Complete Streets: A Primer

Presented by David Riesland, PE
Norman City Traffic Engineer
OTEA Spring Meeting
May 3, 2018
First of all, we need to make one thing perfectly clear—I am no Complete Streets expert.

I assume that many of you in this room may also not be experts.

I have arranged this presentation to offer a primer, of sorts, on the basics of Complete Streets.

Then, we’ll take you on a journey through Norman’s efforts, to date, in this area.
• 150 years ago, we probably didn’t need to be concerned with Complete Streets

• The only modes we see here are horses, the horse and buggy, and pedestrians
• As time went by, more and more modes became available for the movement of people and goods

• Below, we see cars, horses, bicycles and pedestrians—talk about multi-modal!
• Without proper planning, chaos can result

• Looks like the example above might have been able to benefit from the application of some Complete Streets planning!
So, What is Complete Streets?

• Complete Streets is a transportation policy and an approach to design

• It requires:
  • Planning
  • Design
  • Operation
  • Maintenance
What are the Goals of Complete Streets?

- Offering improved safety, health, economic, and environmental outcomes

- Emphasizes the importance of safe access for all users, not just automobiles
Complete Streets History

- Following World War II, many communities were designed to promote fast and easy access via automobiles.

- Many rural and suburban communities have come to rely on the automobile as their sole means of transportation.

- Even in those areas where alternative modes may be viable, the automobile has been the central focus of transportation, infrastructure, and land use policies.
Complete Streets History (cont.)

- Oregon enacted the first Complete Streets-like policy in 1971

- This Oregon policy required that all new or rebuilt roadways provide “routine accommodation” for bicycles and pedestrians

- It also called on state and local governments to fund bike/ped facilities within the public right-of-way
Complete Streets History (cont.)

- In 2003, a search was coordinated to replace the term “routine accommodation”
- Complete Streets was suggested by David Goldberg who was the communications director for Smart Growth America
- This new term was adopted by a coalition of advocacy groups to refer both to a comprehensive approach to street design as well as to the coalition itself
- Hence, the National Complete Streets Coalition was born
Complete Streets History (cont.)

- Coalition steering committee members included:
  - AARP
  - American Planning Association
  - American Society of Landscape Architects
  - American Public Transportation Association
  - Blue Cross Blue Shield Minnesota
  - National Association of Realtors
  - Institute of Transportation Engineers
Complete Streets Make-up

• By its very definition, Complete Streets is a multi-modal concept

• We’ll talk about many of these modes in the slides to come

• Let’s begin with the pedestrian
Pedestrian Elements

- Could include:
  - Sidewalks
  - Traditional and raised crosswalks
  - Median crossing islands
  - ADA compliant facilities
    - Audible cues for people with low vision
    - Pushbuttons reachable by people in wheelchairs
    - Curb cuts
  - Curb extensions

- Let’s move on to traffic calming
Traffic Calming Measures

- Measures to lower automobile speeds and to define the edges of automobile travel lanes could include:
  - Road diets
  - Center medians
  - Shorter curb corner radii
  - Elimination of free flow right turn lanes
  - Back-in angled parking
  - Street trees and planter strips
  - Ground cover

- Now, on to bicycles
Bicycle Accommodations

- May include:
  - Protected or dedicated bicycle lanes
  - Neighborhood greenways
  - Wide paved shoulders
  - Bicycle parking

- Next, transit
Bus Transit Accommodations

- Can include:
  - Bus Rapid Transit
  - Bus pullouts
  - Transit signal priority
  - Bus shelters
  - Dedicated bus lanes

- Now, some exceptions
Exceptions for Complete Streets

- Roads where non-motorized transportation is banned by law
- Where the cost of accommodation would be disproportionate to the need or expected use
- Roadways where lack of present and future need is shown to make the accommodation unnecessary
- Next, the benefits
Safety Benefits

• FHWA Study found:
  - Adding sidewalks decreases pedestrian injuries/fatalities by 88%
  - Adding hybrid beacon signals decreases pedestrian injuries/fatalities by 69%
  - Adding medians decreases pedestrian injuries/fatalities by 39%
Health Benefits

- Multiple groups report that the elements of a Complete Streets plan help to fight obesity

- 43% of people with safe places to walk meet recommended physical activity levels

- These levels drop by 37% when no safe place to walk exists
Economic Benefits

- A revitalization project in Lancaster, CA, that included Complete Streets, helped create 50 new businesses and over 800 new jobs.
- Complete Streets redesign in parts of NYC resulted in a 50% increase in retail sales on 9th Avenue in Manhattan and a 50% decrease in commercial vacancies in Union Square.
Environmental Benefits

• Complete Street policies provide safe options for people to walk and bike

• Complete Streets policies can lead to fewer people driving in their cars which results in lower automobile emissions

• Now, how Norman is moving into Complete Streets
Norman Moves Toward Complete Streets

- In May of 2014, Norman adopted its first Comprehensive Transportation Plan

- Action Item S2a in our CTP is to Adopt Complete Streets Policies, Program and Guidelines
The consulting team working on Norman’s CTP offered the Los Angeles County Model Design Manual for Living Streets as a guide in developing our Complete Streets Manual.
LA County Model Design Manual

- The on-line document is available for any jurisdiction to use and modify as needed
- They only ask that you keep the acknowledgements in your document and that you let them know when you have an adopted manual
Creating Norman’s Plan

- Review team consisting of five members from Public Works and one member from Planning
- Team met monthly to go through the LA County chapters one or two at a time
- Entire process took nearly a year to complete
- Along the way, a number of the photographs in the LA County manual were updated to feature Norman elements
- The next four slides provide some highlights from Norman’s plan
Highlights of Norman’s Plan

- Encourage neighborhood connectivity
  - Shorter trips
  - Encourages more pedestrian/bicycle trips
- Design to accommodate all users
- Access management
- Avoid skewed intersections
- Provide curb extensions where possible
Highlights of Norman’s Plan (Cont.)

- Avoid diagonal curb ramps
- Utilize detectable warnings and accessible pedestrian signals
- Avoid colored or stamped crosswalks at uncontrolled intersections
- Consider use of the pedestrian hybrid beacon system at midblock crossings
Highlights of Norman’s Plan (Cont.)

- Provide bicycle facilities for a range of rider skill level
- Consider wayfinding for all users
- Encourage far-side transit stops
- Proper utilization of traffic calming measures can increase safety
Highlights of Norman’s Plan (Cont.)

- Reclaim stormwater as a valuable resource
- Support and encourage activities and destinations
- On street parking can provide a buffer between pedestrians and moving traffic
- Consider opportunities to narrow travel lanes or to implement road diets
Next Steps

- Engage the Norman health community to secure their endorsement
- Through a series of study sessions, engage the Norman City Council as to the contents of the Manual
- Secure Council Adoption once all members have been brought onboard
Questions?

(Hopefully someone in the room can answer them!)