.

Incorporating more complete streets throughout the region helps achieve many goals outlined in our *Regional Corridor Transportation Plan*<sup>1</sup>, such as:



Improve safety for all roadway users, using a Complete Streets approach



Reduce the need for single-occupant vehicle travel, especially in congested areas



Improve access to destinations via walking, bicycling, and public transit



Prioritize equity, public health, and environmental justice in transportation investments



Promote reduced fossil fuel consumption and few vehicle miles traveled



Align transportation investments with community planning goals

Originally, the concept emerged in 2003 as a response to car-centric planning and became a smart growth principle. By 2012, nearly 500 policies were in-place nation-wide. In total, over 1400 Complete Streets policies have been passed in the United States, including those adopted by 33 state governments, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.<sup>2</sup>

## Why do “Complete Streets” matter in rural contexts?

When many people think about rural areas, images of homes spread out among forest or farmland come to mind. Destinations are far away from one another. While some of this narrative is true, most small towns have a village center or geographically bounded area where most of the population lives. The village center often concentrates public spaces like schools, parks, libraries, playgrounds, etc. and Complete Streets connects individuals to these services. The application of Complete Streets in urban areas is similar. However, Complete Streets may look different in rural versus urban contexts. For example, protected bike lanes with “bollards” (plastic delineators) are often seen in cities with high traffic volumes. For a community of less than 1,000 residents in our region, a treatment like this would not be necessary. A sidewalk serving a critical connection may be more appropriate. That

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.uvlsrc.org/files/5616/4442/1438/UVLSRPC\\_RCTP\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.uvlsrc.org/files/5616/4442/1438/UVLSRPC_RCTP_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/what-are-complete-streets/>

being said, every solution is site-specific, and a Complete Streets approach provides the framework to generate optimal outcomes.

According to the National Household Travel Survey, 17% of all trips are under 1 mile yet 47% of those trips are driven; 39% of all trips are under 3 miles. Complete Streets policies are important for older adults, who want to remain in their communities and stay mobile. The AARP report notes that two-thirds of planners and engineers have not begun preparing for this.<sup>3</sup> The 2009 National Household Travel Survey found that the percent of people who have stopped driving doubles each decade after the age of 65. About half of non-drivers do not travel at all but would like to. The lack of opportunities to take transit, to bike safely, and to walk safely makes travel to the store, doctor, or to visit family and friends impossible.<sup>4</sup>

Rural areas experience longer non-local trip distances and higher crash rates, and compared to urban areas, there are larger health and income disparities. By implementing complete streets policies, it is a commitment towards reducing these disparities. While only 19% of the population in the United States lives in rural areas, 58% of all fatal crashes and 60% of traffic fatalities were recorded in rural regions. Rural areas have higher rates of physical inactivity and chronic disease than urbanized areas. Urban households earn 32% more in yearly income than rural households.<sup>5</sup>

### Public Preferences and Shifting Attitudes

According to the Future of Transportation National Survey, 66% of Americans want more transportation options so they have the freedom to choose how to get where they need to go, 73% of people currently feel they have no choice but to drive as much as they do, and 57% would like to spend less time in the car.<sup>6</sup>

Between 2001 and 2009, the average number of miles per person driven by 16 to 34-year-olds dropped by 23 percent. Compared to older Americans, Millennials take fewer and shorter trips, and take a larger share of trips by walking, bicycling, or other modes. The number of high school seniors with driver's licenses has also dropped, by 12% between 1996 and 2010.<sup>7</sup>

### Unexpected Benefits

Complete Street approaches can provide unexpected benefits to our region. Networks that promote active and public transportation for all users can help to address income and health disparities. For example, these options are often more affordable transportation modes compared to automobiles. It also can generate opportunities for small business development and tourism like connecting bike paths/rail trails with business centers. For example, Lucky's is a popular coffee shop in Lebanon, NH. It is also a meeting spot for cyclists on the weekend before going for a ride on the Mascoma River Greenway. While it takes time to materialize and see how these benefits transcend toward meeting other goals, a return-on-investment occurs when policies are in place. A policy snowballs into a practice which creates projects that lead to an eventual complete network.

### Why have a complete streets policy?

There are many reasons to implement a complete streets policy. Despite our best intentions, a sidewalk here or a transit stop there will not surmount measurable impact. A hodge-podge of capital projects will not create thriving, livable and walkable communities, especially relating to networks of connecting people and places. Therefore, a complete streets policy is necessary to set out a road map for the future. There are ten key elements that are especially important: establish commitment and vision, prioritize diverse users, apply concepts to all phases and projects, allow only clear exceptions, mandate coordination, adopt design guidance, require pro-active land-use

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/archives/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://nhts.ornl.gov/2009/pub/stt.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle\\_pedestrian/publications/small\\_towns/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/small_towns/)

<sup>6</sup> <https://t4america.org/maps-tools/polling/2010survey/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://t4america.org/maps-tools/polling/2010survey/>

planning, measure progress, set criteria for prioritization, and create a plan.<sup>8</sup> These elements provide clear direction and guidance towards ensuring streets are safe for all ages and abilities, promoting active transportation, and optimizing other planning areas like economic development, natural resource management, etc.

### Who has adopted Complete Street planning efforts in our Region?

Town/City	Has the community incorporated "Complete Streets" into any planning efforts?	Where can it be found?
Acworth	No	
Canaan	No	
Charlestown	No	
Claremont	Yes	Master Plan
Cornish	No	
Croydon	No	
Dorchester	No	
Enfield	No	
Goshen	No	
Grafton	No	
Grantham	No	
Hanover	Yes	Complete Streets Policy
Lebanon	Yes	Complete Streets Policy
Lempster	No	
Lyme	No	
New London	Yes	Master Plan
Newbury	No	
Newport	No	
Orange	No	
Orford	No	
Piermont	No	
Plainfield	No	
Springfield	No	
Sunapee	No	
Unity	No	
Washington	No	
Wilmot	No	

### Case Study: Valley Road in Hanover

"In 2012, Hanover completed a bicycle and pedestrian planning effort. This plan identified Valley Road as a local bicycle connection in the overall network. In 2013, Hanover completed a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Plan, which introduced the idea of using advisory shoulders (called advisory bike lanes for this project) on Valley Road. Hanover's Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee (HBPC) advocated to use Valley Road as a pilot project for advisory shoulders. The HBPC surveyed the Valley Road neighbors and built support for a pilot project. While there was some

resistance, the neighborhood was generally supportive of the idea. Hanover's Department of Public Works was open to the idea, and it was presented to the town select board who approved installation of advisory shoulders unit on Valley Rd. The advisory shoulders were painted about 400 meters of Valley Road in the summer of 2014. In 2016 an evaluation report was produced with traffic counts and results from a follow up survey. Based on the success of the Valley Road advisory shoulders, Hanover is currently evaluating adding advisory shoulders to another important bicycle and

<sup>8</sup> <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/elements-complete-streets-policy/>

pedestrian connection between schools and neighborhoods.

Factors in the success of the advisory shoulders were the leadership of the HBPC, support from the adjacent neighbors, the willingness to pilot them by the Department of Public Works and inclusion of Valley Road and advisory shoulders in both the SRTS and Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans. Valley Road is a local bicycle connection between neighborhoods with schools, the downtown, and the Dartmouth College campus. Sidewalks were removed due to root damage and were not replaced because the neighborhood preferred the rural look of streets without sidewalks. Advisory shoulders use existing pavement to provide space prioritized for bicycles and pedestrians at very low cost.”<sup>9</sup>

### Pop-Up Projects: Bike Rodeo, Bike Tour, Active Transportation Charette

#### *Bike Rodeo*

Targeted Participants: Residents, Youth

Since children often ride their bikes or walk to school, safety is incredibly important. Often geared towards children, a “bike rodeo” is an event where people practice and develop bicycle skills. Hosting a “bike rodeo” can be an excellent opportunity to expose community members to active transportation, teach safety skills, and build public support. Riders should go through an area of 50 feet of riding and practice breaking at a selected end point. Organizers often

create zig-zag courses or games to ensure the event is fun and engaging.

#### *Bike Tour*

Targeted Participants: Residents, Planners, Engineers

Bike tours are often seen as a tourism activity to highlight historic, cultural, and natural features of a community. However, bike tours can also be an effective way to expose community members to bicycle and pedestrian facilities, generate conversations around safety, and encourage the use of the facilities. For planners and engineers, this activity is especially useful when considering the application of intersection treatments and identifying priority projects. This event often requires partnering with local bike shops to provide helmets and/or bicycles.

#### *Active Transportation Charette*

Targeted Participants: Residents, Planners, Engineers

“Charette” is a term for creating an activity that involves a real-life application or decision within a community. For example, in an active transportation charette, the facilitator may have participants utilize a map and propose ped/bike solutions to locations within their communities. The activity generates conversations and consensus-building among decision-makers. Facilitators can utilize engaging software like Street Mix<sup>10</sup> or tape on the ground for visualizations.

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<sup>9</sup>[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle\\_pedestrian/publications/small\\_towns/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/small_towns/)

<sup>10</sup> <https://streetmix.net/>