

Vermont's Complete Streets Law and What It Means For You



The new sidewalk in Windsor along US-5 provides connections from downtown to Paradise Park and local shops.

For two years dozens of Vermont organizations, led by AARP Vermont, advocated for a Complete Streets law in Vermont. The Governor signed Vermont's Complete Streets bill (H.198, Act 34) into law, effective July 1. This technical bulletin is intended to give a brief overview of what Complete Streets are, what the bill said and what it means for transportation projects across Vermont.

What is a Complete Street?

The principle underlying the Complete Streets concept is that streets should safely accommodate all transportation system users, regardless of age, ability, or what mode of transportation they prefer – walking, biking, driving, or use of transit.

Why do we need complete streets?

- A significant proportion of Vermont's population does not drive including those under age 16, the elderly, and the disabled. Maintaining a car can also be a financial burden on low-income households.
- Incomplete streets (i.e. built only for cars) limit travel options and create unsafe conditions for bicycles and pedestrians.
- Complete streets enable more energy efficient travel and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

What is the purpose of the Complete Streets bill?

The purpose is “to ensure that the needs of all transportation system users are considered in all state and municipally managed transportation projects and project phases, including planning, development, construction, and maintenance, except in the case of projects or project components involving unpaved highways. These ‘complete streets’ principles shall be integral to the transportation policy of Vermont.” (H.198, Act 34)

When does the policy apply?

This act took effect on July 1, 2011. The policy applies when new roads are being constructed, and when paved roads are being reconstructed, rehabilitated, or otherwise maintained.

Note that the bill is not a mandate to retrofit existing roads. The bill identifies three circumstances in which these principles would not be incorporated:

1. Use of the transportation facility by pedestrians, bicyclists, or other users is prohibited by law.
2. The cost of incorporating complete streets principles is disproportionate to the need or probable use as determined by factors such as land use, current and projected user volumes, population density, crash data, historic and natural resource constraints, and maintenance requirements. The municipality shall consult local and regional plans in assessing these and any other relevant factors.
3. Incorporating “complete streets” principles is outside the scope of a project because of its very nature.

If the project does not include complete streets after consideration of the factors above, the managing municipality must make a written determination accompanied by supporting documentation that is available for public inspection at the office of the municipal clerk and the Agency of Transportation. Written determinations will be final and not subject to appeal or further review.

Where can I find out more?

SWCRPC staff can help you better understand what the Complete Streets legislation means for your town, and how your projects and ideas could be impacted. For more information contact Katharine Otto.

Also check out the following resources:

- The bill as enacted. [Act 34 \(H.198\)](#) An act relating to a transportation policy that considers all users
- State of Vermont Press Release - [Governor Shumlin Signs Complete Streets Bill](#)
- [Vermont League of Cities and Towns Legislative Wrap Up 2011](#)
- [National Complete Streets Coalition](#)
- AARP Vermont - [Complete Streets for Vermont](#)



Extract from the Ludlow Downtown Village Streetscape Scoping and Feasibility Study 2006

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