



## Orange County Department of Planning

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### Complete Streets 101

By: Ashlee Long, Planner

Complete Streets are streets that have been designed for all users. These users include pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets allow for ease in crossing streets, walking to retail, bicycling to work, and other everyday activities. Adopting a Complete Streets policy directs a communities planners and engineers and other decision makers towards making streets safe and accessible for everyone. Considering Complete Streets in the beginning of the development process is an important step. This allows for Complete Streets features to be identified in the planning stage and be included in the scoping and funding decisions that will ultimately be made. The early consideration of Complete Streets elements in the planning process results in a better community for everyone.



Each community's definition of what a Complete Street will look like will differ depending upon the community's needs and wants. A suburban Complete Street is going to look different than an urban or rural one. Some examples of Complete Streets elements include, sidewalks, bike lanes, bus lanes, improved crosswalks, pedestrian refuge islands, curb extensions, narrower traffic lanes and roundabouts.

Complete Streets makes traveling easier for everyone, giving them a choice in their mode of transportation. Those who do not have access to a car, have limited mobility, or are looking to reduce their emissions footprint will now have the ability to walk, bicycle, take transit, or drive safely. Many of the ways to create a Complete Street can be low cost and quick to implement. Some low cost elements include striping for bike lanes or wider shoulders or building more sidewalks. In order to implement Complete Streets a municipality's planner and engineers need to work to with residents and businesses that are along the proposed Complete Street in order to educate them and encourage them to add input to the design elements that will ultimately be implemented.

Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the Complete Streets Act on August 15, 2011. If a transportation project is being developed with state or federal funding, then the project sponsors, whether they are the state, county or local agency, must consider the convenience and mobility of all users in the development process. In the State of New York there are villages, towns, cities, and counties that have adopted Complete Streets policies. A listing of these municipalities and their adopted policies or resolutions can be found on the New York State Department of Transportation's Complete Streets webpage. In the County of Orange, the City of Port Jervis recently adopted a Complete Streets policy in April 2015.

**The benefits of Complete Streets are numerous and include:**

- *Safety benefits:* When streets are incomplete and only take motor vehicles into consideration, all other users are put at risk. Complete Streets help to reduce crashes and pedestrian fatalities. Pedestrian crashes are twice as likely in places without sidewalks.
- *Health benefits:* Obesity in America is rising and inactivity plays a large role. Inactivity also contributes to diabetes, heart disease, and strokes. Completes streets allows people to be active as part of their daily lives. This could be as simple as installing sidewalks that would give people the ability to walk to the store, instead of driving.
- *Economic Revitalization:* With more transportation options available, residents and visitors alike will be able to save money. In turn, the money saved from walking or taking transit will be spent on things such as housing, restaurants, and entertainment.
- *More Livable Communities:* Communities built in the last 50 years have generally been sprawling, low density communities that are connected via busy, high speed roadways that are only accessible by car. Complete Streets aims to create livable communities that allow people to access local destinations by reducing traffic speeds and making it a safer environment for all ages and abilities.



**For more resources on Complete Streets and Complete Streets policies check out:**

- Smart Growth America's National Complete Streets Coalition
- New York State Department of Transportation Complete Streets
- Orange County Transportation Council Complete Streets Policy
- Or contact us at the Orange County Planning Department at [planning@orangecountygov.com](mailto:planning@orangecountygov.com) or call us at (845) 615-3840