

Staff Report

**AMES AREA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
REVIEW OF DRAFT COMPLETE STREETS POLICY**

July 14, 2015

BACKGROUND:

On May 26, 2015, the Policy Committee asked staff to evaluate language for a regional **Complete Street Policy**, and provide a framework for agencies within the MPO who want to develop their own community specific policy, building upon the MPO policy.

Draft Ames Area MPO Regional Complete Street Policy:

Ames Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

Complete Streets Policy

Purposes. This Complete Streets Policy promotes “Complete Streets” principles for all transportation infrastructure projects carried out within the planning boundary of the Ames Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), whether by the City of Ames, the City of Gilbert, Story County, Boone County, Iowa State University, or CyRide. This policy is meant to guide the decisions of Ames Area MPO and its member agencies and in no way supersedes any policies of member agencies in the Ames Area MPO.

Complete Streets Principles. The principles of this Complete Streets Policy are to design, build, maintain, and reconstruct public streets in order to provide for the safety and convenience of all users of a corridor. This includes pedestrians, cyclists, users of mass transit, people with disabilities, motorists, freight providers, emergency responders, and adjacent land users; regardless of age, ability, income, or ethnicity.

Ames Area MPO. The Ames Area MPO Planning Boundary is determined by the US Census Bureau in conjunction with the Decennial Census and is defined as an area of 50,000 or more population that is considered currently urban in character. The Ames Area MPO currently includes the transportation jurisdictions of the City of Ames, the City of Gilbert, Story County, Boone County, Iowa State University, and the CyRide Transit Agency.

Values. The values to incorporate within the Ames Area MPO Complete Streets Policy include not only safety, mobility, and fiscal responsibility, but also community values and qualities. These include environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic and natural resources, and social equity values. This approach demands careful multi-modal evaluation for all transportation corridors integrated with best management strategies for land use and

transportation. The public should be consulted, when appropriate, as a factor in the transportation infrastructure decision-making process.

Adaptability. This Complete Streets Policy provides flexibility to accommodate different types of streets and users, and to promote Complete Streets design solutions that fit within the context(s) of the community.

Applicability. Appropriate Complete Streets principles should be considered as part of all routine transportation infrastructure projects, including:

- *Project identification*
- *Scoping procedures and design approvals, including design manuals and performance measures*
- *Construction*
- *Maintenance*
- *Reconstruction*

Complete Streets principles should:

- *Apply to both existing and future streets,*
- *Apply to all transportation infrastructure projects, regardless of funding source(s), and*
- *Not apply to streets ultimately to be privately owned and maintained, where specified users are prohibited by law, or the cost of providing accommodation are excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use.*

Exceptions to the application of this Complete Streets Policy include instances where member agencies identify issues of safety, excessive cost or absence of need. Any agency's concerns regarding project exceptions or alternatives to meeting complete streets principles may be reviewed by the Ames Area MPO Technical Committee, should that agency desire comment and the consideration of alternatives.

Existing Policies and Regulations. To support this Complete Streets Policy, member agencies may choose to review local design principles, existing policies and regulations. Agencies may request consultation with Ames Area MPO where appropriate. Such policies and regulations may include:

- *Comprehensive plans*
- *University master plans*
- *Transportation plans*
- *Subdivision codes*
- *Manuals of practice*
- *Grant-writing practices*
- *Impact assessments*
- *Level of Service assessments*

- *Departmental policies and procedures*
- *Any other applicable procedures and standards*

Latest Standards. In furthering Complete Streets principles, transportation projects should make use of the latest and best design standards, policies, and guidelines. Performance measures should also be utilized to measure the effectiveness of Complete Streets practices that align with related transportation planning efforts, particularly the Ames Area MPO Long Range Transportation Plan.

HDR, the Long Range Transportation Plan consultant, has also pulled together national best practices information to be used as additional content for Ames Area MPO member agencies, should they choose to draft their own standalone Complete Streets Policy. Alternatively, each member agency could choose to simply follow the MPO's policy, serving as their local policy. This framework, providing a synthesis of best practices, has been provided as an attachment to this report.

Potential Complete Streets Policy Elements

Overview

A complete streets policy is a first step for the MPO and member jurisdictions moving towards a network of complete streets, which allow safe access and mobility for all users, regardless of ability or how they travel. This memo provides a potential framework based on guidance provided by Smart Growth America, and complete streets policies implemented across the country. Much of this information comes directly from Smart Growth America's "Local Policy Workbook" and recommended policy element materials.

While implementation of complete streets is typically the domain of local jurisdictions, MPOs can provide a policy that guides regional implementation. There are example policies adopted by MPO boards within the state of Iowa in Iowa City (MPOJC), the Quad Cities (Bi-State Regional Commission), and Cedar Rapids (Corridor MPO). An MPO-based policy should state which projects are subject to the policy; oftentimes, these are projects that require MPO-distributed Federal funding.

The complete streets policy itself should be a concise statement of intent. Often communities have separate documents detail design guidance, typologies, or more specific implementation plans. For instance, some communities provide an updated set of design guidelines for various typologies of streets and development patterns. Also, the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) will likely provide projects that are supportive of complete streets implementation in the Ames area.

There are several elements included what Smart Growth America considers an "ideal" complete streets policy, and many communities have built their complete streets policies around this framework. These elements are outlined in the next section.

Potential Policy Elements

Complete Streets Vision

The vision is how and why the community wants to complete its streets. Much of the groundwork required for establishing the complete streets vision has been laid by the LRTP's public engagement efforts. The LRTP vision includes establishment of a complete, multimodal network across the Ames area that is convenient, accessible, and active. Much of the community input has focused on making the Ames area a complete, bicycle friendly transportation system. The basis for the complete streets vision is reflected in one of the LRTP's primary community-focused vision themes to provide an "Active Transportation System that is Connected Across all Modes of Travel".

Applies to All System Users

Everyone that uses the area's street network is included in the policy: pedestrians, bicyclists and transit passengers of all ages and abilities, as well as trucks, buses and automobiles. The policy should

state that some corridors and streets will be more oriented to some users than others, but the goal should be that all users should have as complete a system as possible.

All Projects are Candidates

The guidance suggests that as many transportation projects as possible should be inclusive of complete streets elements. Projects of all scales are potential candidates for complete streets elements: retrofit, resurfacing, reconstruction or new construction projects. When a project large or small is initiated, it is an opportunity to incorporate complete streets elements.

As the policy is MPO-based, it should clarify the types of projects that are affected by the policy – for instance, perhaps it only applies to those projects that receive MPO-controlled Federal funds through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) process.

Exceptions

It is understood that not all modes can have equal access on all projects. The Federal Highway Administration's guidance provides three exceptions to complete streets:

1. Accommodation is not necessary on corridors where non-motorized use is prohibited, such as interstate freeways.
2. Cost of accommodation is excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use.
3. A documented absence of current or future need.

Additional exceptions are provided in many communities. These include redundant facilities (parallel street provides complete modal functions), severe topological constraints, low-traffic volume streets, non-infrastructure projects, some maintenance activities, or other legal constraints.

Creates a Network

While it is often an incremental process, complete streets policies, and related implementation plans, should work towards a balanced modal network that encourages street connectivity and a comprehensive, integrated, connected multi-modal network.

All Agencies and Streets

The street network in the Ames area is controlled by multiple jurisdictions and agencies. The complete streets policy should attempt to encompass as many of these different jurisdictional streets, and private developer funded subdivisions as possible, in order to move towards a connected network. Ideally, the MPO policy would apply to regional projects, and would inspire similar policies to be adopted by all jurisdictions in the MPO area.

Design Guidelines / Criteria

Design guidelines effect how the policy gets implemented on a project-by-project basis. Design policies should be reviewed to ensure the ability to accommodate all modes of travel, while still providing flexibility to allow designers to tailor the project to unique circumstances. Some communities have rewritten their design manual to fully implement complete streets, and re-examined their street typologies and classes to provide clearer guidance on options and applications for complete streets in different functional street environments. Resources such as the Active Transportation Alliance provide guidance on identifying community-specific street typologies and context zones to make implementation of a complete network more seamless. Other communities have used existing design guides, such as those issued by American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), Iowa’s SUDAS, National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), and the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines.

Context Sensitivity

Complete streets projects need to be developed to fit within their community environment. As Smart Growth American points out, this common sense element of the plan can allay fears that the policy will be applied in unreasonable ways, and can help prioritize the neighborhood / development typologies that are most appropriate for particular modal treatments.

Performance Measures

This element establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes. This guides the MPO and member jurisdictions in how it will evaluate the current system, how it will assess potential complete streets improvements, and how the community defines moving towards success and its ultimate complete streets vision. Much of the work being done in the LRTP and ongoing MPO performance monitoring can be incorporated into this element. Relevant LRTP performance measures include:

- Create and enhance multimodal access and connections between bicycle, pedestrian, transit, and private vehicle travel.
- Improve system connectivity through improved multimodal network connections and reduced network gaps.
- Consider the safety of all travel modes when considering changes to the transportation system.
- Added bicycle and pedestrian access in new urban developments.
- Promote active transportation projects and programs.
- Multimodal access to K-12 schools.

Implementation

This element provides the next steps in moving towards the getting the policy “from paper onto the streets”. This is the policy direction given to the jurisdictional departments in ways to initiate planning for and designing the complete streets solution.