



Smart Growth America
Making Neighborhoods Great Together



**National Complete
Streets Coalition**

BENEFITS OF COMPLETE STREETS

Complete Streets Improve Mobility for Older Americans

An 82-year-old woman was fined more than \$100 for crossing against a don't-walk signal. Mayvis Coyne began carrying her groceries across Foothill Boulevard in Los Angeles while the WALK signal was still on, but could not cross the wide road before the light changed. One elderly neighbor resorts to calling a cab simply to cross the poorly designed street.¹



This street provides a refuge median to make it easier and safer for slower pedestrians to cross. *Photo: Dan Burden, Walkable and Livable Communities Institute*

Incomplete streets a problem for older Americans

Central to the creation of livable communities is the ability for everyone, regardless of age or ability, to travel safely. Yet, many of our nation's roads do little to meet the needs of the growing population of older Americans. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2025, nearly one in five Americans will be over the age of 65, totaling 62 million Americans. Many older adults will continue to drive for most of their trips, but some will face physical and cognitive challenges that must be addressed to enable their continued mobility and independence.

A transportation system that prioritizes fast automobile travel has created roads that are difficult to navigate or unsafe to travel by foot, bike, or public transportation. Crossings are long, intersections

are expansive, sidewalks are absent, and transit stops offer no place to sit. These roads are especially trying for older adults, even when behind the wheel. Almost 40 percent of Americans over the age of 50 say their neighborhoods lack adequate sidewalks, 55 percent report inadequate bike lanes or paths, and 48 percent have no comfortable place to wait for the bus.² These incomplete streets have deadly results: In 2008, older pedestrians were overrepresented in fatalities; while comprising 13 percent of the population, they accounted for 18 percent of the fatalities.³

These incomplete streets limit safe mobility and can breed isolation. As people age, some will stop or limit their driving. More than 50 percent of older Americans who do not drive stay home on a given day because they lack transportation options. Older Americans make just 6 percent of their trips on foot or bike – far less than in some European countries, where adults over the age of 65 use these active modes for about half of all trips.⁴ Non-driving seniors make 65 percent fewer trips to visit family, friends or go to church; many report they do not like to ask for rides.⁵



Complete Streets make it much easier for seniors to stay active, particularly when they require assistance from a cane, walker, or wheelchair. *Photos: Dan Burden, Walkable and Livable Communities Institute*

Complete Streets help create livable communities

Complete Streets policies offer the opportunity to improve travel options of people of all ages. Planning, designing, and building roads with all users in mind will provide older adults a variety of options for getting around, whether walking, taking public transportation, or sharing rides with family and friends.

A majority of people aged 50 or older support Complete Streets policies.⁶ More than half (54 percent) of older adults who reported an inhospitable walking, bicycling, and transit environment outside their homes would walk, bicycle, and take transit more if those problems were fixed.⁷ Eight of ten of older Americans surveyed consider that “for many seniors, public transportation is a better alternative to driving alone, particularly at night.”⁸ Complete Streets also create safe space for older adults to walk or bike as exercise, helping them achieve a healthier lifestyle.

A community with a Complete Streets policy considers the needs of older residents every time a transportation investment decision is made. Following a Complete Streets process will balance the sometimes-competing needs of older drivers and older pedestrians by slowing vehicles down where necessary, creating an easily navigated multimodal network of streets, and improving visibility. Proven methods to create Complete Streets for aging pedestrians include retiming signals

to account for slower walking speed, constructing median refuges or sidewalk bulb-outs to shorten crossing distances, and installing curb ramps, sidewalk seating, and bus shelters with seating. Improved lighting, signage, and pavement markings are among the measures that benefit drivers of any age, particularly older drivers.

Learn more at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/completestreets.

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- 1 Bartholomew, D. (2006, April 10). "Senior Cross Over Walking Ticket." *Daily News of Los Angeles*.
 - 2 AARP Public Policy Institute. (2009). *Planning Complete Streets for an Aging America*. Lynott, J., et al. Retrieved from: http://www.aarp.org/research/ppi/liv-com/transport/articles/Planning_Complete_Streets_for_an_Aging_America.html
 - 3 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's National Center for Statistics and Analysis. *Traffic Safety Facts: 2008 Overview*. Retrieved from: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811162.PDF>
 - 4 Pucher, J. & Dijkstra, L. (2003, September). "Promoting Safe Walking and Cycling to Improve Public Health: Lessons from the Netherlands and Germany." *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol.93, No.9.
 - 5 Surface Transportation Policy Project. (2004). *Aging Americans: Stranded Without Options*.
 - 6 Lynott, J. (2009).
 - 7 Lynott, J. (2009).
 - 8 American Public Transportation Association. (2005). *The Attitudes of Older Americans Toward Mobility and Transportation* Retrieved from: <http://www.publictransportation.org/resources/releases/release051207b.asp>