

# La Crosse County: Complete Streets



## Key players:

- City planners
- Regional Planning Commission or Metropolitan Planning Organization staff
- Local public health department
- Healthcare providers
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Transportation regional bike/pedestrian coordinator
- Community Active Living coalition
- Safe Routes to School staff
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator

La Crosse County is a beautiful place to bike and walk, with scenic trails overlooking the Mississippi River. However, for many years, biking and walking in the city of La Crosse often meant crossing multiple high-volume, multi-lane streets. The La Crosse County Health Living Collaboration, a community coalition dedicated to improving health in La Crosse County, and the La Crosse County Health Department (LCCHD) teamed up to make La Crosse County safe for cyclists and pedestrians through the adoption and implementation of a [Complete Streets](#) policy. In April 2011, La Crosse County became the first county in Wisconsin to adopt a Complete Streets Policy. Onalaska and the Villages of West Salem and Holmen also adopted Complete Streets policies, and the city of La Crosse adopted a Green Complete Streets Policy. As a result of the new policies, 17.5 miles of sharrows (shared-lane bicycle markings) and bike lanes, more than 100 additional bike parking spaces, and 64 Share the Road signs have been added, and bike counts have doubled.

## First steps

After applying for and receiving a Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), LCCHD created a Bike/Pedestrian Coordinator position to support planning for Complete Streets at the county level. The Bike/Pedestrian Coordinator worked with Safe Routes to School (SRTS) staff to provide outreach and education to the community on strategies to increase use of safe, active transportation. Additionally, the Complete Streets team engaged community stakeholders by providing education and information on Complete Streets and how it would make a positive impact on the community.

## Starting the conversation

The Complete Streets team started the conversation with potential stakeholders by referencing national Complete Streets literature and noting that this policy was supported by [state-level Complete Streets legislation](#). The Complete Streets team attended city, county and village meetings to present information on Complete Streets policies and answer questions. They also presented to local community organizations, such as bike and environmental clubs, and promoted the policy in the media with letters to the editor, media appearances, and letters of support from community organizations. Presentations and outreach focused on how Complete Streets would improve health and safety in the community.

## Gaining community support

Engaging community stakeholders and gaining their support was critical to getting a Complete Streets policy in place. The team focused its message on how a Complete Streets policy would improve the community, especially for vulnerable and underserved populations. La Crosse already had a well-established SRTS policy in place, which was expanded with the CPPW grant. The Complete Streets team described SRTS as trying to remedy mistakes of the past, and Complete Streets as trying to prevent those mistakes from being made again. They also explained that Complete Streets does not need to cost more than incomplete streets, making it a good investment for the community's health.



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*“The built environment affects our health and either encourages or prohibits physical activity. Streets that provide dedicated space for walking, bicycling and people using wheelchairs, known as Complete Streets, provide a safe welcoming place for people to be physically active.”*

**Jack Zabrowski**

LaCrosse Pedestrian/  
Bicycle Coordinator

## Resources:

[Active Community Toolkit](#)

[Wisconsin Active Communities Alliance](#)

[National Complete Streets Coalition](#)



## Challenges

One of the biggest challenges the Collaboration and Complete Streets team faced was overcoming resistance and inertia from some community members. Some were misinformed about Complete Streets, thinking the community had already implemented the policy. Others were resistant to the idea of implementing the policy because it was a change from how streets had been built in the past. Education and outreach were critical to gaining support and reducing resistance from community stakeholders.

## Key lessons

- Collaboration is the key to success. It takes support and effort from many sectors of the community to adopt and successfully implement a Complete Streets policy.
- Conduct training for municipal staff who are involved in planning and implementing bike/pedestrian accommodations and projects. People will be more likely to incorporate bike/pedestrian accommodations if they know how and why to include them.
- Consider passing a Complete Streets ordinance, as an ordinance may be more durable than a policy.

## Get started in your community

Do you want to make your community a safer place for active transportation by implementing a Complete Streets policy? Start with these steps, and consult the [Active Community Toolkit](#) and the [Wisconsin Active Communities Alliance website](#) for more resources.

- Establish a workgroup to provide outreach and education on Complete Streets to community stakeholders. See Key Players on page 1 for ideas on whom to include.
- If possible, secure funding for the project and hire a Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator to support planning for Complete Streets and active transportation projects.
- Provide training for workgroup members on Complete Streets and develop outreach/educational material. See the Resources section for free resources provided by the National Complete Streets Coalition.
- Attend city, village, and/or county meetings to educate community stakeholders and policy makers on the benefits of adopting a Complete Streets policy. Provide additional outreach to local businesses, health care organizations, and schools.
- Engage community stakeholders through the media by submitting letters to the editor and letters of support from community organizations to local newspapers and making TV or radio appearances.
- Once a Complete Streets policy is passed, provide training for municipal staff who will be involved in incorporating bike/pedestrian accommodations into projects.
- Continue to promote a bike and pedestrian-friendly environment by encouraging your community to pass a Complete Streets ordinance.

