

MORPC Complete Streets Policy

1. Background

MORPC has long been a proponent of creating a multimodal, safe and efficient transportation system that ensures accessibility to all roadway users. In order to increase the number of projects that provide bicycle and pedestrian facilities in central Ohio, MORPC adopted a Routine Accommodation policy in 2004. This policy recognized the importance of and encouraged the construction of non-motorist facilities by putting a mechanism in place that required all project sponsors receiving MORPC-attributable federal funding to provide bicycle and pedestrian facilities in their design and construction phases as appropriate.

Since 2004, MORPC has engaged in intensive research to better understand how it can help make the region as attractive, livable, and prosperous as possible. The foundation of this research was a multifaceted growth strategy called *Regional Connections*. The objectives of *Regional Connections* were to create an understanding of central Ohio's anticipated growth over the next 20 to 30 years, and to formulate a strategy to address this growth in a way that would enhance the region aesthetically and economically. In 2007, MORPC adopted the recommendations of *Regional Connections* as "a significant guiding framework for Commission policy decisions."

This Complete Streets policy builds upon these efforts and promotes a multimodal transportation system that is integrated with sustainable land use developments. Its main objective is to design and build roads that safely and comfortably accommodate all users of roadways, including motorists, cyclists, pedestrians, transit and school bus riders, delivery and service personnel, freight haulers, and emergency responders. It includes people of all ages and abilities.

Building complete streets provides many benefits to residents, business owners, developers, and the community as a whole. First and foremost, embracing the complete streets concept will create balanced transportation systems by providing accessible, safe, and efficient connections between destinations. It will bolster economic growth and stability while increasing property values. It will ensure job growth, reduce crashes through safety improvements, improve public health and fitness, reduce harmful emissions, and reduce the overall demand on our roadways by allowing people to replace motor vehicle trips with active transportation options. Secondly, integrating sidewalks, bike facilities, transit amenities, or safe crossings into the initial design of a project spares the expense and complications of retrofits later.

2. Definition

Complete Streets are roadways designed to safely and comfortably accommodate all users, including, but not limited to motorists, cyclists, pedestrians, transit and school bus riders, delivery and service personnel, freight haulers, and emergency responders. "All users" includes people of all ages and abilities.

3. Vision/Purpose

To create an equitable, balanced, and effective transportation system where every roadway user can travel safely and comfortably and where sustainable transportation options are available to everyone.

The **goals** of this Complete Streets Policy are:

- 1) To create a comprehensive, integrated, and connected transportation network that supports compact, sustainable development and provides livable communities.

- 2) To ensure safety, ease of use, and ease of transfer between modes for all users of the transportation system.
- 3) To provide flexibility for different types of streets, areas, and users.

4. Policy

Policy Statement

1. MORPC will promote the Complete Streets concept throughout the region and, therefore, recommends that all local jurisdictions and the state adopt comprehensive Complete Streets policies, consistent with the Regional Policy. MORPC will seek incorporation of the Complete Streets concept and policy into the development of all transportation infrastructures within the region at all phases of their development, including planning and land use control, scoping, design approvals, implementation, and performance monitoring.
2. MORPC requires that all projects receiving MORPC-attributable federal funding adhere to this policy. MORPC members receiving MORPC-attributable federal funding shall fill out the checklist accompanying this policy. More information on the review and appeals process is available in the Applicability section. Projects utilizing any other funding sources are also encouraged to adhere to this policy.

Applicability

This Complete Streets Policy applies to all projects, including the new construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, repair, maintenance, or planning of roadways, trails and other transportation facilities that will use federal funds allocated through MORPC.

Review process – The following three steps will be part of the general review process of MORPC-funded projects. A MORPC checklist accompanying the policy was developed to guide project sponsors through the project definition, scoping, funding application, and project design stages.

Step 1: As described in MORPC’s funding application process, MORPC staff will perform an initial screening of new requests and discuss with the applicants the competitiveness of their requests in comparison to other projects and available funding. MORPC staff will also be available to discuss the different ways of adhering to the Complete Streets policy and provide technical assistance.

Step 2: Projects sponsors applying for MORPC-attributable federal funding will be asked to provide a statement that their project will comply with the Complete Streets policy by accommodating all users as reasonably as possible. Questions as shown in the Complete Streets checklist *Section A* are only informational. Applicants will respond to these questions as part of completing the funding application itself.

Step 3: After MORPC has committed funding to a project, MORPC staff will review the project throughout the design phase to ensure that the requirements are met and to provide assistance where needed. The completion of the answers in *Section B* of the Complete Streets checklist will assist with this process. Because of the flexibility of the policy and the variety of approaches that a sponsor may take to complete a street, MORPC staff, as stewards of the Complete Streets policy, will work with the project sponsor throughout the project development to find an acceptable solution for both parties. MORPC staff will maintain publically available information describing the nature and extent of the compliance with the Complete Streets policy. The appeals process described below would be used in those instances where sponsors and staff cannot reach an agreement.

Appeal process – Project sponsors may request an exemption or re-review of their projects by the Appeals committee if they cannot reach an agreement with MORPC staff.

The Appeals committee is made up of a total of six (6) people who are appointed by the Policy Committee Chair for two years terms. Members may be reappointed for successive terms. The voting membership consists of three (3) representatives of local communities and two (2) public members who are all knowledgeable about transportation design. This committee is supported by one (1) non-voting MORPC staff. The Appeals committee will meet on an “as needed” basis. MORPC staff will review the requests initially and provide a report with recommendations to the committee in advance of each meeting. The applicant will have the opportunity to review the report and add comments to it prior to its submittal to the committee. During each meeting the committee shall discuss and evaluate the request(s) and vote on a recommendation. The committee may invite the applicant to attend the meeting(s).

A quorum will consist of at least three (3) voting members, and a majority of the voting members of the full appeals committee is needed to act. Members with conflicts of interest on a particular project before the committee must recuse themselves from deliberation on that project. In the event that the sponsor disagrees with the action of the Appeals committee, the sponsor may appeal to the MORPC Policy Committee officers who may or may not elect to hear the appeal request.

Instead of an exemption, the Appeals committee may also suggest a lesser level of accommodation. All exemptions will be kept on record and made publicly available. Over the next year, MORPC staff will prepare an exemption document that will help streamline the appeals process. Exceptions would account for issues of prohibitive costs, highways or other roads where pedestrians are not allowed, and other justifiable reasons that arise during development of projects with allocated MORPC funds.

Requirements

- Each project shall use the most appropriate design standards and procedures. For projects using MORPC attributable federal funding, it will be necessary to meet or exceed standards and procedures acceptable to the Ohio and U.S. Departments of Transportation, such as the Ohio Department of Transportation’s Project Development Process and Location & Design Manual.
- Project sponsors shall fill out Section B of the checklist accompanying this policy and provide completed form to MORPC.
- Designs shall include accommodation of all users and be sensitive to the context of the project setting. It is important to note that Complete Streets may look different for every project and road type. For example, wide lanes or paved shoulders may be sufficient in a rural area, whereas sidewalks and/or bike lanes are needed in an urban setting. Also, when re-striping projects are considered, where the right-of-way will not change, options such as bike lanes, sharrows, and pedestrian crosswalks could still be implemented. More information and examples will be provided as part of the checklist and toolkit.
- A systems approach shall be used in developing roadway projects, especially to ensure coordination with nearby jurisdictions, projects, and plans irrespective of the project sponsor.
- If there is another project planned or in development near this project the two should be coordinated to ensure consistency in the facilities serving the corridor.
- Logical termini should be chosen to include connections through “pinch points,” such as overpasses, railroad crossings, and bridges. Logical termini should not be chosen so that the project ends before such a “pinch point” unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

- If the project serves a destination point, such as a school, recreational facility, shopping center, hospital, or office complex, the project shall provide the opportunity for the destination to have access to the project's pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- Every project shall involve the local transit agency in the design process to ensure that sufficient accommodation of transit vehicles and access to transit facilities is provided. The project sponsor shall provide the local transit agency during Step 1 of the Project Development Process the opportunity to participate throughout the entire process.
- Public transit facilities shall be designed with the goals of Complete Streets in mind, by including sidewalks, bicycle connections, or secure bicycle parking, among others.
- Every project shall provide the opportunity for utility/telecommunications infrastructure to be appropriately accommodated to allow for existing and future growth. Efficient use of right-of-way during construction and maintenance should be considered to improve access to utility systems, including future broadband networks. This policy is not intended to create new rights for utilities outside those provided by existing law and contract.
- Every project shall ensure that the provision of accommodations for one mode does not prevent safe use by another mode (e.g., a bus shelter should not block the clear walking zone on the sidewalk).

5. Recommendations

- All users should be considered during the entire life cycle of a project, including planning, design, construction, operations, and maintenance.
- Street furniture, such as bike racks or benches, should be considered as part of all projects as long as they do not impede any user.
- When designing a facility that includes or crosses an existing or future transit route, ensure that the appropriate pedestrian and wheelchair access is provided to and from the transit stops.
- Traffic-calming elements including, but not limited to, landscaping, street trees, and narrowing of lanes, should be considered where safe and appropriate.
- Project sponsors should consider including street trees and landscape components, with careful analysis of tree, site, and design considerations.
- Special consideration should be given to future planned facilities or services.
- Each project design should be coordinated with appropriate access management strategies. Access management strategies should consider the placement of sidewalks and ramps to eliminate sight distance issues.
- Although this policy focuses on engineering projects, the project sponsor should provide education, encouragement, and enforcement strategies during or after the project. The education component should include government officials, developers, and the public. A toolkit designed by MORPC staff will provide best practices, ideas, and resources to help with these efforts (see Implementation section).
- While this policy focuses on transportation, local governments should review their land use and zoning policies to provide for mixed land use developments and projects that provide direct non-vehicular connections within a given development.
- Each local community should regularly update its project design standards and procedures and train its staff to adhere to them.

- Local governments are encouraged to adopt their own Complete Streets policies, consistent with this regional policy and federal and state design standards. State governments should work with the local Metropolitan Planning Organizations to ensure consistency in policies at the state, regional and local level.

6. Implementation

Upon approval and adoption of this Complete Streets policy, it will become part of MORPC's planning process and project selection for MORPC-attributable funding. The principles of this policy will also guide MORPC staff in the preparation of the Regional Transportation Plan and other plans it prepares or to which it contributes.

A toolkit will be developed and provided to each community in modules as they become available. The objective of this toolkit is to assist project sponsors in developing Complete Streets projects. This toolkit will contain model policies, sample design standards, examples for land use and zoning practices, educational and enforcement strategies, and information on other resources.

7. Evaluation

MORPC shall, at a minimum, evaluate this policy and the documents associated with it on an annual basis. This evaluation may include recommendations for amendments to the Complete Streets Policy, including the development of exemption guidance, and subsequently be considered for adoption by the Policy Committee of MORPC utilizing its then current public and member involvement procedures.