

City of Saratoga Springs Complete Streets Policy

Prepared by Shared Access Saratoga

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City of Saratoga Springs Public Safety
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Safe Routes to School
Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce
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City of Saratoga Springs Commissioner of Finance
County Supervisor
Cool Cities
Bonacio Construction
Sustainable Saratoga
Elan Planning, Design & Landscape Architecture
Saratoga Healthy Transportation Network
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Tri- State Transportation Campaign
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Executive Summary

Shared Access Saratoga is a local organization focused on promoting and encouraging access for all modes of transportation for all users throughout the City of Saratoga Springs. Over a period of nine months in 2011, Shared Access Saratoga worked toward completing a municipal Complete Streets Policy document, to help the City of Saratoga Springs continue to move forward as a community that provides meaningful shared access.

Shared Access Saratoga has drawn on the expertise of its membership, which includes a broad mix of partners and stakeholders such as the City of Saratoga Springs Departments of Planning, Engineering, and Public Safety; Safe Routes to School; the Saratoga Healthy Transportation Network; the Downtown Special Assessment District; Skidmore College; AARP; Saratoga Hospital; Sustainable Saratoga; the Capital District Transit Authority; the development community; professional planners; local neighborhood associations; and elected officials.

In August, 2011, Governor Cuomo signed the statewide Complete Streets bill into law. This law requires that complete streets design guidelines be considered for the planning, design, construction, reconstruction, and rehabilitation of roadways receiving federal or state funding. This state law is indicative of the attention and progress that the Complete Streets effort has made in recent years.

The Complete Streets Policy encompasses the design, planning, and operations of transportation systems in the City, and will accommodate and encourage travel by cyclists, pedestrians of all ages and abilities, and public transportation users, in accordance with established best practices. The implementation of a Complete Streets Policy can improve the economic vitality of the community, and its fiscal requirements can be addressed and mitigated through updated planning practices. In addition, the policy allows for documented exceptions where costs cannot be mitigated.

A complete streets community promotes a number of community benefits including enhanced quality of life, improved community health, reduced dependence on automobiles, and less reliance on fossil fuels. It is time for Saratoga Springs to take the next step in promoting shared access for its citizens by adopting a complete streets policy.

The following Complete Streets Policy identifies a vision for complete streets in the City of Saratoga Springs and describes a series of guiding principles. The policy provides a rationale for complete streets and also articulates the health, safety, environmental, economic and fiscal benefits of complete streets. Finally, the policy identifies a set of recommended action items for immediate and long-term implementation of the policy.

City of Saratoga Springs Complete Streets Vision

With the signing of the Complete Streets Law by Governor Cuomo, statewide attention is being given to the complete streets programs, which improve the safety, health and vibrancy of New York State communities. The City of Saratoga Springs Complete Streets Policy will encourage the development of a complete streets network throughout the City to create a more balanced transportation system. The Complete Streets Policy shall be consistent with and assist in achieving the goals and recommendations set forth in the City's Comprehensive Plan and other policy documents. The Policy shall ensure that new and updated public and private projects are planned, designed, maintained and operated to enable safe, comfortable and convenient travel to the greatest extent possible for users of all abilities including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders.

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Preamble

In August 2011, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the “Complete Streets” bill into law. This bill, which passed unanimously in both the State Senate and State Assembly, requires that Complete Street design guidelines be considered for the planning, design, construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation of roadways receiving federal or state funding. Typical design features include, but are not limited to, sidewalks, bike lanes, lane striping, shared roadway signage, crosswalks, traffic calming, and bus pull outs. Such guidelines are intended to provide convenient access and mobility to all users including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclist, and public transit users. The law took effect mid-February 2012.

The concept of complete streets is not new, but it is becoming increasingly more integrated into new projects and the regular maintenance or rehabilitation of local transportation systems. In fact, the New Urban Networkⁱ estimates that over 15 municipalities in New York State have adopted local complete streets laws and at least 25 states have implemented some form of complete street policy.ⁱⁱ

Vision

With the signing of the Complete Streets Law by Governor Cuomo, statewide attention is being given to the concept of complete streets, which impacts the safety, health and vibrancy of New York State communities. The City of Saratoga Springs Complete Streets Policy will encourage the development of a complete streets network throughout the City to create a more balanced transportation system. The Complete Streets Policy will assist in achieving the goals and recommendations set forth in the City’s Comprehensive Plan and other policy documents. The Policy shall ensure that new and updated public and private projects are planned, designed, maintained and operated to enable safe, comfortable and convenient travel to the greatest extent possible for users of all abilities including pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and transit riders.

Objectives and Guiding Principles

- A. Encourage collaboration among City departments to develop a comprehensive intermodal transportation system during project planning, implementation and maintenance.

- B. Incorporate locally sensitive “best practices” from United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials, Institute of Transportation Engineers, NYS Department of Transportation, Americans with Disabilities Act and other appropriate entities to enable citizens to safely travel by all transportation modes, including walking, biking and transit ridership.

- C. Promote the safe use of a multi-modal transportation system by increasing the awareness of all users through an appropriate educational program for residents, property

owners, visitors, developers and City staff. The educational program should be designed to enhance the concept of sharing the road.

D. Reinforce collaboration with partners at the local, school district, county, state and federal levels to ensure appropriate connectivity for all travel modes.

Rationale for Complete Streets

The integration of land use and transportation is critical to the livability of a community and region. In a highly competitive global economy, regions and communities must learn to address each in a balanced manner to maintain a high quality of life for existing and future residents, businesses and visitors. The Capital Region is currently undergoing significant increases in employment and population related to nano-technology and other industries. This growth is attracting new residents and employees who have an expectation for a high quality of life, which includes a walkable, bikeable and vibrant community. Ensuring complete streets are consistently provided within the community contributes to this high quality of life.

Complete Streets designs a routine approach for accommodating alternative travel modes for multiple users, regardless of age or ability. This results in a balanced transportation system providing choices of where people can go and how they can get there. Complete streets may include elements such as defined pedestrian and bicycle spaces, street trees and benches, pedestrian scaled lighting, and transit stop shelters. These elements allow people to safely walk to the library, take the bus to the grocery store or bike to the park. Such elements provide the capacity to increase bicycle, pedestrian and transit use of the street system, which would positively impact the physical health and safety of the community, the environmental quality of our neighborhoods and the economic vitality of the City.

It should be recognized that the City of Saratoga Springs has accomplished many steps in achieving a complete streets goal. The City has, and requires, a compact land use pattern supports alternative transportation options such as walking, cycling and transit use. The City also has a variety of cultural, economic, civic and historic destinations in close and convenient proximity for visitors and residents alike. The City also currently has numerous complete street components incorporated within its private development approval process such as requirements for sidewalks, curbs, street trees, and bicycle parking.

While the City of Saratoga Springs has made progress in addressing the needs of users in specific areas, there is room to more thoroughly “complete the street” throughout the City. Adopting a complete streets policy will allow the City to progress even further in providing safe, convenient access for all users and all modes of transportation. Additional rationale for complete streets related to health, safety, the environment, economic vitality and fiscal impact is described below.

Health

Public health officials have become increasingly aware of our nation's declining physical fitness and the resulting increase in diseases such as diabetes and obesity. Much research has been conducted to identify a link between auto-dependent sprawl and an increase in sedentary lifestyle diseases. Research indicates that countries that invest in a more multi-modal transportation system (walking, cycling, transit) have higher rates of cycling and walking as well as lower rates of obesity. It is believed that the most practical and effective way to improve public fitness is to increase walking and cycling.ⁱⁱⁱ Walking and biking can decrease the risk of diseases related to inactivity such as asthma, hypertension and obesity. In addition to its health benefits, walking and biking decrease automobile dependence, in turn improving environmental quality, sustainability, roadway conditions and the economy.

One way to increase walking and biking in a community is to provide safe opportunities to do so. Providing for complete streets will assist in creating safe options and opportunities for walking and biking.

Safety

A generation ago, walking and bicycling to school or work was a common practice. Today, however, the number of people walking and cycling to local destinations has dwindled. A major factor in this trend is a concern for safety. Providing well-defined pedestrian and bicycle facilities coupled with an educational program is the most effective way to help address the safety concerns often raised.

Environment

Increasing greenhouse gas levels are negatively impacting the earth. Carbon dioxide is the primary greenhouse gas and for every gallon of gasoline burned, 20 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions are produced.^{iv} The auto-centric manner in which our communities have grown is a critical factor in the consumption of carbon-based fuels in the U.S. Implementing a complete streets policy can have a positive impact on our environment by reducing the community's reliance on a vehicular mode of transport and offering other viable transportation options such as walking, bicycling and public transit.

The Mayor and City Council also recognized the significance of greenhouse gas on our environment. The City Council previously passed the Healthy Transportation Resolution, clearly defining the Council's intentions which are included and reflected within this complete streets policy. In 2009, the City Council took action by joining the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. Most recently in December 2011, the City became a Climate Smart Community.

Economic Vitality

Additionally, the choices that result from a complete streets policy can improve and maintain the economic vitality of the City. The downtown area will continue to be a target for growth

and tourism in the region, which will help maintain the rural character of the City's outer district by focusing growth in the downtown. Streets accommodating pedestrian and bicycle activity are welcoming and encourage residents and visitors to linger at local businesses. This creates the potential for residents and visitors to patronize the City's numerous shops and restaurants. By reinforcing a compact urban development form and encouraging non-vehicular traffic, the concept of the "City in the Country," as outlined in the adopted Comprehensive Plan, can be maintained while providing for increased tax base.

Fiscal Impact

Designing complete streets is not additional work for planners, architects and engineers; it is different work. The practitioners of these disciplines have in the past been asked to solve a particular problem – namely, safely and efficiently moving the maximum number of cars past a given point in the shortest time. The Complete Streets Policy simply redefines the problem. Under this Policy, these professionals are required to use their knowledge and skills to design roads and a street network that safely and efficiently moves all users, motorized and non-motorized. The fiscal impact is mitigated by the implementation of best practices, prevention of delays in the design process and elimination of the need for costly retrofits.

Studies show the costs associated with the routine accommodation of alternative transportation modes (i.e. walking, cycling and transit) generally represent a small percentage of a community's overall budget. The resources that are spent represent a long-term investment in the financial and physical health of the City.

Policy Implementation

A Complete Streets Checklist shall be completed by the Project Sponsor for all municipal and private projects that impact City Streets. This document shall list complete streets basic practices that have been integrated into the project design and how user groups including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders are accommodated. It will also list if any user groups were not accommodated and the reasons why.

Transparency and public access to user group accommodations on all city street projects will be key in tracking the City's progress long term. The Checklist will assist in tracking the City's progress and the information will assist in understanding the challenges in implementing complete streets throughout the City. This document should be completed at the beginning of any design or application process and be kept on file in the City Planning and Economic Development Office for easy access.

Recommended Action Items

Immediate Action Items

1. The City Council shall appoint the Shared Access Advisory Board (SAAB) to provide input on public projects to further the City's complete streets philosophy. SAAB will be solely

advisory in nature and will consist of seven members. One technical member shall be chosen by each City Council member. Participation by, or communication with technical City staff including Planning, Public Safety, and Department of Public Works is strongly encouraged. Two additional members shall be citizens-at-large appointed by the Mayor and may be representatives from local organizations related to healthy transportation and the promotion of a sustainable community (examples may include Bikeatoga, formerly the Saratoga Healthy Transportation Network or Sustainable Saratoga). The members shall be appointed for two year terms, with staggered appointments. At large members appointed to the SAAB should be selected based upon their interest and experience in sustainable approaches to transportation and community planning. SAAB would meet a minimum of four times per year and on an as-needed basis as called on by the City Council, at the inception of public transportation projects, or upon request by the Land Use Boards. SAAB meetings would be open to the public and would allow for public input.

2. Develop a “Complete Streets” checklist for all public and private projects for review during the project planning and design phase. The checklist may also be used for applications before the Land Use Boards for the review of private development projects. SAAB, in conjunction with the Planning Office and Land Use Boards, will develop the checklist. This information will reside in the Planning and Economic Development Office.

3. Provide information about the City’s complete streets policy, SAAB and information compiled with Complete Streets checklists on the City’s website for easy public access.

4. Identify current regulations within the City’s Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations that are consistent with a “complete streets” approach to roadway and streetscape development. Provide recommendations to further enhance guidelines and requirements for private development projects. Also identify possible amendments to the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations that can further support complete streets. Shared Access Saratoga's 2011 *Complete Streets Policy Audit* prepared by Elan Planning, Design & Landscape Architecture could be a starting point for this action item.

Short Term Action Items (Two Year Plan)

5. Cooperate with the Saratoga Springs School District to achieve shared goals related to Safe Routes to School within the City. The City of Saratoga Springs’ Complete Streets Policy will promote a fully-connected transportation network for all modes of transportation. While not every street can be designed perfectly for every user, the development of Safe Routes to School supports the goals of the Complete Streets Policy. It would also allow for “an interwoven array” of shared streets which adequately serve all modes of transit. In order to define this array, Shared Access Saratoga could assist in creating a Safe Routes To School “sharrows” map and related costs, as is currently being implemented in Albany NY.

6. Incorporate complete streets into the City's routine street maintenance and improvements. It would also be recommended that complete street components for public projects be incorporated in the 6-year Capital Plan, where appropriate and be included in the Mayor's Capital Committee efforts related to the City's operational budget. Utilize the data gathered from Complete Streets checklists to assist in tracking the incorporation of complete streets or highlighting geographic areas in the City where focused maintenance may be needed.

7. Promote the safe use of a multi-modal transportation system by increasing the awareness of all users through an appropriate educational program. The Shared Access Advisory Board could lead this effort with assistance from the Planning Office, appropriate local organizations, and the school district. Additionally, City staff are strongly encouraged to attend periodic workshops and training to remain well-informed of changes in the field.

8. Seek grant opportunities to assist in implementing the City's complete streets policy.

Mid Term Action Items (Four Year Plan)

9. Review the Complete Streets Policy and assess the success of its implementation in the City. This could be a joint effort with the Planning Office and SAAB that may also include input from the public on the policy's success. The review should include considerations for modifications or improvements in the approach to providing complete streets.

10. Conduct a comprehensive complete streets audit examining the accessibility, safety, connectivity and quality of place for an area in the City that includes key community features and destinations. The Planning Office could lead this effort in coordination with appropriate City departments, relevant City committees, the City's Land Use Boards and SAAB. This information could be incorporated into a complete streets gap analysis map and a future Bicycle, Pedestrian and Public Transit Plan. Coordination with the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) would be critical in the creation of a Public Transit Plan effort.

11. Identify a dedicated funding mechanism for future transportation projects, such as linking sidewalks and safe routes to school, to implement actions supporting a complete streets policy.

Long Term Actions Items (Six Year Plan)

12. Complete a Bicycle, Pedestrian and Public Transit Plan including a map, illustrating gaps in pedestrian, bicycle and transit friendly components. The results of the complete street audit could be the basis for this plan and could assist in identifying complete streets needs and priorities within the City. Such a plan may also include recommendations for enforcement throughout the City related to complete streets.

ⁱ The New Urban Network is a New Urban News publication dedicated to providing news and analysis on compact, mixed use development. <http://newurbannetwork.com/about-us>

ⁱⁱ "NYS Complete Streets Bill Passes Unanimously," New Urban Network, June 21, 2011. <http://newurbannetwork.com/article/nys-complete-streets-bill-passes-unanimously-14898>

ⁱⁱⁱ If Health Matters: Integrating Public Health Objectives in transportation Planning. Todd Litman. Victoria Transport Policy Institute. Aug. 2009.

^{iv} Growing Cooler: Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change. Reid Ewing, et al. Urban Land Institute.