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Township Law *E-Letter*

Introduction to Michigan's "Complete Streets" Legislation

Local and state governments across the country are joining a "Complete Streets" movement to make their communities more livable. Two laws amended last year brought the "Complete Streets" movement to Michigan. Here is what you need to know about the new laws.

What are "Complete Streets?"

Complete streets are usable by all: the young, the old, the motorist, cyclist, walker, wheelchair user, bus rider, or shopper and shopkeeper. A Complete Street Policy therefore directs transportation planners and engineers to design streets for all these users.

Complete Streets can encourage economic growth and stability by providing safe, accessible, and efficient connections between home, public transportation, work, and shopping destinations; improving safety; promoting healthy living by encouraging more walking and biking in persons of all ages, backgrounds, and fitness levels; and reducing stress on automobile transportation networks.

Complete Streets commonly include: sidewalks, bike lanes, wide shoulders, multitude of crossing opportunities, refuge medians, bus shelters and crossings, special bus lanes, raised crosswalks, curb ramps, audible or tactile pedestrian signals, longer crossing times, and sidewalk bulb-outs. In this way, the Complete Street concept goes beyond aesthetics, bike trails, and walkability, because it requires consideration of things like ADA compliance and other potential street amenities.

The Law that Wasn't Adopted

Legislation initially proposed in May 2010 would have required a significant amount of immediate

action on the part of local road agencies and land-use planners. As originally drafted, the bills would have required local road agencies to adopt Complete Streets policies within two years; required sidewalks in all construction and preservation projects, unless the cost would be excessively disproportionate; required local land-use plans to consider or incorporate a "complete streets interconnected transportation system," as



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well as issues like traffic congestion and noise, traffic impacts of large developments, traffic safety, commercial driveways, traffic calming techniques or devices (such as speed bumps), etc. But those proposals were left on the “cutting room floor,” and somewhat more modest laws were eventually passed last year.

Public Act 135 of 2010

As finally adopted, Act 135 amended Act 51 to require local road agencies to adopt “Complete Streets” policies in their land use “master-plans.” The law defines “Complete Streets” as those that “promote safe and efficient movement of people and goods whether by car, truck, transit, assistive device, foot, or bicycle.”

The new law also created a government “complete streets” advisory council including representatives of various pro-sidewalk interest groups. The Complete Streets Advisory Council held its first meeting on April 27, 2011 and will meet quarterly in the future. More information about the Council is available at MDOT’s website: http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,1607,7-151-9623_31969_57564---,00.html. The new law also requires certain consultations between state, county and local governments regarding their respective “complete streets” policies. The law specifically requires “consultation,” but not “agreements,” between units of government .

Public Act 134 of 2010

Act 134 amended the Michigan Planning Enabling Act to require local land-use plans to “provide for safe and efficient movement of people and goods by motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, and other legal users” (rather than just automobiles) and other provisions relating to the interconnectivity of various elements of the transportation system.

What Is Required of Townships?

The easy answer to this question is nothing—**yet**. But the amendments to the Michigan Planning

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Enabling Act will eventually affect your Township, because the legislation:

- Modifies the definition of “streets” to specifically include all legal users.
- Expands the elements that may be included in a master plan to encompass all transportation systems that move people and goods.
- Specifies that transportation improvements identified in a plan are appropriate to the context of the community and considers all legal users of the public right of way.
- Identifies the means for implementing transportation elements of the master plan in cooperation with the county road commission or MDOT.

The amendments to Act 51 also change state law governing expenditures of state transportation funding, which largely affect MDOT and road agencies, including the following noteworthy provisions:

- Requires counties, cities, villages, and MDOT to consult with one another when planning non-motorized projects affecting a transportation facility that belongs to the other.
- Requires non-motorized improvements to meet accepted practices or established best practices.
- Requires road agencies to notify one another when their five-year non-motorized programs are finalized.
- Requires the State Transportation Commission (STC), within two years, to adopt a Complete Streets policy for MDOT, and to develop model Complete Streets policies for use by local agencies.
- Requires state and local agencies to consult and agree on how to address Complete Streets before submitting the Five-Year Program to the STC (exempts anything in an

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approved multi-year capital plan approved before July 1, 2011).

- Allows MDOT to provide technical assistance and coordination to local agencies in the development and implementation of their policies.
- Requires MDOT to share expertise in non-motorized and multi-modal planning in the development of projects within municipal boundaries.
- Allows agencies to enter into agreements with one another to provide maintenance for projects constructed to implement a Complete Streets policy.

Drafting a Complete Streets Policy or Amending Master Plans

Townships now have the option of drafting their own Complete Streets Policy, but certainly must consider the legislative goals when amending any master plans as they become due for renewal. There are a number of things to consider when you begin to grapple with incorporating Complete Streets goals into your own local needs and objectives.

One size does not fit all! Use the various Complete Street policies available as a guide—not rules. There is no one way to complete a street, because each street, intersection, and neighborhood has its own needs. Local government policies or plans need not mirror one another. That means common sense and safety should guide road plans and street design. For example, modernized crosswalks are unnecessary where it is unlikely your citizens will cross a road, such as in an industrial zone or a remote area.

Why here? Review why your township should embrace a Complete Streets Policy—what statistics or information spurs you to do so?

- Safety?
- Local obesity and chronic disease rates?

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- Public health care costs that could benefit from a neighborhood that is more walkable and livable?
- Rates of walking and biking to schools?

What can you gain? Collect and understand personal stories of problems with traditional “incomplete streets” and positive experiences with well-designed “complete streets”

Not just for automobiles anymore! How will you shift the focus of road design from moving cars quickly to providing safe mobility for all users?

- ***Example 1:*** Are there underutilized multi-lane roads that could be converted to a complete street by removing one lane and using the extra space for bike lanes or sidewalks?
- ***Example 2:*** Reevaluate standard lane widths. Narrower lanes can help reduce speeding, save money, and provide space for sidewalks where none was available before.

Open Invitation to Good Ideas: Include a variety of personnel in policy/plan amendment project: elected officials, planning officials, public works personnel, public health staff, community leaders, and the public. Perhaps start with a small task force and seek broader input at different stages.

Starting the Clock: When and how will policy/plan affect local projects? For example, will it immediately affect planning and all construction taking place in one year or more? What sorts of projects must comply with the policy? New construction only, or all repair and maintenance projects?

Money, money, money: How will you obtain or direct funding?

- Special funding sources to assist in retrofitting projects or undertaking maintenance projects?

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- Incentives to those who undertake the complete streets strategy before a policy is in place?
- Funds designated for projects that are already in the pipeline that may require revisions?
- Funding for complete streets through the usual manner for street construction and transportation matters? This requires redirecting funding concerns from the question of “how much is it going to cost,” to “how we better allocate the funds we already have?”

Working together: How will your community cooperate with neighboring communities and road agencies to promote the ends of Michigan’s Complete Streets legislation?

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How are we doing? How will you evaluate your community’s progress—reports to elected officials and the public? And how, if at all, will that affect the policy/plan?

For More Information

<http://www.completestreets.org/> (in-depth introduction to the Complete Streets concept and links to research and training tools).

<http://www.micompletestreets.org/> (fact sheets, documents, links to draft policies).

<http://mihealthtools.org/mihc/CompleteStreets.asp> (sample policies and toolkits). — **Lizzie Mills**



The Author

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