



# MINNESOTA'S STATEWIDE COMPLETE STREETS POLICY

THE COMPLETE STREETS LAW DIRECTS MN/DOT TO WORK WITH STAKEHOLDERS TO UPDATE MN/DOT POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO ALIGN WITH COMPLETE STREETS THINKING.

July 2010

**I**N 2010, Minnesota enacted a state-wide Complete Streets policy, joining 13 other states that have Complete Streets laws in place.

## **Q** What is Complete Streets?

**A** "Complete Streets" is a term used to describe transportation planning and design policies and processes that emphasize safety and accessibility for all users. A Complete Streets policy ensures that the needs and safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities are taken into account in the design and operation of roads.

## **Q** What happened to prompt this law?

**A** During the past 50 years, Minnesota road building has focused

on moving as many cars as possible, as quickly as possible. Safety and accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders have too often been left out or addressed inadequately. In 2008, the Minnesota Legislature required the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) to conduct

***"Minnesota road building has focused on moving as many cars as possible, as quickly as possible"***

a study of the benefits, feasibility, and costs of a statewide Complete Streets policy. The study results recommended that Mn/DOT update its policies to reflect a Complete Streets approach and specifically recommended that Mn/DOT adopt and implement a Complete

Streets policy. The Minnesota Legislature received the study in December 2009 and subsequently passed a Complete Streets law in May 2010.

## **Q** What does the new statewide complete streets policy accomplish?

**A** The Complete Streets law directs Mn/DOT to work with stakeholders to update Mn/DOT policies and practices to align with Complete Streets thinking. The law mandates that Mn/DOT report back to the Legislature on those changes in a series of three reports in 2011, 2012, and 2014. The law also requires Mn/DOT to provide more flexibility in implementing Complete Streets principles for local cities and counties that are building roads which are subject to state-aid design standards. The law encourages, but does not require, local governments to adopt Complete Streets policies.

## Q What does the law say?

A The new legislation:

- » Defines Complete Streets as “...the planning, scoping, design, implementation, operation, and maintenance of roads in order to reasonably address the safety and accessibility needs of users of all ages and abilities. Complete streets considers the needs of motorists, pedestrians, transit users and vehicles, bicyclists, and commercial and emergency vehicles moving along and across roads, intersections, and crossings in a manner that is sensitive to the local context and recognizes that the needs vary in urban, suburban, and rural settings.”<sup>1</sup>
- » Requires Mn/DOT to implement a statewide Complete Streets policy that will affect virtually all phases of road activity on trunk highways—from planning to maintenance—and on county state-aid highways and municipal state-aid streets when a variance is requested. Before Mn/DOT begins implementing the policy, it must consult with stakeholders, regional agencies, local governments and road authorities about ways to integrate Complete Streets principles into design solutions. In addition, Mn/DOT must address protocols, guidance, standards and training, and must also integrate principles for design solutions that are context-sensitive.<sup>2</sup>
- » Encourages, but does not require, local governments to adopt Complete Streets policies. The legislation also allows local governments to adopt Complete Street policies that exceed the state policy.<sup>3</sup>
- » Ensures that any local government that is seeking to implement a Complete Streets project may request a variance for this purpose. The legislation also requires Mn/DOT to evaluate all variance requests regarding Complete Streets principles using specific Complete Streets guidance publications.<sup>4</sup> Mn/DOT and its variance committee must consider the latest edition of A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets, published by the American Association of State Highway and Trans-

portation Officials; for urban area projects, Mn/DOT must consider the latest edition of Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities, published by the Institute of Transportation Engineers. If Mn/DOT denies a variance, the commissioner is required to provide a written explanation of why the variance was denied.<sup>5</sup>

- » Requires Mn/DOT to report to the legislature on its implementation of the Complete Streets policy in January of 2011, 2012, and 2014. This report must include identification of statutory barriers and changes to the variance process (2011), development of performance indicators (2012), and identification of statutory recommendations for facilitating policy implementation (2012, 2014).<sup>6</sup>



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1 MINN. STAT. 174.75, Subd. 1.

2 MINN. STAT. 174.75, Subd. 2.

3 MINN. STAT. 174.75, Subd. 4.

4 MINN. STAT. 174.75, Subd. 5; MINN. STAT. 162.02, Subd. 3a(a); and MINN. STAT. 162.09, Subd. 3a(a).

5 MINN. STAT. 174.75, Subd. 5(a), (b).

6 MINN. STAT. 174.75, Subd. 3.