

Greater Madison MPO Complete Streets Policy

Background

The Greater Madison MPO (MPO) has required roadway projects funded through the STBG-Urban program to be designed and constructed as complete streets for many years; however, the state law referenced in the MPO's STBG-Urban funding application was rescinded in 2015, making the MPO policy somewhat difficult to interpret. This policy updates and replaces the previous policy, providing local jurisdictions an updated and context-specific policy that can support innovative and locally-appropriate project design and construction. The MPO's *Connect Greater Madison: 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)* recommends incorporating complete streets and green streets concepts for regional and local roadways.¹

“Complete Streets is an approach to planning, designing, and building that enables safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. This approach also emphasizes the needs of those who have experienced systemic underinvestment, or those whose needs have not been met through a traditional transportation approach, such as older adults, people living with disabilities, people who don't have access to vehicles, and Black, Native, and Hispanic or Latino/a/x communities.”

- Smart Growth America

“Complete streets are streets that are designed to help people get where they want to go, whatever their mode of choice. Serving the needs of those who have historically been marginalized in the transportation planning process and underserved by the transportation system—low-income people, elderly and disabled people, and racial and ethnic minority groups—is of particular importance. Integrating community context into all planning, construction, and operations activities can help ensure that the goal of providing free-flowing thoroughfares for motor vehicles does not crowd out safety, equity, and other community priorities. While a complete street may or may not be equipped with facilities like sidewalks and bike lanes, the need for facilities to accommodate travelers using alternative modes should be thoroughly considered prior to construction...”

“MPO policy is to support the adoption of green and complete streets policies by local communities, and to require that streets funded through the STBG-Urban program be designed and constructed as complete streets.”

- *Connect Greater Madison: 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (4-18)*

1. Vision and intent:

The Greater Madison MPO's (MPO) Vision is for “a sustainable, equitable regional transportation system that connects people, places, and opportunities to achieve an exceptional quality of life for all.”

Complete and connected street networks that accommodate people who walk or bike, use transit, drive or ride in private or for-hire vehicles, and deliver freight or provide services are critical to achieving this vision.

¹ Streets and Roadways Recommendation 3

The intent of this policy is four-part:

- 1) To promote the development of complete street projects in and around the MPO's Planning Area;
- 2) To be flexible enough to accommodate local preferences and needs, project context, and planned development;
- 3) To prioritize projects benefiting historically disadvantaged communities, including racial and ethnic minorities, and low-income populations; and,
- 4) To be transparent and to ensure that potential applicants for project funding subject to this policy understand the requirements of the policy.

2. Serve diverse users:

Historical underinvestment in predominantly minority and low-income areas have resulted in disparities, including, but not limited to: access to diverse transportation options, crash rates, health outcomes, education, income, and employment opportunities; and that a comprehensive, equitable approach to transportation design and project selection can play a role in addressing these disparities.

Complete streets benefit all users equitably only when they are available equitably; to this end, the MPO prioritizes complete streets projects in neighborhoods that have suffered from historical underinvestment and that lack appropriate infrastructure and facilities.

3. Commitment in all projects and phases:

This Complete Streets Policy applies to all roadway projects selected for funding by the Greater Madison MPO, including new facilities, retrofit and reconstruction, and maintenance projects. Exceptions to this policy will be considered as described in section 4.

Note: Even small projects can be an opportunity to make meaningful and lasting improvements. For example, adding or moving an edge stripe to create room for cyclists or painting a crosswalk adjacent to a bus stop are both relatively low cost improvements. Furthermore, the design of new or reconstructed facilities should anticipate future demand for bicycling, walking, and transit facilities and should not impede the provision of future enhancements.

4. Expectations and Exceptions:

All roadway projects to which this policy applies will be reviewed by MPO staff for consistency with this policy. In the event that staff determine a project does not comply with this policy and is therefore ineligible for MPO-awarded funding, the applicant may petition for an exception to this policy. Requests for exceptions will be reviewed by the MPO's Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), which will provide recommendations to the MPO Policy Board. The MPO Policy Board will have sole authority to approve exceptions to this policy.

Exceptions may be granted for projects when:

- Bicyclists and pedestrians are prohibited by law from using the roadway.
- The cost of establishing bikeways would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use. Excessively disproportionate is defined by FHWA and state statutes as bicycle and pedestrian facilities together exceeding 20% of the cost of the larger transportation project.
- Detrimental environmental or social impacts outweigh the need for these accommodations.
- State or other law precludes the applicant's ability to obtain sufficient right-of-way to accommodate facilities designed for one or more modes.

Note: Where bicyclists and/or pedestrians are prohibited from using the roadway, or for any other reason are not accommodated within the roadway, efforts should be made to provide alternative adjacent or nearby parallel routes for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Note: Context-sensitive design, such as where there is no current or reasonably foreseeable need to accommodate a given mode (e.g. transit stops or facilities in an area or community with no transit service) does not constitute a violation of this policy, and does not require an exception.

5. Jurisdiction:

The jurisdiction of this policy is the Metropolitan Planning Area for the Greater Madison MPO in effect at the time of solicitation for funding applications. This policy applies to all roadway projects selected for funding by the MPO, including new construction, rehabilitation, reconstruction, maintenance, or other. This policy does not apply to stand-alone bicycle, pedestrian, transit, Intelligent Transportation System (ITS), or non-infrastructure projects selected for funding by the MPO.

In order to ensure federal compliance, the MPO requires projects receiving federal funding adhere to this policy. The MPO shall give consideration to adopted local Complete Streets policies; however, this regional policy will take precedence for MPO-attributable federal funding criteria. Projects utilizing any other funding sources are also encouraged to adhere to this policy.

6. Design:

The public's ability to safely travel within the public way is paramount, and speeding and reckless driving contribute to crashes that can cause severe injury or even death. Through Complete Streets elements, the design of streets can improve poor motorist behaviors such as excessive travel speeds.

Projects subject to this policy shall be designed for the context of surrounding land uses (see section 7). Complete Streets projects generally provide the following features within the public right-of-way: sidewalks, bicycle facilities (e.g. bike lanes, separated paths, and wayfinding signs), ADA-compliant curb ramps and bus stops, and other reasonably applicable facilities to assist in safe multimodal use of the right-of-way.

Projects shall provide sidewalks or other separated pedestrian ways on both sides of all streets, unless project context and/or ROW restrictions preclude providing such facilities on more than one side of a street or a portion thereof.

Projects shall include low- or moderate-traffic stress bicycle facilities (LTS 1, 2, or 3); no projects resulting in high traffic stress bicycle facilities (LTS 4) will be funded by the MPO unless approved as an exception to this policy (see section 4).²

Projects shall be designed in accordance with locally-adopted plans and current best practices and design recommendations from appropriate expert sources, including but not limited to the most up-to-date versions of:

- The National Association of Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Bikeway Design Guide
- The NACTO Urban Street Design Guide

² See the Low-Stress Bicycle Network Report

<https://www.greatermadisonmpo.org/planning/documents/LTSRReportFinal.pdf> and the updated 2023 LTS methodology at https://www.greatermadisonmpo.org/planning/documents/LTS_Methodology_2023_Update.pdf

- The NACTO Transit Street Design Guide
- AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities
- AASHTO Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities

The MPO's *Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities, Policies, and Street Standards* report and its addenda³ should be considered in project design, and project design elements should follow best national practices where those differ from existing local standards.

The above resources and other appropriate guides and plans⁴ should be consulted as appropriate when planning and designing new or reconstructed roadways; however, innovative design options that have a comparable level of safety for users when compared to more traditional design options will also be considered. The MPO strongly encourages communities to stay current on new guidance, standards, recommendations and resources regarding bicycle and pedestrian accommodations as well as ADA-accessible accommodations, and is available to provide assistance in identifying appropriate treatments for proposed projects.

7. Land use and context sensitivity:

Through the regional planning process and local comprehensive planning processes, residents, business owners, and other stakeholders have articulated a vision for the streets and transportation priorities within their individual neighborhoods.

Project design must account for existing or planned adjacent land uses and context sensitivity. Projects must account for expected changes in travel demand, but should not be “over-built” based on speculation. Projects shall be consistent with the functional classifications envisioned in the Regional Transportation Plan, but shall not be designed as a one-size-fits-all response to the roadway functional class.

³ <https://www.greatermadisonmpo.org/planning/BikePlan.cfm>

⁴ Additional resources and plans to consider include:

- Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Recommended Design Guidelines to Accommodate Pedestrians and Bicycles at Interchanges
- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Policy on Geometric Design of Highway and Streets
- The US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Design Controls (MUTCD)
- The Wisconsin Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (WMUTCD)
- The US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration's Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks Guide
- FTA Manual on Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections to Transit
- Wisconsin Department of Transportation's Bicycle Facility Design Handbook
- Wisconsin Department of Transportation's Facilities Design Manual (FDM)
- Local and regional bicycle and pedestrian plans
- Local transit development plans
- Local ADA Transition Plans
- ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG)
- (Proposed) Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG)
- Dane County Bicycle Wayfinding Manual
- City of Madison Complete Green Streets Guide

8. Performance measures:

The MPO currently collects data and reports on performance measures related to the development of complete street networks:

- Miles of Pedestrian Facilities
- Low-Stress Bike Facilities
- BCycle Utilization
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Fatalities and Serious Injuries
- Transit Ridership
- Mode of Transportation to Work

Annual Performance Measure Reports are available at <https://www.greatermadisonmpo.org/trends/>.

As part of the MPO's ongoing efforts to improve transportation access for traditionally marginalized populations, the MPO started to track projects earning points for improving access for identified Environmental Justice (EJ) areas in 2022, including the percentage of funded projects serving EJ areas and the percentage of funding allocated to projects serving EJ areas. These performance measures will be used to evaluate progress on implementing this complete streets policy. The number of exceptions to this policy will also be tracked and reported.

9. Project selection criteria:

It is long-standing MPO policy that all street and roadway construction and reconstruction projects selected for funding by the MPO must comply with the MPO's Complete Streets Policy; however, that policy has for many years referred to a state law and related rules that have been repealed. This policy replaces the previously-referenced state law and related rules, but does not reduce or obviate the requirement that all roadway projects selected for funding by the MPO must comply with the MPO's adopted complete streets policy.

10. Implementation steps:

The MPO shall assist communities in understanding the importance of complete street networks, and shall provide technical assistance and recommendations when requested, both for project design and for development of community-specific complete streets policies.

The MPO shall conduct outreach and education efforts both independently and in cooperation with local agencies and organizations to increase awareness of the importance of complete street networks.

The MPO shall continue to require that roadway projects selected for funding by the MPO comply with the adopted complete streets policy, and shall follow the process described in this policy to evaluate requested exceptions to this policy.

Glossary

Benefit: An effect of a project or program that will be helpful or useful to a given population or residents of and visitors to a given area.

Marginalized populations: Populations that have historically been overlooked or excluded from decision-making, including Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; female-identifying persons; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; immigrants; persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality, and the currently or formerly incarcerated.

Underinvested and underserved communities: Population groups, which may identify through race, culture, geographic proximity, or other traits, that have limited or no access to resources that are available to other groups.

For the purposes of federal funding eligibility or prioritization of projects benefiting *underserved communities*, refer to the definition in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). At the time of the drafting of this policy, that definition is:⁵

An underserved community as defined consistent with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and DOT definitions of a disadvantaged community designation, which includes any Tribal land; any territory or possession of the United States; or U.S. Census tracts identified in one of the following tools (may only select one option to identify underserved communities):

- The interim USDOT Equitable Transportation Community Explorer (ETCE) <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/0920984aa80a4362b8778d779b090723/page/Applicant-Explorer/>
- Any subsequent iterations of the ETCE released during the NOFO period; or
- The Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) to identify disadvantaged communities <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/>

Funds to underserved communities are spent in, and provide benefits to, underserved communities.

Vulnerable Road Users or Vulnerable Users: Pedestrians, bicyclists, and people using mobility devices; all roadway users who are not in a car, truck, bus, or other protective vehicle.

⁵ Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) NOFO, DOT-OST-2023-0048
<https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2023-03/SS4A-NOFO-FY23.pdf>, April 12, 2023