

House Transportation Committee Testimony 6/24/10  
Complete Streets

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to give testimony on complete streets. My name is Sarah Panken; I am the Active Communities Coordinator for the Michigan Fitness Foundation. Our mission is to create a physically educated population with the knowledge and skills to lead a healthy, vigorous and safe lifestyle *in communities designed to support physical activity*. I work with communities across Michigan to help them become more walkable and bikeable by implementing community policy and design that supports physical activity. Complete streets principles and policies are an important part of this effort because they ensure that transportation networks accommodate active modes of transportation (i.e., walking and bicycling). As someone who works with Michigan communities, I recognize the essential role complete streets principles and policies play in creating safe opportunities for people to walk and bike to destinations.

According to Active Living Research (2009), a program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, there is a significant body of evidence linking transportation, planning and community design to increased physical activity.

- Communities that develop pedestrian and bicycle friendly infrastructure with links to destinations of interest have more physically active residents (Active Living By Design, 2002)
- People who report having access to sidewalks are 20% more likely to be physically active (Duncun, Spence and Mummery, 2005).
- Presence of safe bicycle facilities can increase the number of people who ride their bikes and meet daily physical activity recommendations (Rievetfeld and Daneil, 2004).
- Studies have shown that the amount of time children spend outside is the most powerful correlate of their physical activity level; however, it is greatly hindered by vehicular traffic, lack of sidewalks and open spaces, and community design guided exclusively by motorized transportation systems (Institute of Medicine, 2005).

To increase safe physical activity opportunities, many communities have adopted complete streets policies, with positive results. There is a growing base of evidence that complete streets policies can make it safer and easier for children and families to walk or bike for recreation or transportation. Because of this implication, many renowned institutions recommend complete streets principles and policies as a strategy to increase physical activity levels, improve public health, and combat childhood obesity.

The Centers for Disease Control's *Recommendations for Improving Health Through Transportation Policy* released in April 2010 includes a recommendation that complete streets be implemented to create transportation systems that connect the places where people live, learn, work, shop and play by providing safe and convenient walking and bicycling facilities.

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In February 2010, Leadership for Healthy Communities, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, published *A Guide for Local and State Leaders to Create Healthy Communities and Prevent Childhood Obesity*. The guide states that making bicycling and walking more viable and safe transportation options will reduce childhood obesity and recommends implementing complete streets.

This year, catalyzed by First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* initiative, President Obama formed the White House Taskforce on Childhood Obesity. In May, this taskforce delivered a report to the President that outlines an action plan to end childhood obesity by 2030. Chapter 5 of this report outlines steps to increase physical activity at the school and community levels. There is a recommendation that a complete network of safe pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be in created using complete streets principles to allow more children to use active transportation and walk or bike to school or other destinations (e.g., after school activities, parks, libraries).

A February 2010 National Conference of State Legislatures report on legislation trends related to *Promoting Healthy Communities and Preventing Childhood Obesity* states policymakers recognize the importance of providing safe walking and biking opportunities and that more than 20 states have some form of complete streets policy to help accomplish this.

Complete streets policies are becoming popular because people want more transportation choice opportunities. According to the Transportation 4 America survey conducted in March 2010, 73% of respondents stated that they would like to drive less and 66% stated that they would like more transportation options. Furthermore, 1/3 of Michigan residents do not drive because they are too young, elderly or have a disability (2000 U.S. Census); having transportation choice is important to ensure that all residents have the ability to lead independent lives. Studies show that communities that are walkable and bikeable are places where people want to live.

- According to the 2004 Cool Cities Survey of young adults aged 18-35 in Michigan, “safe streets” and “walkable streets” were two of the top three attributes considered when deciding where to live.
- People want to live in communities where they can walk or bike to get to work, shopping or to recreate and will pay approximately 20% more to live there (National Association of Realtors, 2002).
- Case studies show that implementing complete streets principles in business districts can increase retail sales by 40% (Complete Streets, 2009).

Clearly, complete streets is a part of revitalizing Michigan. Creating places where people can walk or bike will not only improve residents' health, but also the health of Michigan. Now is the time to take action and support complete streets!

Thank you for this opportunity.