



Legislative Report on Complete Streets

January 2011



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Report Development Cost

As required in Minnesota Statute 3.197, this document must contain the cost of preparing the report at the beginning of the report, including any costs incurred by another agency or another level of government.

Mn/DOT staff costs totaled \$5,000.

Legislative request

This report is in response to the legislative directive to the commissioner of transportation to report on the department's Complete Streets activities. Laws 2010, Chapter 351, Section 72. Chapter 351, require that a report is completed by Jan. 15, 2011 addressing three items:

- State Aid variance process
- Plan implementation
- Statutory barriers

State Aid variance process

The State Aid variance process is provided for in Minnesota Statute 162.155 and allows local agencies to be granted waivers to Minnesota Rules 8820 if a variance committee recommends the waiver and the commissioner of transportation grants it. The Complete Streets legislation now requires each variance committee to consider the *Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets*, from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and the *Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities*, from the Institute of Transportation Engineers in evaluating any variance that is related to Complete Streets.

Actions taken to expedite the process

The checklist to complete a State Aid variance committee meeting has been recently modified. The detailed internal checklist helps State Aid staff to be knowledgeable of the steps required to process variance requests and to ensure that there is no loss of productivity as staff changes occur. The procedure described in the checklist helps staff expedite the process and ensures they are fully informed of their responsibilities.

Actions taken to make the process more transparent

The variance process link has been moved to the front page of the State Aid for Local Transportation webpage under Quick Links.

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/stateaid/index.html>

The webpage contains meeting dates for the current year, a map showing where the Variance Committee meetings are held, a link to the State Aid Rules, a State Aid Standards Development Slide Show and a contact person for further information and assistance. It also includes a Design Element Variance Checklist for agencies requesting a variance to be sure their request includes all the information a variance committee uses in considering recommendations. The revised checklist includes a reference to the AASHTO green book and ITE book so that a requesting agency can use these guides to support their submittal.

Review of past variance requests

From January 1 - October 1, 2010 there were 10 variance requests; four were related to Complete Streets designs. Three of the four were approved. The variance requested by the city of Monticello to narrow a Municipal State Aid Street from 38 feet to 36 feet with parking on both sides was denied based on the following reasons as recommended by the variance committee:

- There is not a large parking demand. West River Street can remain 36 feet wide with parking allowed on one side or West River Street can be narrowed to 32 feet wide with parking allowed on one side of the street;
- West River Street can be widened to 38 feet wide since there is sufficient right of way and there are few mature trees to remove.

Plan implementation

The State Aid Division engineer has been assigned as the Complete Streets department champion and a project manager has been identified.

A webpage for Complete Streets has been created. A detailed work plan has been developed, is posted on the web and is updated on a regular basis. So far the following assignments have been completed:

- Reviewed AASHTO standards
- Updated State Aid variance justification checklist
- Placed a link for variances on the front page of the State Aid website
- Reviewed the layout content checklist
- Reviewed the highway project development process handbook
- Reviewed the cost participation policy

Staff members from different functional groups have been identified to discuss processes to implement a Complete Streets policy. The following functional groups have been selected:

- **Design process** — The group is identifying possible constraints in the design phase. Members of the group have interviewed personnel from Traffic, Design Standards, Maintenance and state aid to describe Mn/DOT's current design approaches for the highway system and to discuss different manuals including the AASHTO green book and the Minnesota Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. A comparison between Minnesota State Aid standards and national standards has been prepared and has been shared with the county and city standards committees who recommend rule changes for Chapter 8820.
- **Funding and planning** — Funding and planning play a key role in implementing any policy. Possible funding sources, planning approaches and best practices are being evaluated for the Complete Streets project. A list of possible funding

sources, ways to access funding and the restrictions of each funding source will be developed. A grant was received through the National Academies to lead an initiative to prepare a Complete Streets plan and evaluate the Complete Streets planning process in Grand Rapids, Minn. A research proposal from the University of Minnesota (*Planning and Implementation of Complete Streets at Multiple Scales*) has been evaluated by Mn/DOT and funded by the Local Road Research Board. The proposal submitted would provide a valuable tool for transportation practitioners and local, county and state agencies through development of an illustrated framework approach and practical guide to analysis, evaluation and prioritization of transportation modes across key locations. The guide would highlight plans that have integrated complete streets concepts, emerging complete streets policies and successful complete streets projects that have been implemented and constructed in a variety of contexts. Findings and case studies will be available on CD, through regional workshops and on an interactive website.

- **Training and support**—Training and support needs are being identified within Mn/DOT and at the local agencies. Mn/DOT will develop training to help agencies develop and implement their own Complete Streets policies. The Local Technical Assistance Program at the University of Minnesota will assist Mn/DOT develop this training. A “*Designing Complete Streets*” training module, with interactive exercises, has been developed and integrated into Mn/DOT’s Core Foundations Workshop. Another training module, “*Serving All Modes,*” is included in Mn/DOT’s Advanced Flexibility in Design Workshop. The modules include information about modes of travel, the Complete Streets concept, design trade-offs and risk assessments. Participants also learn about universal design principles, ADA design requirements, and how to better serve and integrate the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users in transportation projects. These training modules are designed for internal and external participants.

An external advisory group has been established and its first meeting was held July 29, 2010. The group discussed work prioritization and ongoing local projects that support or interact with Mn/DOT Complete Streets initiatives. The group will meet again in February 2011. The group included:

- Seven state agency representatives
- Eight local agency representatives
- Nine stakeholder group representatives
- One federal agency representative
- One state legislator

District 4 Planning and Design staff, Central Office Geometrics and Landscape Architecture staff and the Director of CSS recently met to discuss Complete Streets concept and design options for downtown Alexandria. The project is planned for 2013 and exemplifies the benefits of working together early in the planning and design process. This is an indication that the principles are being adopted by staff in the agency and will become a way of doing business.

Comments on the Complete Streets activities within Mn/DOT are included in the 2012–2013 Budget Narrative submitted to Minnesota Management and Budget and will be noted in future budget documents as required.

The Complete Street plan implementation is a long term process expected to take several years.

Statutory barriers

The external advisory group has identified three potential legislative barriers that may be brought forward in the future, but not for the 2011 Legislative Session. There was no consensus that any of these barriers should be pursued immediately.

Items for future consideration of legislative action:

- Allow cities and counties with Complete Streets policies to be exempt from the requirement of Minnesota Statute 161, which requires a commissioner's speed study before establishing a speed limit other than the statutory defined limit
- Allow cities and counties with Complete Streets policies to be exempt from all State Aid design standards
- Waive the State Aid variance process requirement that requesting agencies assume all liability if the agency has adopted Complete Streets policies

As work with the external advisory group continues, additional barriers may be identified. These will be brought forward in the January 2012 report.

The external advisory group reviewed and commented on this document. Their comments were incorporated into the final report.