



Complete Streets

When the Georgia Department of Transportation presented its newly-adopted Complete Streets Policy at a conference of bicycling enthusiasts last month, some may have viewed it as a seminal moment – a wondrous epiphany at the former State Highway Department?

For those of us who work at Georgia DOT though – on the concepts, design, engineering and implementation of improvements to the state’s transportation infrastructure – it was more the formalization of a continuing evolution in our thinking and our work. A public declaration grounded not in buzzwords or overnight trends, but in the foundation of the Department’s maturing, inclusive philosophy of transportation planning.

Complete Streets is a growing national initiative to improve the design and operation of roadways, particularly those in urban and suburban settings, to accommodate and encourage safe access for all users – motorists, transit riders, cyclists and pedestrians. We worked with a broad array of local governments, our transportation partner agencies and pedestrian and cycling advocacy groups to develop Georgia DOT’s policy – now formalized in some 30 pages of definitions, standards and guidelines in our design manual.

Complete Streets is more than pages in a manual however. It is confirmation of an ever-changing culture; an acknowledgement that our transportation system can be more – should be more – than its least common denominator; a recognition that the straightest route between two points may not be everyone’s desired route. Complete Streets is a state of mind. The Georgia Department of Transportation is the proud keeper of a 20,000-mile highway system considered among the nation’s best. But we know it can be more. More inviting. More accommodating. More holistic. Complete Streets is the Department’s commitment to make it more, or perhaps better stated, to continue making it more.

For many of the goals and precepts of Complete Streets already are keystones of existing Georgia DOT initiatives – our emphasis on context sensitive designs, our financial underwriting of the Clean Air Campaign and community transit programs, our Scenic Byways, Transportation Enhancement and Safe Routes to Schools programs, our aggressive Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Action Plan. And our construction program. In the north Georgia community of Braselton, a Department rerouting project was to include a bike lane and a sidewalk on either side of the roadway. But in talking – and listening – to the community, we learned they preferred multi-use trails on both sides; we revised our plans and built trails. An \$11 million project currently underway on Buford Highway – a busy Atlanta arterial highway with heavy localized pedestrian traffic – embodies all that is Complete Streets with sidewalks, pedestrian countdown timers at crosswalks, hybrid pedestrian beacons and a raised center median to serve as a pedestrian refuge.

Complete Streets is not an aspiration for the Georgia DOT; it is the way we go about our business every day. For the foreseeable future, that business likely will remain centered around the highway system.

Ten million Georgians depend on it. But it can be a more complete system. And we are a different, wiser department now – we no longer see our mission as highways always; rather highways all ways.

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