

## 6. Complete Streets Policy





## The Role of the Complete Streets Policy

The primary recommendation of this Plan is for a statewide Complete Streets policy that applies to all Iowa DOT projects, including new construction, reconstruction, and 3R projects (resurfacing, restoration, or rehabilitation). From an infrastructure perspective, this is the most important recommendation of this Plan. The Complete Streets Policy was developed based on the National Complete Streets Coalition's guidelines for state legislation. However, this policy is written as an Iowa DOT policy (rather than state legislation).

The policy is purposefully lacking in specifics (e.g., the criteria used to determine what type of accommodation must be provided) to maintain flexibility and avoid incompatibilities. Guidance for selecting appropriate facility types is provided in Chapter 4.

The specifics of Complete Streets design and policy implementation (which are recommended by this plan) should reside in modifications to the Iowa DOT's Design Manual and Bridge Design Manual. Periodic reports (see section 3.5 of the policy) should reflect whether the Iowa DOT and the state as a whole are adequately following this policy.

Section 4 of the policy outlines its effective date for Iowa DOT projects. Although it is non-binding to other transportation agencies (Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Regional Planning Affiliations (RPAs), counties, and municipalities), these agencies are encouraged to adopt similar policies, as some have already.

## 6.1 Complete Streets Policy Language

### Section 1—Complete Streets

- 1.1.** Motor vehicle, public transportation, bicycle, and pedestrian modes are each integral to the transportation system, and the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) shall view all transportation improvements as opportunities to improve safety, access, and mobility for all transportation users.
- 1.2.** Accommodations for all users shall be considered in the planning, design, construction, and reconstruction of any primary highway, and should be considered for any secondary or local transportation project receiving federal or state funding. New accommodations shall be considered in Iowa DOT 3R projects (Resurfacing, Restoration, or Rehabilitation) whereby bicycling, pedestrian, and transit provisions can be added within the scope of the project. This shall include the reduction of barriers by including accommodations across, as well as along, transportation facilities. The Iowa DOT shall create a safe, comprehensive, integrated, and connected network to accommodate all users in a manner that is suitable and sensitive to the rural, suburban, or urban context.
- 1.3.** The Iowa DOT shall (and any regional or local entity using state or federal funds to plan, design, or construct a transportation facility should) consult the latest versions of the following design guidelines and standards, which clarify and expand upon the Iowa DOT's design manuals and specifications:
  - a.** *A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets* (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials);
  - b.** *Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities* (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials);

- c. *Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities* (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials); and
- d. *Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines* (United States Access Board).

Finally, the Iowa DOT should utilize the latest version of the following guidelines, which apply to unique situations and where accommodation treatments are needed beyond typical applications:

- e. *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach: An ITE Recommended Practice* (Institute of Transportation Engineers); and
  - f. *Urban Bikeway Design Guide* (National Association of City Transportation Officials).
- 1.4. The Iowa DOT shall support the use of federal and state funds by Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Regional Planning Affiliations, counties, and cities for projects that follow a Complete Streets process by encouraging the examination of project prioritization and selection processes. The Iowa DOT should also examine applicable federal and state funding programs to ensure that projects that follow a Complete Streets process are fairly considered.
  - 1.5. The Iowa DOT shall encourage regional and local entities to follow a Complete Streets policy for all transportation projects by encouraging possible modifications to Statewide Urban Design and Specifications (SUDAS) to reflect the Complete Streets process. The Iowa DOT may also provide assistance to and coordinate with regional and local entities in developing and implementing complementary Complete Streets policies. In the development of projects within city boundaries, the Iowa DOT shall offer assistance, as appropriate, in multimodal transportation planning and design.
  - 1.6. The Iowa DOT shall modify its procedures, documents, training systems, and performance measures to ensure that the needs of all

users of the primary highway system are included in all phases of all projects not excepted from the provisions of this policy by Section 2. The Iowa DOT shall create an implementation plan, including a schedule and stakeholder outreach plan, in consultation with interested stakeholders.

- 1.7. For bicycle and pedestrian accommodations within primary highway right of way (ROW), the Iowa DOT shall require the local sponsoring entity to complete form 632007, Application for Use of Highway Right of Way for Multipurpose Trail Operation. The permit shall require the local entity to maintain the facility as appropriate for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, including but not limited to maintenance and repair of the surface, maintenance of vertical and lateral clearances, snow removal, and debris removal. The permit shall require the local entity to be responsible for the facility meeting applicable municipal, county, state, and federal requirements, and addressing any necessary future modifications after initial construction. If applicable, the cost of constructing accommodations, when not an integral part of an Iowa DOT project or when found to be excessively disproportionate as determined by Sections 2.3 and 2.4, shall not be an Iowa DOT cost.





## Section 2—Exceptions

- 2.1.** It is a goal of the Iowa DOT to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety, access, and mobility as part of all primary highway projects. However, there may be situations in which it is desirable to seek an exception in order to reduce the project cost impact of providing bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. Other than projects excepted from the provisions of this policy by Sections 2.2 and 2.3, all projects that are granted exceptions should still consider incremental bicycle and pedestrian improvements.
- 2.2.** The provision of facilities pursuant to Section 1 shall not be required if:
- a.** Bicycle or pedestrian use is prohibited on the transportation facility;
  - b.** The transportation facility has a posted minimum speed limit;
  - c.** The provision of the accommodations would be unsafe;
  - d.** ROW acquisition would be necessary for the purpose of providing the accommodations;
  - e.** The project scope is limited to maintenance activity; or
  - f.** The provision of the accommodations is limited by the Code of Iowa or Iowa DOT Administrative Rules.
- 2.3.** For roadway projects within incorporated areas, the provision of facilities pursuant to section 1 shall not be required if the Director of the Iowa DOT (or appointed designee) determines, with respect to a primary highway, that:
- a.** The additional cost of new bicycle and pedestrian accommodations would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use. Excessively disproportionate is defined as exceeding twenty percent of the cost of the larger transportation project. In cases where the additional cost is considered excessively disproportionate, the project should still consider accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians, but the scope of accommodations may be reduced to the point that the additional cost does not exceed twenty percent of the total project budget; or
  - b.** There is a demonstrated absence of future need as determined by factors including current and future land use, current and projected user volumes, population density, and crash data. For design and construction, the time horizon considered for future need shall be defined as one-half of the operational lifespan of the transportation facility for pedestrian accommodations and the entire operational lifespan for bicycle accommodations. For example, if a road in the metro area periphery is being reconstructed with a 20-year lifespan, future development plans should be consulted and if the area will be developed within 10 years, pedestrian and bicycle accommodations should be provided. If it will be developed between 10 and 20 years, only bicycle accommodations should be provided. For planning and ROW acquisition, the time horizon considered for future need shall be defined as twice the operational lifespan of the transportation facility.

- 2.4.** For rural projects, the provision of facilities pursuant to section 1 shall not be required if the Director of the Iowa DOT (or appointed designee) determines, with respect to a primary highway, that the additional cost of new bicycle and pedestrian accommodations would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use as determined by section (a) and (b) below.
- a.** Excessively disproportionate is defined as exceeding a certain percentage of the cost of the larger transportation project. The cost exception threshold varies and is determined based on the current Bicycle Compatibility Rating (identified in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and maintained by the Systems Planning Bureau) and the number of Need Tests that are passed. The matrix below specifies the cost exception threshold to be used for rural projects.
- The following need tests may be electively performed in order to attempt to achieve a lower cost exception threshold for a project. If these tests are not performed, the cost exception threshold defaults to twenty percent.
1. A bikeway along the project is included in a bicycle or pedestrian plan.
  2. The project creates a connection between two or more existing, programmed, or planned bikeways or trails.
  3. The project is near a city (within 1 mile of corporate limits for cities less than 5,000 population, within 2 miles of corporate limits for cities with 5,000 to 15,000 population, and within 3 miles of corporate limits for cities over 15,000 population).
  4. There are employment centers, parks, schools, residential areas, or other destinations within 0.5 miles of the project.
  5. The project is part of an official or recognized bike route used regularly by a group of bicyclists, or there is probability that 25 or more bicyclists per day can be expected if adequate accommodations were provided (based on the American Community Survey statewide mode share for bicycling and the average daily traffic for the project).
- b.** In cases where the additional cost is considered excessively disproportionate, the project should still consider accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians, but the scope of accommodations may be reduced to the point that the additional cost does not exceed the cost exception threshold. Reduced scope accommodations must still meet current standards unless a design exception is approved.
- 2.5.** The Iowa DOT shall consult local and regional plans, local officials, and the general public, as appropriate, in both the provision of facilities and assessing exceptions.
- 2.6.** Exceptions to this policy shall be documented in writing with supporting data that indicates the reason for the exception and shall be shared with the Advisory Committee as established in section 3.

**Figure 6.1: Cost exception threshold for rural projects***Need Tests Passed*

*Current Condition  
Bicycle Compatibility  
Rating*

|          | 3 or more | 2 out of 5 | 1 out of 5 | 0 out of 5 |
|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Poor     | 20%       | 15%        | 10%        | 0%         |
| Moderate | 15%       | 10%        | 5%         | 0%         |
| Good     | 10%       | 5%         | 3%         | 0%         |



## Section 3—Complete Streets Advisory Committee

- 3.1.** The Iowa DOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, staffed by the Iowa DOT, shall serve as the Complete Streets Advisory Committee for the following purposes:
  - a.** Providing education and advice to the Iowa DOT, local engineers and planners, consulting engineers, interest groups, and the general public;
  - b.** Making recommendations to the Director of the Iowa DOT (or appointed designee) on policies and procedures, assisting in updating design guidance, providing educational opportunities to employees, and establishing new measures to track success in multimodal planning and design; and
  - c.** Preparing periodic reports as outlined in section 3.5.
- 3.2.** Bridges and Structures, Design, Local Systems, Location and Environment, Systems Planning, and Traffic and Safety Bureaus, as well as Districts shall designate one or more staff members to serve on the Complete Streets Advisory Committee.
- 3.3.** Non-Iowa DOT members of the Complete Streets Advisory Committee shall be appointed by the Director of the Iowa DOT (or appointed designee) and shall include members representing each of the following:
  - a.** The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services;
  - b.** Practicing licensed engineers with expertise in multimodal transportation;
  - c.** Knowledgeable, community planners with experience in complete streets (Iowa chapter of the American Planning Association, Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals, etc.);
  - d.** The Iowa County Engineers Association;
  - e.** The American Public Works Association—Iowa Chapter;
  - f.** A Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO);
  - g.** A Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA);
  - h.** American Association of Retired Persons;
  - i.** Organizations interested in the promotion of bicycling;
  - j.** Organizations interested in the promotion of walking;
  - k.** Organizations representing persons with disabilities;
  - l.** Automobile and/or trucking transport organizations; and
  - m.** Other interested parties as determined by the Iowa DOT.
- 3.4.** The Advisory Committee shall meet twice per year. A chair(s) shall be appointed by the Committee members to serve a two-year term. The Iowa DOT bicycle and pedestrian coordinator shall serve as the liaison. The Committee membership shall be reviewed on a 3-year cycle.
- 3.5.** Periodic public reports may include the following information:
  - a.** A summary of specific actions taken by the Iowa DOT in the preceding year to improve the safety, access, and mobility of roadways for all users as defined in section 1.2;
  - b.** Any identified changes to the Complete Streets Policy to facilitate implementation;
  - c.** Modifications made to or recommended for protocols, practices, guidance, standards, or other requirements to facilitate Complete Streets implementation;
  - d.** The status of the development of multimodal performance measures;
  - e.** Information collected from agencies on the percentage of trips made by foot, bicycle, and public transportation, together with the target level of the use of these modes;
  - f.** Crash statistics by mode, age, road type, location, and other relevant factors; and
  - g.** Other related information as requested.

## Section 4—Effective Date

- 4.1. This policy shall take effect on December 11, 2018, meaning that section 1 shall apply to any transportation project for which a final concept has been completed on or after January 1, 2020.
- 4.2. The Iowa DOT shall review the fiscal impact of this policy upon the completion of one full programming and project letting cycle following the effective date identified in section 4.1, and biennially thereafter.

## 6.2 Additional Guidance

The following additional guidance is provided to add clarity to the intent and implementation of the Complete Streets Policy.

### Intent to Improve Conditions for Biking

The intent of the Complete Streets Policy is to improve conditions for bicycling and walking in every project, even if the project has a lower cost exception threshold. On many projects this means improving the Bicycle Compatibility Rating from “poor” or “moderate” to “moderate” or “good.” On roads that already have a Bicycle Compatibility Rating of “good” prior to construction and with suitable pedestrian accommodations, the level of quality for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations should be maintained or improved.

For example, a two-lane roadway with 6-foot wide paved shoulders might be rated “good” for bicycling. But if the roadway is widened to four-lane and only 4-foot wide paved shoulders are provided due to ROW constraints, the rating may drop to “poor” or “moderate.” Such an outcome should be avoided if possible.

In other words, the intent is that post-construction conditions be at least as good as they were before the project began and that roadway projects do not result in a reduction of quality or comfort for bicyclists or pedestrians. To achieve this objective, the selection of the bicycle facility type must be made in consideration of traffic volumes and speeds. See Chapter 4 for facility selection guidance.

### Section 1.7 (Maintenance Agreements)

This section of the Complete Streets Policy requires that local entities agree to maintain bicycle and pedestrian accommodations within primary highway ROW. This requirement is intended to apply to multi-use trails and sidewalks built alongside roadways. It is not intended to apply to bikeways constructed as part of the roadway, such as paved shoulders or bike lanes. On-road bikeways on primary highways should be designed, funded, constructed, and maintained as part of the roadway by Iowa DOT. Some exceptions to this practice may occur, however, if local entities desire a higher level of maintenance than can reasonably be provided by Iowa DOT. An example is the portion of Iowa 1 near Solon where local entities desired a very high level of shoulder sweeping and agreed to take on this maintenance activity.





## Section 2.4 (Rural Project Cost Exception Thresholds)

The Policy's matrix (recreated in Figure 6.2) provides a variable cost exception threshold based on existing conditions and the current and future need for accommodations. This matrix only applies to rural projects. By nature, projects within cities will usually be in areas with moderate to high levels of bicycle and pedestrian latent demand. Furthermore, since pedestrian activity in areas outside of cities is far less likely than is bicycle activity, this matrix focuses on conditions related to bicyclist demand.

For roadways with good or moderate current conditions for bicycling, it is important that conditions be maintained or improved when a project is designed and constructed, which is the reason the matrix includes cost exception thresholds in the bottom row. Likewise, roadways on which there is a demonstrated absence of future need should not be required to allocate as much of the project budget toward accommodations. However, it is important that some consideration be given on every project (even if no need tests are passed), such as providing regulatory, warning, or wayfinding signage. (The Facility Selection Matrix and Bicycle Facilities and Treatments sections of Chapter 4 give guidance in this area and the Design Manual section 12B-01 defines bicycle route, shared lane, and shared lane marking.) Since wider pavement generally equates to better conditions for bicycling, it is also desirable to widen the pavement (total width of roadway and paved shoulders) as much as possible within the cost exception threshold, even if it is not possible to provide 4 to 6 feet of effective paved shoulder width.

While it is ideal to improve conditions to a "good" Bicycle Compatibility Rating, a lower level of accommodation can be accepted if few of the need tests are passed. For example, if a roadway is currently rated "poor" for bicycling and only one out of the five need tests are passed, then only up to 10 percent of the project cost would need to be spent on accommodations to ideally improve the rating to "moderate" (although a rating of "good" would still be desired if achievable for 10 percent of the project budget).

Other than projects that are entirely exempt from the Complete Streets Policy, the only situation in which no portion of the budget should be allocated to accommodations is if none of the need tests are passed.

**Figure 6.2: Annotated Complete Streets Policy cost exception threshold matrix**

|  |          | Needs Test Passed   |            |            |            |
|--|----------|---|------------|------------|------------|
|  |          | 3 or more   | 2 out of 5 | 1 out of 5 | 0 out of 5 |
| Current Condition<br>Bicycle Compatibility<br>Rating                 | Poor     | 20%*  | 15%        | 10%        | 0%         |
|  | Moderate | 15%   | 10%        | 5%         | 0%         |
|  | Good     | 10%   | 5%         | 3%         | 0%         |
|  |          | * The percent of a project's budget may exceed 20% if high bicycle and/or pedestrian demand exists. |            |            |            |
| Minimum Target<br>Bicycle Compatibility<br>Rating After Construction |          | Poor, but with some minimum improvement   |            |            |            |
|  |          | Moderate  |            |            |            |
|  |          | Good  |            |            |            |

### Need Tests

Bicycle and pedestrian accommodations should be included in a project by default. In other words, providing accommodations should not require justification. Rather, to exclude accommodations in accordance with the exceptions clause of the Complete Streets Policy, the absence of future need should be demonstrated during the project scoping process.

The above matrix necessitates some quantifiable "tests" to determine whether the absence of need can be demonstrated. Conducting these tests is optional and should only be undertaken if the design engineer or Project Management Team believes a certain project will have an absence of need. These tests are stated in the above Complete Streets Policy (section 2.4).