

Complete Streets

Neighborhood streets are the lifeblood of cities. Like arteries that sustain life in surrounding cells, our streets sustain life in our neighborhoods. Simply put, if our streets are not healthy, then our neighborhoods are not healthy.



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So what are healthy streets? First, a street is all of the public space that includes the car lanes, median, and sidewalks right up to the private property line. Healthy, or what we call "complete streets", are designed to serve the needs of all the people who use them—fathers pushing strollers, grandmothers, children walking to school, people driving to work, bicycle messengers, people using wheelchairs, and people taking the bus, just to name a few.

While there are differences among how and where we travel, there is great similarity among our needs. When we meet the needs of everyone, including all ages and abilities, we have a complete street. But a complete street doesn't only meet travel needs—it's also the space we share as a community. This is where we meet with friends, debate, stroll, grab a coffee, and people watch.

Streets are some of our favorite places. Maybe you have fond memories of playing games with friends on your street when you were a kid. Maybe you like to hang out at the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica. What are the things that make such streets your favorite places? Maybe it's that you are friends with your neighbors. Maybe it's the beautiful trees. Maybe you love that you can leisurely walk, shop, and dine with friends.

There are many elements that make a street a place, but the most important element is people—they are the "indicator species" of complete streets. If we're going to create complete streets then we have to figure out how to make people feel comfortable there outside of their cars; and to do that we have to provide what they need and desire. Below are the guiding principles and recommendations for creating complete streets.

Guiding principles to make our streets work for...



- **The neighborhood, the district, the city, and the region**

Different neighborhoods need different types of streets so complete streets come in different shapes and sizes depending on the neighborhood and how it connects to the surrounding area. A neighborhood should have a balanced mix of different types of streets from boulevards with wide sidewalks, to neighborhood “downtowns” with wide sidewalks and slow traffic, to narrow residential lanes.



- **Connecting people to places**

Complete streets are well connected to places people need to go. This provides more than one route to get places and spreads out car traffic. The most connected streets are laid out in a traditional grid pattern. The least connected have a lot of cul-de-sacs and only a few large connected roads that everyone has to use to get everywhere.



- **People biking and taking transit**

We have come to think of our streets as just serving cars, but in cities many people get around other ways. We can walk, take a bus, take the subway, ride a bike, or drive a car. Complete streets offer several options as efficient ways to get around, and prioritize people’s need to get around over the needs of cars.



- **People walking**

Teenagers and grandparents use streets and sidewalks, but they have different safety and travel needs. Both able-bodied people and people with disabilities use streets, but they too have different safety and travel needs. A complete street accommodates these diverse safety and travel needs for all ages and abilities, even if it is a boulevard with a lot of through traffic.



- **Trucks, fire, ambulance and police**

Aside from providing an efficient and safe travel for people, we also need efficient and safe travel for goods and services. Complete streets are designed to move goods and services such as emergency medical care, fire trucks, and police cars.



- **The environment**

Complete streets are created with the environment in mind. This means that watersheds and other natural habitat are respected and accommodated as we create streets.

Specific Recommendations for Creating Complete Streets



Think about some of the best living rooms you've been in . . . To get people to linger on our streets, we can turn them into outdoor living rooms . . .

- **Provide Beauty, Comfort, and Intrigue**

A complete neighborhood street is one that is not only used for passing through, but also for staying awhile. Living rooms are a good model for creating complete streets because people like to spend a lot of time there and they provide comfort, beauty, and intrigue. Think about some of the best living rooms you've been in. It probably has walls, couches, lamps, tables, a fireplace, a painting or a photograph, and books. To get people to linger on our streets, we can turn them into outdoor living rooms that provide shelter from the elements—wind, rain, heat, and coolness; a comfortable place to sit down; light; and intriguing things to play with and look at. There are many ways to do this but we can start with parks, landscaping, street furniture, and public art.

Trees and Plants

Trees and plants not only provide shade, comfort, and beauty for pedestrians but they also clean our air and maintain comfortable temperatures throughout the seasons.

Street Furniture and Lighting

Street furniture and lighting entice pedestrians to linger on the street by creating comfort, safety, and a sense of place.

Functional and Inviting Bus Stops

If public transportation is efficient, clean, and safe, it will be a well-used and viable transportation option. Without clean bus stops that provide shelter, bus schedules, and a comfortable place to sit, public transportation will be unattractive to many. Complete streets have functional and inviting bus stops.



- **Create Variety**

A complete street is not only for homes, or businesses, or industries. A complete street has a variety of buildings and spaces for a variety of activities. This not only creates a variety of destinations, but a variety of places to stop along the way. Homes are very important because they create a constant presence of people, but a balanced mix of parks, schools, stores, offices, churches, restaurants, and theaters creates a complete street. The degree of variety will vary from neighborhood to neighborhood.



- **Pay Attention to Building Design**

Complete streets pay close attention to building design because buildings have a huge impact on how a street is experienced. Rather than facing the rear of buildings, the entrances of buildings on a complete street come up to the sidewalk and face the street. This forms a street front that creates a sense of enclosure and encourages people to walk. Buildings on a complete street also have a variety of building types that are similar in height and are designed with quality workmanship, materials, and attention to detail.



- **Make it Walkable**

A complete street will provide comfortable and safe space for people to leisurely walk and experience the neighborhood. A complete street has sidewalks that are wide enough for two-way foot traffic; buffers between car traffic; crosswalks and medians; and short block lengths that encourage walking and slow drivers.



Street dimensions play an important role in creating complete streets that are safe and enjoyable.

- **Pay Attention to Size and Boundaries**

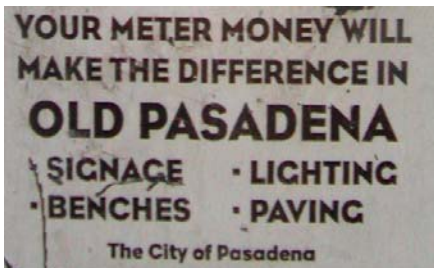
Street dimensions play an important role in creating complete streets that are safe and enjoyable. Street width, length, slope, and the radii of curves, curbs, and intersections have a lot to do with slowing traffic and making the street an interesting place to be.

A complete street will also be well defined. It will have boundaries that clearly communicate where the edges of the street are and where a street begins and ends. These boundaries direct the pedestrian's sight and help establish a sense of place. Streets are defined vertically by buildings and trees; they are defined horizontally by buildings, parks, and other spaces that may fill in the gaps.



- **Carefully Place Parking**

A complete street is not dominated by parking spaces and is located in areas that do not detract from pedestrian activity. Generally, parking is placed at the rear of buildings; on-street parking is metered to manage parking and provide funds for the neighborhood; and parking structures have spaces that are available to anyone coming to the area. These three things minimize the need for parking spaces, maximize the use of the spaces we have, and pay for the upkeep of the sidewalks and streets. .



- **Provide Maintenance**

Just because you build a complete street does not mean it will remain one. As always, it takes maintenance. A complete street is designed with materials that are easy to maintain and with a plan to keep it clean and in good repair.



- **Hide the Utilities**

It can be expensive to place utilities underground, but complete streets try to do this as much as possible to provide a more pleasant pedestrian environment.

References:
Street Design Guidelines for Healthy Neighborhoods, Dan Burden
Great Streets, Allan B. Jacobs