

## **Guest View: Complete streets create more complete communities**

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In its version of the Transportation Bond Bill, the Massachusetts House of Representatives took a significant step forward to improve communities across the commonwealth by including the Active Streets Certification Program thanks to the leadership of New Bedford state Rep. Antonio Cabral in his role as chairman of the House Committee on Bonding, and Rep. Jason Lewis as the original filer of the bill. If passed in the final version of the bond bill, this program will help cities like Fall River and New Bedford build and improve streets that will promote walking, biking and public transportation options that will have a significant positive impact on people's health and the economy in every community.

Historically, we have designed for the car first, pedestrians second and maybe some thought — if any — to bicycles. Today, there is a growing movement toward improving the streets in our communities to provide alternatives to the car. It is called "Complete Streets." Complete Streets are streets that work for everyone by balancing a variety of transportation options. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit riders and cars.

Complete Streets bring myriad benefits to all communities whether urban, suburban or rural, and they help make people and economies healthier. When sidewalks and bike lanes are improved and made an integral part of the streetscape, pedestrians and bicyclists are safer and more likely to walk and bike when they go to work, shopping and school. And, when public transit options are better integrated into these complete streets, people can get to their bus or train station easier by safely incorporating walking and biking into their commute.

The burden of incomplete streets is particularly high in low-income communities and communities of color, where the car ownership rate is much lower than average. Unsafe streets and lack of transportation options in these communities lead to higher pedestrian fatality rates, higher transportation costs, poor air quality, and barriers to opportunity that stand in the way of health, education and prosperity for too many Massachusetts residents.

By creating safer and better sidewalks, bike paths and connections to public transit, we can encourage more people to choose "active transportation" like walking and biking that leads to healthier living.

Providing more transportation options reduces reliance on cars, which in turn makes our roads safer from

pedestrian accidents while reducing pollution. Creating complete streets in our communities also provides safer and improved mobility for seniors and people with disabilities.

Better design encourages people to walk and bike through their communities, where they are more likely to focus on, and drop in to, local shops and restaurants and spend their money in town rather than somewhere else. This, in turn, draws more businesses that provide vitality and revenue to the community. Cities and towns that have more walkable streets are also able to draw in more visitors to their retail areas, as well as boost property values as prospective home buyers look for a community that is both attractive and supports a better quality of life.

The \$50 million Active Streets Certification Program currently in the House version of the transportation bond bill would encourage cities and towns across the commonwealth to implement Complete Streets policies by creating a small grant program. Communities would become eligible after passing a Complete Streets bylaw or ordinance in addition to taking several other actions.

Last November, more than two dozen mayors, town managers and other municipal leaders from urban, suburban and rural areas called on legislators to include this incentive program in the Transportation Bond Bill.

People and communities are realizing that there are more ways to move around than simply getting in the car. Younger professionals want to use public transit and bike or walk as part of their commute. Parents want their kids to walk to school to be healthier and have more time away from screens. Seniors want to walk safely and easily to their corner store, friends' or house of worship. And, businesses want people to notice them and stop in.

All of these activities can be achieved by making the streets that run through our cities and towns Complete Streets. The Senate now has the opportunity to help communities make major improvements that will benefit all residents and businesses by including the Active Streets Certification Program into the final version of the transportation bill.

The Massachusetts Public Health Association, Transportation for Massachusetts, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and many other groups worked with the House to include this program and now we ask that the Senate pass it as well. Complete Streets create complete communities for everybody.