



Shenango Valley Area Transportation Study
Metropolitan Planning Organization

Complete Streets Policy

Mercer County, PA

Adoption: December 10, 2024



Shenango Valley Area Transportation Study MPO/Mercer County Complete Streets Policy

1. Vision

To ensure that Mercer County is a place for individuals of all backgrounds to live and travel freely, safely, and comfortably. That public and private roadways in Mercer County shall be safe and convenient for residents of all ages and abilities who travel by foot, bicycle, carriage, public transportation or automobile. To ensure the sustainability of communities countywide.

2. Definition

“Complete Streets standards or policies means standards or policies that ensure the safe and adequate accommodation of all users of the transportation system, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation users, children, older individuals, individuals with disabilities, motorists, and freight vehicles.”

- Section 11206 (a) of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), aka Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)

3. Access

It is vital that Mercer County’s Complete Streets policy serves the needs of persons of all ages and abilities, including children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Mercer County strives to be inclusive so that anyone can feel safe and comfortable while using public right-of-way regardless of their age, ability, socioeconomic status, and (where appropriate) mode of transport. Given Mercer County’s significant aging population, it is vital that transportation projects are designed to improve safety and mobility so that all residents have multiple options to access the services and amenities they require to have a high quality of life.

4. Scope

When residents travel on Mercer County’s transportation network, trips should be safe and comfortable. This requires a seamless, connected street network, with a variety of modes, including safe and convenient pedestrian crossings and access to transit. Even a small interruption in the connection or one hazardous section can make a trip challenging. Every street does not necessarily need to provide separate accommodations for every mode, but a network should be in place so that feasible trips can be made by walking, biking, carriage, and taking public transit, as well as driving. Furthermore, the Shenango Valley Area Transportation Study (SVATS) MPO staff shall work proactively with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), Mercer County municipalities, and businesses and educational institutions to develop plans, facilities, and accommodations that further the MPO’s Complete Streets policy.

Environmental Justice (EJ) refers to the policy set forth by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that states, for the purposes of transportation planning, MPOs must specifically address EJ in the process of developing and advancing transportation programs and projects. The core principle is that all individuals in a community should enjoy the same protection from hazards, equal access to resources and infrastructure, and benefits from the economic and social influences and opportunities regardless of race, color, national origin, ability, English proficiency, or income. It also means that decisions made regarding the community are made in a way that is fair and honest. Historically these populations have

been negatively affected and under-served by traditional planning efforts, especially during the interstate expansion era. The SVATS MPO Complete Streets policy prioritizes these underserved communities.

5. Implementation

This Mercer County transportation system should be designed and operated in ways that, to the greatest extent possible, ensure the safety, security, comfort, and convenience of pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit/paratransit users, assistive mobility device users, motorists, emergency responders, freight providers, and users of other common modes of transportation.

The SVATS MPO shall establish a routine process for project delivery that reflects the Complete Streets policy. The SVATS MPO, local municipalities and Mercer County will review, seek and incorporate public input and recommend project prioritization to ensure that they effectively implement this policy.

The Complete Streets Policy shall be applied by the SVATS MPO in the project selection phase, in conjunction with prioritization methods in the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), to ensure that applicable projects accommodate the appropriate modes of transport.

The SVATS MPO shall apply a “Complete Streets Scorecard” measuring applicable standards to provide a quantitative evaluation of transportation projects. Project prioritization shall incorporate consideration of improvements and repairs that benefit vulnerable and underrepresented communities.

Complementing existing federal guidance, updates to documents such as the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), and Mercer County Comprehensive Plan shall incorporate Complete Streets principles. Updates to these plans shall place emphasis on ensuring equity for residents of all backgrounds, incomes, ages, and abilities and developing diverse modes of transport including walking, biking, traveling by carriage, and taking public transit, as well as driving where feasible and appropriate. The Complete Streets Policy will be reevaluated by the MPO during each LRTP update.

The SVATS MPO shall encourage staff professional development and training on non-motorized transportation issues through attending conferences, classes, seminars and workshops, as appropriate.

When there are conflicting needs among users and/or modes, safety shall be the highest priority; particularly safety for the most vulnerable street users (pedestrians, bicyclists, children, seniors, and people with additional accessibility needs). Highway Functional Classification shall be considered when determining what needs are present and which modes are permitted. Selection and quantitative evaluation of performance measures shall also support investment in the most underinvested and underserved communities.

Funding for construction, operations, and maintenance is expected to come from a variety of areas including municipal budgets, developer projects, state, federal and other grants. Availability of funds shall be taken into consideration when conducting cost-benefit analysis of incorporating Complete Streets principles into transportation projects.

6. Engagement and Coordination

In order to ensure that full consideration is being given to Mercer County's physical, economic, and social setting, the Complete Streets policy, in both development and implementation, shall include community engagement as a factor in decision making. The community engagement approach will contribute to preserving and enhancing scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources while striving to improve or maintain safety, mobility, and infrastructure conditions.

Community engagement activities must address issues that the public perceives as important. Thus, while developing and implementing the Complete Streets policy, SVATS MPO staff will seek ways to explain to the public why the policy matters. Such efforts may include conducting workshops, events, or meetings in places that are comfortable and familiar to the audiences. To ensure the message is consistently delivered, the "Complete Streets Scorecard" that provides a concise evaluation of transportation projects will guide community engagement.

Each communication or event should contribute to the public's understanding of the Complete Streets policy and its purpose. The MPO shall incorporate discussion of its Complete Streets policy at its public meetings to enable the community to contribute to new policies and projects. The meetings may be attended in-person or virtually, and will be advertised in a newspaper of general circulation and on municipal websites.

Many organizations, agencies, and entities have a role to play in implementing the Complete Streets policy. Coordination and commitment from all agencies involved are required for success in communicating the policy. Some of the groups involved may include:

- Shenango Valley Area Transportation Study MPO
- Mercer County Regional Planning Commission
- Mercer County Government
- Local Municipal Governments
- Mercer County's Public and Private School Systems
- Non-Profit Organizations
- Property owners
- Engineering companies
- Construction contractors
- Development Community, Economic Development Agencies and Chambers of Commerce

7. Exceptions

Exceptions to this policy shall be reviewed as projects are considered for the Long-Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program.

Complete Streets improvements may not be appropriate in some cases due to context. There are different exception processes for transportation projects. These exceptions may not be construed to circumvent environmental justice, Title VI requirements, or equal treatment of all residents. A project must meet one or more of the following criteria to qualify for an exception:

- i. An accommodation that is not necessary on corridors where specific user groups are prohibited. Such an exception may include projects involving arterials that function to optimize movement of vehicular traffic.
- ii. A justifiable absence of current and future need exists and is not recommended in any existing planning documents. This exception may include projects in areas in which existing structures already serve all modes of transport and do not require Complete Streets improvements.
- iii. A project of equivalent scope and schedule exists or is already programmed for funding to provide connectivity for all users. This exception may include projects that would involve redundancies or conflicts with other projects.
- iv. Cost of accommodation is disproportionate to the need or probable use.
- v. Integration of Complete Streets principles is structurally infeasible due to challenging topography or other existing conditions.
- vi. Emergency Repairs such as (but not limited to) a water main leak that requires immediate, rapid response.
- vii. A project that has already been programmed for funding prior to the adoption of this policy.

Complete Streets improvements should align within the parameters of the design and scope of the original project. Simple maintenance projects such as (but not limited to) minor repaving, bridge repairs, and simple stormwater improvements will not warrant a major selection process and will not be given a complete streets policy score. Not all features will be appropriate or feasible for every right of way; project designers should practice flexibility and take local context into consideration, especially in the selection stage when evaluating the adoption of Complete Streets principles.

8. Conclusion

A Complete Streets approach will make the street network safer and more convenient for those who drive, bicycle, walk, travel by carriage, or ride public transit – improving quality of life and making Mercer County a better and more equitable place to live, work, and play.

9. Sources

- Mercer County Comprehensive Plan
- Mercer County Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)
- Mercer County Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
- Mercer County Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)
- Smart Growth America Complete Streets Policy Framework
- Smart Growth America “Elements of a Complete Streets Policy”
- City of Pittsburgh, PA Complete Streets Resolution
- State College, PA Complete Streets Resolution
- Howard County, MD Complete Streets Resolution
- City of Rogersville, MO Complete Streets Resolution
- Boston MPO Complete Streets Scorecard
- FHWA Moving to a Complete Streets Design Model: A Report to Congress on Opportunities and Challenges