

NCDOT Complete Streets Policy – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

General

Question: What projects are subject to the Complete Streets Policy?

- The Complete Streets Policy requires NCDOT planners and designers to consider and incorporate multimodal facilities in the design and improvement of all appropriate transportation projects in North Carolina.

Question: What types of projects are not subject to the Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology process as described in the Implementation Guide?

- The Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology does not apply to the project types listed below. Many of these project types include alternative review processes for which to address Complete Streets elements:
 - Independent bike/pedestrian projects which are subject to STI legislation (EB STIP Projects);
 - Emergency repairs;
 - Interstate projects where Y-line roadways/facilities are not modified;
 - Safety projects (such as at-grade rail crossing improvements, Spot Safety and Mobility projects, and High Impact/Low Cost Program projects);
 - Maintenance and Highway Maintenance Improvement Program (HMIP) projects (excluding preservation or resurfacing projects that allow for the marking of shoulders as bicycle accommodations). Consult the forthcoming *NCDOT Complete Streets Resurfacing and Maintenance Activities Implementation Guidance* for direction on this specific alternative evaluation process;
 - Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or Rural Planning Organization (RPO) funded projects, though they are required to meet NCDOT design criteria and may follow the Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology or an alternative methodology that is equal or greater to determine need and select the appropriate facility(ies).

Question: How will the Complete Street cost share impact roadway projects currently in the STIP?

- Projects that have not yet completed a final environmental document will fully comply with the updated policy, including the revised cost share provisions.

If a project has a completed final environmental document but the local agreement has not been executed, additional complete streets elements will be considered if the additional elements do not require a change to the environmental document and the requested elements fit within the approved typical section of the project.

If a project has a completed final environmental document but the local agreement has not been executed, the cost share will be calculated based on the Complete Streets Guidance document.

If a project has a completed final environmental document and the local agreement has been executed, no changes will be considered, and the cost share provisions agreed to in the local agreement will be honored.

Question: Does the new Complete Streets Policy apply only to projects submitted for P6.0 and not P5.0?

- The Complete Streets Policy applies to all projects that do not have a finalized environmental document. See response to the second question above.

Planning

Question: What qualifies as an acceptable transportation plan?

- The mutually adopted Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) will be considered the controlling plan for the identification of non-motorized facilities to be evaluated as part of a roadway project. The CTP customarily incorporates recommendations from other locally adopted plans. Other locally adopted plans not incorporated into a CTP will be considered so long as 1) the planned facility addresses a transportation need and 2) the planned facility meets the design guidance standards referenced in the *Implementation Guide*.

Question: If a new state, regional or local plan is adopted during the project development phase prior to completion of the Environmental document, will this plan serve as an eligible adopted plan for purposes of implementing the Complete Streets Policy?

- An eligible plan adopted prior to the finalization of the environmental document can be referenced for policy compliance. For any plan that is anticipated to be adopted during this phase, ongoing coordination is expected between the local/state/regional entity administering development of the plan and NCDOT's Project Development units.

Question: If a plan only identifies a pedestrian and/or bicycle need (such as with many CTPs) for a specific roadway corridor, will the Complete Streets cost share formula apply?

- When a need along a specific roadway corridor is identified on an adopted plan, this will serve to meet the plan requirement guiding cost share application. The *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology* includes resources to supplement the transportation need determination. These supplementary resources include a demand estimation tool, observed demand, transit ridership, crash history, and forecasted land use. The determination of the facility constructed will be based on prevailing authoritative design guidance – NCDOT Roadway Design, AASHTO Guides and other supporting resources—in consideration of roadway conditions, anticipated use, and project constraints.

Question: When other locally adopted plans are considered outside of the CTP, what does the phrase “addresses a transportation need” indicate (Section 2.1 in the *Implementation Guide*)?

- This is defined by the planned facility recommendations connecting to an existing or planned bicycle or pedestrian network. Planned facilities that do not connect to a bicycle or pedestrian transportation network must provide justification for a stand-alone facility such as providing local connections to schools, parks, transit facilities, or a well-defined and documented key destinations as defined by the authoritative references for Complete Streets design.

Question: Does NCDOT delineate between facilities designed to serve a transportation need versus facilities designed for a recreational purpose?

- As indicated in the *Implementation Guide* and defined in the preceding question, planned facilities must address a transportation need. Multimodal facilities incorporated as part of a highway project do not have a specifically defined purpose and need differentiating from the planned or programmed highway project. All facilities constructed as part of a highway

project aim to serve a transportation need even if those facilities provide connections for multiple travel purposes.

Exceptions

Question: If exceptions to the Complete Streets Policy are not approved by the Complete Streets Review Team (Section 2.4 of the *Implementation Guide*), will this necessitate the re-scoring of projects submitted during the Strategic Prioritization process?

- NCDOT has a policy that covers the possible re-prioritization of committed STIP projects that have significant changes. This policy screens projects with major cost or scope changes to determine if re-scoring the project is appropriate. A project will only be re-scored when significant scope changes result in the project transforming into a fundamentally different project.

Question: Will all Complete Streets Project Sheets be reviewed for exceptions to the Complete Streets Policy?

- All projects submitted through NCDOT's Strategic Prioritization Process will be required to attach a Complete Streets Project Sheet. Only projects selected for funding and listed on the draft STIP will be reviewed for Complete Streets elements and exceptions to the policy.

Question: Does the second exception in the Policy, "Areas in which the population & employment densities or level of transit service does not justify the production of multimodal facilities", mean that NCDOT will not build / maintain facilities in an area where densities are low? Is there a density requirement – how low is too low?

- A facility must serve a transportation purpose and address a transportation need to be constructed by NCDOT. Transportation need may be demonstrated through review of existing population, employment, and zero-vehicle households (as described in the *Complete Streets Evaluation Project Methodology* and incorporated in the demand estimation tool), counts (bicycle, pedestrian, and transit), observed demand, and anticipated land use that is confirmed with the Local Government Agency (LGA) or MPO/RPO, among other sources. Locations that have no or intermittent non-motorized activity are likely to receive consideration for shared roadways or no facilities, except for project areas that contain state or region-wide project facilities like those identified in the Great Trails State Plan. All exceptions are subject to approval by the Complete Streets Review Team.

Question: Are rural areas and small rural towns considered for complete streets elements? What about rural areas with popular bicycle-and-pedestrian-focused destinations?

- Yes, all projects subject to this policy will be evaluated for inclusion of complete street elements, including rural areas. The process detailed in the *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology* begins with a review of the CTP and locally adopted plans to identify need and includes specific guidance for areas with estimated intermittent and low bicycle and pedestrian demand (likely rural and incorporated rural town areas). This process consists of consultation with the relevant LGA, MPO, or RPO on anticipated land use, a gap analysis to support network

connectivity, observed demand, and proximity to state or region-wide facilities. The process for facility selection, assessing and reducing impacts, and securing a maintenance agreement (if applicable) applies to all eligible projects.

Question: What is the preferred method for documenting exceptions on the Complete Streets Project Sheet?

- Exceptions for each mode should be documented within the relevant section – pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities, public transit improvements. In the Exceptions section of the Project Sheet, language should be added if no facilities for pedestrians, bicycles or public transportation will be evaluated and/or if only certain modes will not be evaluated.

Question: When the municipality wishes to submit an exception, who is authorized to do so for the municipality?

- Exceptions submitted by the municipality, must be done so in the form of an adopted letter from the highest-ranking local official. Some examples include: Mayor, City Manager, County Chairman, County Manager, etc. These exceptions will be reviewed by the Complete Streets Review Team. The exception letter may be attached to the Complete Streets Project Sheet.

Question: The Complete Streets Project Sheet indicates that pedestrian and bicycle facilities as part of a highway project may be exempt if the location is greater than one mile from any existing or planned pedestrian facility, residential or commercial land use, school or public transit stop. Does this apply to state or region-wide projects like the Mountains to Sea Trail, East Coast Greenway, Carolina Thread Trail, Piedmont Legacy Trails, and the Great Trails State Plan?

- No. The focus of statewide planning initiatives is on shared-use paths that can serve transportation purposes, providing connections between where people live, work, and play. Shared-use paths are referred to as trails, greenways, multi-use paths, rail-trails, and in the case of trails along roadways, side paths. If multimodal facilities are identified that will support the connection of these planned state or region-wide initiatives and fall within the right-of-way of a NCDOT highway project, those planned facilities shall be included as part of the highway project under the Complete Streets Policy.

Project Development

Question: A local bicycle plan calls for bike lanes and the locality requests a multi-use path on both sides of the road. Are both multi-use paths paid by NCDOT or is there a cost share portion?

- The Equal or Better Performance of Facility stipulation in the *Implementation Guide* allows for a locality to request a different facility type if an alternative facility is viewed as more appropriate than what is identified in the local plan. NCDOT will review an alternative facility(ies) to the bicycle and/or pedestrian facility type proposed in the adopted plan based upon the evaluations and decisions reached within the *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology* or upon the written request of the local representatives to the Project Engineer. The Project Engineer will document the evaluation of the alternative facility(ies) and consult with the Complete Streets Program Administrator for additional guidance as needed. The Complete Streets Review Team and the Project Engineer will evaluate and provide a decision for this type of request. Otherwise, anything beyond what is recommended from the *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology* would be viewed as a betterment, with the locality fully responsible for funding the extra width needed for the multi-use paths.

Resurfacing and Maintenance Activities

Question: How often will resurfacing lists be submitted to impacted local governments?

- Annually, a five-year resurfacing list will be distributed to each local government where a resurfacing is scheduled or anticipated over the next five-year period. The list will identify locations where planned facilities with complete street elements align with resurfacing projects.
- Link: [HMIP Plans](#)
- The forthcoming *NCDOT Complete Streets Resurfacing and Maintenance Activities Implementation Guidance* provides information on the integration of the Complete Streets Policy and maintenance activities.

Question: Will there be opportunities for the implementation of road diets with resurfacing projects?

- Due to the potential impact of the elimination of travel lanes on an area's overall transportation system, road diets require a greater degree of evaluation. For this reason, road diets are commonly viewed as an individual roadway improvement project that may be beyond the scope of standard roadway resurfacing. Local governments are encouraged to coordinate with their local Highway Division and the Integrated Mobility Division concerning opportunities to incorporate road diet design in resurfacing projects, particularly focusing on projects scheduled in the later years of the Highway Maintenance Improvement Program (HMIP).
- See the forthcoming *NCDOT Complete Streets Resurfacing and Maintenance Activities Implementation Guidance* and the *NCDOT Lane Reallocation Guidance* for additional information on opportunities to include complete streets elements through resurfacing and road diets.

Question: Will improvements outside a municipal boundary and within NCDOT right-of-way be subject to a local maintenance agreement?

- Except in special circumstances, NCDOT will not construct separated facilities without a maintenance agreement. Separated facilities are those where NCDOT maintenance vehicles are unable to mount the vertical delineation between the travel lane and the pedestrian and/or bicycle facility. Additionally, any vertical elements would have to meet breakaway crash worthiness and approvals from the NCDOT Signing and Delineation Unit.
- NCDOT will maintain non-separated bicycle and pedestrian facilities or infrastructure that accommodates those users within the roadway at locations outside municipal limits where a county maintenance agreement has not been executed. Examples of non-separated complete streets elements may include bicycle lanes, buffered bicycle lanes, and paved shoulders.

Question: Do facilities have to be completely within NCDOT right of way in order to be maintained by NCDOT? What if the plan calls for a multi-use path and parts of it are built in an easement?

- Except in special circumstances, NCDOT will not construct separated facilities without a maintenance agreement. Separated facilities are those where NCDOT maintenance vehicles are unable to mount the vertical delineation between the travel lane and the pedestrian and/or bicycle facility. NCDOT will only maintain facilities within the right of way. Where there is an exception to maintain a facility, NCDOT will only maintain a facility within their right-of-way.

Work Zone Accommodations

Related Policies

Question: The 2012 Complete Streets Planning and Design Guidelines have been superseded and eliminated. When will new complete streets planning and design guidelines be released?

- Complete Streets design will be incorporated into the update of the NCDOT Roadway Design Manual, which along with the AASHTO guides will serve as NCDOT’s authoritative design references. There will not be a new version of the eliminated Complete Streets Planning and Design Guidelines.

Cost Share

Question: Will NCDOT fully fund and construct the specific type of facility that is recommended in a state, regional or locally adopted transportation plan?

- Project development that begins with CTPs and locally adopted plans allows for continued project and facility refinement. NCDOT will review the facility type proposed in the adopted plan and evaluate the project as described in the *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology*. NCDOT will fully fund the selected facility as part of a roadway project if it is specifically identified in an adopted plan (see Planning section above for details on adopted plans), there is a transportation need, a maintenance agreement is reached (for separated facilities), and impacts are minimized. In addition, in order for NCDOT to incorporate and fund a bicycle, pedestrian and/or public transportation facility in roadway and bridge projects, the facility recommendations identified in state, regional or locally adopted plans must be consistent with design guidance outlined in NCDOT’s Roadway Design Manual and American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guides. Any portion of a requested/planned bicycle, pedestrian and/or public transportation improvement that exceeds NCDOT’s authoritative references for street design will be viewed as a betterment.

The project development process may uncover certain environmental, schedule, cost, and other impacts that influence final project design. Final complete streets design will be guided by identified need, plan recommendation, minimizing impacts, and prevailing design guidance. These considerations are described in the Step 4 and Step 5 of the *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology*.

Question: Within the Cost Share table in Section 7.1 of the *Implementation Guide*, what does “Not in plan, but need identified” mean?

- This section concerns if a need for bicycle, pedestrian and/or public transportation facilities is identified during the project development scoping process. This information may come from the Integrated Mobility Division scoping reports and/or other state/local agencies when providing project comments.

Question: Is there a constraint to how much NCDOT will pay for Complete Streets elements?

- Through the Project Delivery Network (PDN), NCDOT Project Engineers must consider all project impacts and assess options to reduce impacts. The *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology* details how the Project Engineer evaluates impacts of integrating of complete streets elements, including cost impacts. Projects that exceed a 10% increase of overall project costs for integrating Complete Streets components or result in significant schedule impacts may

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warrant greater scrutiny (higher costs are anticipated for bridge, urban, and constrained project areas). Greater scrutiny may result in continuation with the preferred selected project, selection of a different facility with lower impacts, increased cost share, or an alternative inclusion plan. An analysis of historical NCDOT project let lists has shown that integrating Complete Streets components has increased overall project costs on average between from 2% to 10% for most projects.

Question: What is meant by the statement “NCDOT is responsible for the full cost of bridges” in Section 7.1 of the *Implementation Guide*?

- NCDOT will fully fund the cost of bridges including approved bicycle and pedestrian facilities (or the provision of space for future construction of said facilities) where identified in a state, regional or local plan and/or where a bicycle/pedestrian need has been determined during the scoping and project development process.

Question: In the event that an improvement is identified in an adopted plan and it is outside of municipal limits, would the county be considered the government jurisdiction under the Cost Share table in Section 7.4 of the *Implementation Guide*?

- Yes, and the county population is defined as the population within unincorporated areas of the county only.

Question: If a roadway project traverses multiple jurisdictions where some jurisdictions have an adopted plan, and some do not, how will cost share be handled?

- Cost share will be applied to each jurisdiction individually as determined by the presence of an adopted plan. Further evaluation by the project manager and coordination with the Complete Streets Review Team will be necessary for projects spanning multiple jurisdictions.

Question: If a road improvement project has been delayed and the local government did not originally participate in sidewalk match requirements due to cost barriers, can the project be revisited to apply updated cost share percentages?

- Projects that have not yet completed a final environmental document will fully comply with the updated policy, including the revised cost share provisions. See response to the second question in the General section.

Question: Will NCDOT project funding include right-of-way acquisition necessary for funding complete streets elements?

- NCDOT will fully fund the cost of right-of-way acquisition for the selected complete streets elements if the project is an eligible plan, meets the design criteria defined in the *Implementation Guide*, and satisfies the metrics identified in the *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology*. These metrics include transportation need determination, facility selection, assessing impacts, and minimizing impacts (i.e. cost, schedule, and environmental). If the project is not identified in a plan, but a need for bicycle, pedestrian and/or public transportation facilities is determined during the project development scoping process, then cost share requirements will apply. If the project or portion of the project is identified as a betterment, then the local entity will be responsible for the full cost.

Question: What is the difference between multi-use paths and side paths and how is cost-share applied?

- The biggest distinction between a multi-use path (also referred to as a shared-use path or SUP) and a side path is locational - They are otherwise identical in function and use. A side path is a multi-use path constructed along but separated from a roadway, within the road right of way. A multi-use path can be located anywhere and can function independent of a roadway improvement. The Complete Streets policy is intended to capture improvements within the road right of way, including side paths and multi-use path crossings.

Question: When the *Implementation Guide* refers to landscaping and lighting betterments, does this refer only to landscaping and lighting betterments that are part of Complete Streets projects, or to all landscaping and lighting betterments?

- The *Implementation Guide* only refers to betterments associated with a complete streets project.

Design Guidance

Question: Will NCDOT consider improvements for rideshare, connected/autonomous, and electric vehicles as a component of Complete Streets?

- The Policy states that evolving transportation technology options are an integral part of the State’s transportation vision. The consideration of new transportation technologies will be guided by the availability of appropriate design guidance and standards. As stated in the Policy, “Planning, implementation and design guidelines will be updated periodically to address changes in Departmental policies and procedures and to reflect new transportation technologies and innovations.”

Question: How will NCDOT determine which side(s) of the road will receive a complete streets element like a sidewalk, bicycle lane, or shared-use path?

- The *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology* includes a Facility Selection and Accommodation Matrix that provides NCDOT Project Managers with guidance for selecting the preferred and secondary facility options—if unable to accommodate the preferred facility(ies)—given the roadway’s operating speed, vehicle volumes, lane configuration, and anticipated bicycle and pedestrian demand. For pedestrians, the guidance indicates the preferred facilities of sidewalk on one side in Low demand areas (e.g. rural areas), one or both sides in Medium demand areas (e.g. suburban areas), and both sides in High demand areas (e.g. urban and urban core areas). Sidewalk placement is dependent on the distribution of development along the roadway, and for balanced development, sidewalks should be considered on both sides of the roadway. Where land development is not consistent along both sides of the roadway and there is potential for pedestrian and/or bicycle crossings, consider including sidewalks on both sides of the roadway. Project Managers will review local plans, evaluate the network, review site constraints, and exercise engineering judgement when selecting the location of complete streets elements. In situations where demand is present or anticipated for both pedestrians and bicyclists, the Project Manager should follow the Facility Selection and Accommodation Matrix to accommodate both user types.

Administration

Question: How are NCDOT stormwater staff involved with complete streets and are there opportunities to incorporate innovative stormwater management within complete streets?

- NCDOT’s Hydraulics Unit will be consulted regarding collaborative approaches to incorporating complete streets elements in roadway projects as part of Stage 2 of the PDN.

Question: Is there an NCDOT, local, MPO, county, etc. staff group which will analyze this policy and decide how to address questions and policy gaps?

- A Technical Team comprised of representatives outlined in the *Implementation Guide* will continually meet to respond to external and internal policy related questions. The role of this group is to review and maintain the *Implementation Guide*, recommend updates and process improvements, and establish performance metrics for implementation. The supporting resources such as the *Complete Streets Project Evaluation Methodology* and the forthcoming *Complete Streets Resurfacing and Maintenance Activities Implementation Guidance* were developed in consultation with various NCDOT units, Divisions, and external stakeholders.