Complete Streets Policy Brief
New York State

Preamble
It has been suggested that the widespread lack of physical activity in our nation has played a major part in the perpetuation of the obesity epidemic. A key factor contributing to the lack of physical activity in our country and specifically in New York State is the general lack of infrastructure to support pedestrian travel on foot and by bicycle. Currently, infrastructure of streets and roads in most communities focuses on the safety and needs of motorists, with few considerations made for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users. It is our assertion that an important step in curtailing the obesity epidemic will be to revamp transportation infrastructure in communities to create “complete streets.”

A recent poll indicated that more than half of Americans would like to bicycle more, walk more, and drive less. However, a major contributing factor to low pedestrian and bicyclist utilization of community streets and roads is the lack of infrastructure in place to accommodate safe travel. The “complete streets” movement calls for the creation of road networks that routinely accommodate all travelers: drivers, transit users, pedestrians, bicyclists, older individuals, children, and people with disabilities. This is done through the routine inclusion of accommodations such as bicycle lanes, sidewalks, crosswalks, benches, street trees and shelters for public transit users. Such safety considerations have the capacity to increase pedestrian, bicyclist and transit usage of streets, which would positively impact the physical health of individuals, the environmental quality of neighborhoods, and the economic vitality of communities.

Walking and bicycling to work or school was common a generation ago. Today, walking and bicycling to local destinations have all but dropped off the radar as modes of transportation for the majority of children and adults. Safety issues are a principal concern for individuals, and traffic danger is consistently cited as a major reason why individuals will not walk or cycle to school, work, or other destinations (CDC, 2005). These fears do not come unwarranted in New York State where police reports indicate that, in 2005, there were over 15,000 crashes between pedestrians and motor vehicles, and almost 6,000 crashes between bicyclists and motor vehicles.
Furthermore, the nation’s youth is disproportionately affected by pedestrian/traffic accidents. According to the New York State Department of Health’s Bureau of Injury Prevention, the leading cause of injury, hospitalization, and death among 5-9 year olds in New York State is being struck, as pedestrians, by motor vehicles. In addition, children ages 5-19 are more at risk than any other age group for being hospitalized for a bicycle/motor vehicle collision related injury. The most recent New York State Census' data indicates that youths 17 and under comprise approximately 25% of the population of New York State; however, in 2005, youths aged 5 to 17 years represented 61.6% of all bicycle/motor vehicle injuries and fatalities and 25.7% of all pedestrian/motor vehicle injuries and fatalities.b

The health of our nation is declining. Obesity rates have risen to epidemic proportions in New York State and throughout the country. National estimates of medical expenditures related to obesity totaled $75 billion in 2003.d Meanwhile, in the same year New York State alone spent $6.1 billion in medical expenditures related to obesity in adults—the second highest total in the nation.e

The threats of global warming have been well documented in recent years: increased atmospheric carbon levels due to the burning of fossil fuels are creating what promises to be a hostile environment for life. Excessive U.S. fuel consumption continues to play a major role in the saga: according to the U.S. government’s official energy statistics from 1980-2004,f the U.S. consumes almost twice as much carbon-based fuel as China, the number two consumer of carbon fuel in the world, and over three times as much as Russia, the number three consumer. A major reason for the high fuel consumption in the U.S. is the automobile-centered infrastructure of most of our towns and cities. The implementation of complete street plans has the capacity to reduce our carbon emissions by increasing the number of viable transportation options available to individuals.

In addition to the health and environmental impacts, the implementation of complete streets has the capacity to improve the economic vitality of a community. Streets that accommodate pedestrian and bicyclists encourage residents and visitors to linger in shops and restaurants, creating the potential for economic growth in a community. This creates capital through increased value of property for retail, restaurant, and residential purposes. As the community continues to grow, its capacity to draw visitors from the surrounding regions will also increase,
thus perpetuating economic growth. Furthermore, it has been shown that complete streets increase social capital by fostering vibrant cultural and social interactions and creating a heightened sense of community. This in turn often results in lower crime rates and greater civic involvement.

A final benefit from the implementation of complete street projects in a community is the enhanced independence of older adults and disabled individuals—an important consideration as our population ages. The year 2006 saw the first of the baby boomers reach 60 years of age. Over the next eighteen years, 30% of the nation’s population, or 76 million baby boomers in the United States will pass that same milestone, with 7.3%, or 5.62 million of them residing in New York State. These individuals will be looking for ways to maintain their independence as their willingness and ability to drive personal motor vehicles decreases with age. One way that older individuals can maintain their independence is to utilize a combination of public transit and pedestrian modes of travel. Communities that offer widespread pedestrian and public transit accommodations will fare well with aging baby boomers who wish to maintain their independence.

**Definition**

A complete street provides for the safe, convenient and comfortable travel by foot, bicycle, transit, vehicle, car and truck.
Policy

I. Purpose
-To create a set of guidelines that community transportation planning committees will follow when generating plans for relevant transportation projects.
-These guidelines will create policies to support the implementation of complete street projects.

II. Scope
-Complete street projects will create environments that promote safety for users of all transportation modes.
-Improved safety access and convenience will create a truly intermodal transportation system.
-The above changes will have a positive impact on the health and vitality of the involved community in many ways including:

- Increased opportunities for physical activity
- Improved air quality
- Improved mobility for all users
- Positive economic input
- Independence for seniors and those with disabilities
- Enhanced quality of life

III. Policy Defined
The policy will create language to ensure that planning of future transportation projects will follow the guidelines for creating complete streets.

Agency
-State level: NYS Department of Transportation is responsible for the coordination and development of a comprehensive transportation policy for New York State. The NYS DOT coordinates and assists in the development and operation of all transportation facilities and services in New York State, and also formulates and keeps current a long-range comprehensive statewide master plan for general transportation facilities.


Proposed Complete Streets Policy

Purpose:
State policies can establish a sustainable model for a Healthy New York. The state is responsible for funding, operating and maintaining the majority of the streets in New York. This complete streets policy will ensure the highest quality along with consistent implementation of bicycle and pedestrian transportation systems.

Proposed Policy:
New York State hereby adopts the policy of “Complete Streets” as a guiding principle for our infrastructure. “Complete Streets” are defined as facilities that “are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and bus riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a complete street.”

The state will support the development of a complete system of bikeways, pedestrian facilities and shared use paths, bicycle parking and safe crossings connecting residences, businesses and public places. The state will promote bicycling and walking for health, environmental sustainability, exercise, transportation and recreation.

Bicycle and pedestrian facilities shall be provided in all new construction, reconstruction and maintenance projects in New York State unless one of the following conditions is met:

- Bicyclists and pedestrians are prohibited by law from using the roadway. In this instance, bicyclists and pedestrians will be accommodated elsewhere within the right of way or within the same transportation corridor.

- The cost of establishing bikeways or walkways would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use. Disproportionate is defined as exceeding twenty percent of the cost of the larger project.
In cases where the existing right-of-way does not allow for sidewalks, bike lanes, paths or other improvements, potential alternatives will include the appropriate use of paved shoulders, signage, traffic calming and/or enhanced education and enforcement.

Bicycle and Pedestrian facilities will be provided and maintained in accordance with guidelines adopted by the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and the American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Site plan and subdivision reviews conducted will incorporate these facilities. New York State offices and public buildings will provide bicycle parking, lockers and showers in accordance with local zoning and planning regulations.