



Smart Growth America
Making Neighborhoods Great Together



**National Complete
Streets Coalition**

BENEFITS OF COMPLETE STREETS

Complete Streets Make for a Good Ride



This bus stop provides a safe, comfortable environment for transit users without impeding pedestrian traffic.
Photo: John LaPlante.

Just outside of Boston, new apartments were recently built across the street from the Dedham commuter rail station. However, residents are forced to scramble across a busy road and squeeze through a hole in a fence in order to access the station. The only alternatives are to take a shuttle bus on a three-mile detour or to drive to the station and pay to park.¹

Incomplete streets a barrier for riders, good service

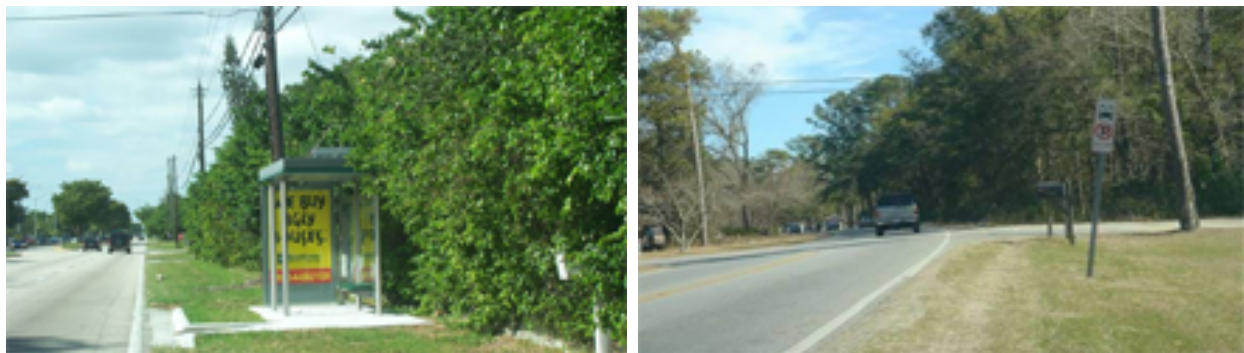
In too many cases, road design is out of sync with the needs of the people who are riding buses, trains, and trolleys. Poor design slows transit service and discourages people from using public transportation.

Even in communities served by public transportation, incomplete streets may discourage residents from fully using the service. Many users – pedestrians, older Americans, disabled people, and others – are unable to get to transit stops in a safe and convenient manner.

Nearly every transit trip begins as a walking trip – but the disconnect between transit and road planning means transit riders are often left to wait at bus stops marked by a lone post in the grass – no sidewalk, curb ramp or bench. Crossing the street to catch the bus may be hazardous. Even where sidewalks and safe roadway crossings exist, often the placement of driveways or other

barriers force bus stops to be located some distance from the intersection, increasing walk times and encouraging unsafe jay walking. A study in Houston, Texas found that three out of five disabled and elderly citizens do not have sidewalks between their home and the nearest bus stop. Fewer than 10 percent of them use public transportation, even though 50 percent live within two blocks of a bus stop.² A lack of sidewalks or pedestrian paths linking the entire catchment area of a transit stop form a barrier to transit use by all members of the community – young and old, with or without disabilities.

Buses get stuck in traffic, and their progress is further slowed by the constant need to merge back into the flow of traffic after pulling over to pick up passengers. Stop-and-go bus service discourages use, increasing traffic congestion by those who choose to drive instead. While solutions exist that can help speed service, transit agencies often don't have much say in tweaking road design for bus use.



These bus stops do not provide adequate access or shelter for transit users. *Left: US Access Board. Right: www.pedbikeimages.com*

Complete streets make transit safe, convenient, and comfortable

Some communities have begun to prioritize creating streets that work well for public transit vehicles and their riders. They see that buses and trains carry more people at a lower cost than automobiles, and help ease congestion and air pollution.

Streets that are well designed for transit can encourage more people to get out of their cars and onto the bus. Such streets provide accessible bus stops and assist buses in moving through traffic. Since 2000, rapid bus service in Los Angeles has used a priority signal system that allows buses to extend green lights or shorten red ones. Within the first year of operation, travel time decreased by 25 percent and ridership increased by more than 30 percent.³

Improving access to transit also reduces dependence on more costly alternatives, such as paratransit or private transportation services. A calculation by the Maryland Transit Administration found that providing paratransit for a daily commuter costs about \$38,500 a year. Basic improvements to a transit stop costs \$7,000, the equivalent of just two months' worth of that service for a single rider. More extensive improvements, such as adding a lighted shelter and bench and replacing the sidewalk leading to the stop, costs about \$58,000 – just 33 percent more than providing a single year of paratransit service for one person.

Transit systems have also discovered that bicycling and transit go well together. Most transit agencies now provide bicycle parking at bus and rail stops, and more than 100 transit systems in the U.S. now carry passengers' bicycles on buses and trains. This extends the range that customers can travel to reach transit -- assuming the roads to the transit stop are bicycle-friendly. Some transit agencies are working in partnership with departments of transportation to improve bicycle facilities in areas surrounding transit stops and stations.⁴

A community with a Complete Streets policy ensures safe and convenient access to public transit for all users. Complete Streets policies help create the safe and comfortable bus stops and smooth predictable transit trips that help make transit an attractive option.

Learn more at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/completestreets.

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- 1 (2006, September 21). Boston Globe.
 - 2 Gilderbloom, J., & Markham, J. "Housing quality among the elderly: A decade of changes." *Int J Aging Hum Dev* 1998; 46(1). Retrieved from: http://www.louisville.edu/org/sun/housing/cd_v2/Bookarticles/Ch1.htm.
 - 3 Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. (2002, March). *Metro Rapid Demonstration Program, Final Report*.
 - 4 Schneider, R. (2005). *Integration of Bicycles and Transit, TCRP Synthesis 62*.