



BENEFITS OF COMPLETE STREETS

Complete Streets Help Keep Kids Safe



Photo by Heather Bowden, via Transportation for America.

Outside Philadelphia, two students who attend Uwchlan Hills Elementary School ride the bus only 90 yards to cross a busy street. In Auburn, Maine, students living just down the street from their elementary school are also taking the bus. These schools are missing the sidewalks and crosswalks that allow kids to walk to school safely. Their streets are incomplete.

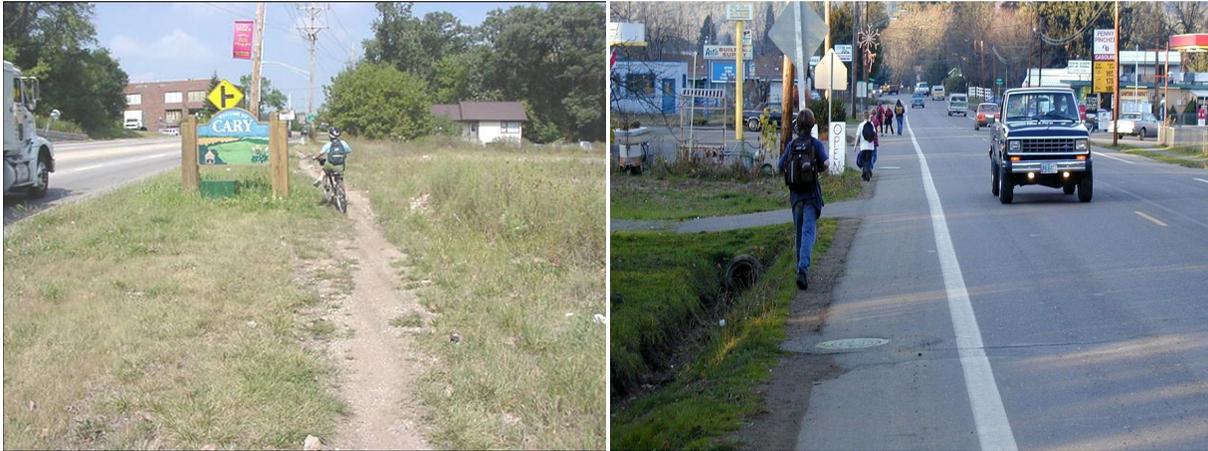
Incomplete streets a barrier for children

When streets are designed only for cars, they become barriers for children, who cannot safely walk or bicycle along or across them. Unfortunately these safety fears are well founded – pedestrian injury is a leading cause of unintentional, injury-related death among children, age 5 to 14.¹

As a result, many children end up in the back seat of the car, missing out on opportunities for independence and physical activity. One recent survey found that, while 71% of adults walked or rode their bicycles to school as a child, a mere 17% of their own children currently do so.² While ‘stranger danger’ is often cited as a primary factor, a CDC survey found that traffic-related danger is a more common reason children did not walk to school.³

Limited physical activity is a factor in the obesity epidemic among children. The number of overweight or obese American children nearly tripled between 1980 and 2004.⁴

The lack of Complete Streets is perhaps best illustrated by hazard busing for schoolchildren. In Illinois, 15% of students who ride the bus to school do so because it is considered too dangerous to walk from home, less than 1.5 miles away.



Examples of incomplete streets. Left: Photo courtesy of League of Illinois Bicyclists. Right: Photo Michael Ronkin

Complete Streets give children safety, mobility

Complete Streets provide children with opportunities to walk, bike and play in a safe environment. More children are likely to walk or bike to school when sidewalks or footpaths are present, when there are safe street crossings, and when school zones enforce a reduced vehicle speed.⁵ Streets that provide dedicated space for bicycling and walking help kids get physical activity and gain independence.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs, which have become tremendously popular across the country, will benefit from complete streets policies that help turn all routes into safe routes. The California program, initiated through legislation in 2000, was an immediate success, with more kids walking to school, reduced traffic speeds near schools, and more drivers yielding to pedestrians.⁶ While federal funding is now available in all fifty states for Safe Routes to School programs, it only serves a limited number of communities each year. Complete Streets policies can augment these programs to help all communities create safe routes as a routine part of roadway improvement, design and construction.

A community with a Complete Streets policy considers the needs of children every time a transportation investment decision is made. Roads near schools and in residential neighborhoods are designed and altered to allow children, the most vulnerable users of our streets, to travel safely.

Learn more at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/completestreets.

- 1 Surface Transportation Policy Project (2004). *Mean Streets*.
- 2 Appleyard, B. (2005). *Livable Streets for Schoolchildren*. NCBW Forum.
- 3 Martin, S. and Carlson, S. (2005). Barriers to Children Walking to or From School—United States, 2004M MMWR. 2005; 54:949-952.
- 4 U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. (2004) Physical Activity and the Health of Young People.
- 5 Ewing, R. Will Schroerer, William Greene. School location and student travel: Analysis of factors affecting mode choice. Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board, No. 1895, TRB, National Research Council, Washington, D.C., 2004, pp. 55-63.
- 6 Appleyard, B. (2005)