Recommendations Report

New Hampshire Department of Transportation
Accelerating Practical Solutions Workshop

July 2018
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Preface

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) partnered with the Governors’ Institute on Community Design (GICD) to help build awareness around the need to support all users of the transportation network, identify barriers in project development processes and design guidance to support Complete Streets, and identify policy gaps or changes needed to address those barriers. GICD facilitated an Accelerating Practical Solutions workshop for NHDOT decision-makers and other stakeholders on March 6, 2018 in Concord, NH.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the outcomes of the workshop, provide further information and resources to support NHDOT’s decision-making, and support NHDOT and its regional and local partner agencies and other stakeholders as they collaborate on Complete Streets moving forward.

A resource team of facilitators and experts consisting of the following individuals led the workshop:

- Emiko Atherton, Director, National Complete Streets Coalition
- Mike Rutkowski, Steering Committee Member, National Complete Streets Coalition Steering Committee; Principal, Stantec
- Rayla Bellis, Program Manager, Smart Growth America

Attendees at the workshop included NHDOT leadership and staff, transportation staff and planners from local and regional partner agencies, and a few additional stakeholders from advocacy organizations, totaling approximately 60 participants.

Acknowledgements

The Governors’ Institute on Community Design team thanks NHDOT Commissioner Victoria F. Sheehan for the invitation to work with the Department; Larry Keniston and Erik Paddleford with NHDOT for their leadership and assistance planning the workshop; Craig Tufts with CNHRPC for his assistance planning the case study; and the NHDOT decision-makers and stakeholders who attended the workshop for their participation in the discussion.

About GICD

The Governors’ Institute on Community Design, a program of Smart Growth America, helps state leaders address economic development, housing, transportation, and other pressing issues that relate to how communities grow and develop. Visit www.govinstitute.org for more information.

The Governors’ Institute has developed the Accelerating Practical Solutions program to help transportation agencies meet changing demands on their systems by defining the transportation problem to identify the most cost-effective solution to that problem. The program aims to build internal capacity to plan, design, construct, operate, and maintain context-sensitive transportation networks that work for all modes of travel.

The workshop and this report were developed with the support of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Transportation.
Introduction

Background

New Hampshire is facing changes that are impacting the role of transportation in meeting the needs of residents and contributing to the state’s economic vitality. Nationwide, demographic shifts and changing market trends are driving an increased demand for development in walkable communities, including small towns. For New Hampshire, the state’s aging population will also create specific mobility challenges that NHDOT needs to address in order to allow residents to age in place, reach their daily needs, and maintain a high quality of life. New Hampshire already has the third highest median age of any state in the country (42.8 as of 2015),¹ and residents over age 65 will make up nearly 30% of the state’s population by 2040.² At the same time, funding for transportation remains constrained, and decision-makers face growing public scrutiny about how and where transportation dollars are spent.

NHDOT recognizes the need to expand its consideration of all community residents who use its road network to meet these changing needs and demands. While the Department does not have a statewide Complete Streets policy, it has incorporated a Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) approach into its project development process that expands the stakeholder engagement conducted throughout the process and puts a greater focus on tailoring projects to specific community values.

NHDOT also has several initiatives underway that call to attention the need for increased safety and access for all roadway users. First, the Department is developing new draft design guidance currently titled the NHDOT Multimodal Design Criteria. Second, the Department is expanding its “Suggested Minimum Design Standards for Rural Subdivision Streets” guidance to incorporate greater flexibility and the latest best practices from the Federal Highway Administration. Third, the Department’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Advisory Committee recently added a transit representative and was renamed the NHDOT Complete Streets Advisory Committee.

NHDOT also recognizes that more work is needed to fully bring a Complete Streets approach into its decision-making process. NHDOT will need to evaluate its own project development process, as well as how the Department works with its partners from local and regional agencies to consider and balance the needs of different modes.

Workshop summary

In order to help address these needs and augment existing initiatives, GICD facilitated an Accelerating Practical Solutions workshop for NHDOT and local and regional partner agencies on March 6, 2018 in Concord, NH.

The GICD team developed the workshop in line with “Practical Solutions,” an outcome-focused approach to decision-making for transportation project development and delivery. The goal of Practical Solutions is to precisely identify a transportation problem and then finely tune the scope of the solution to address the identified problem. This approach allows departments of transportation

to address challenges and meet demand while seeking lower cost solutions, optimizing existing transportation systems, providing mobility options, reducing the need to build costly new infrastructure, and avoiding overdesigning.

GICD developed the workshop agenda in partnership with NHDOT to help decision-makers identify the challenges they face in making context-sensitive decisions about how to meet the needs of different travel modes. The workshop’s objectives were to:

• Build a common understanding of the benefits of Complete Streets and reasons to consider all modes of travel in transportation project development,
• Discuss ways the current project development framework and coordination procedures can be updated to support Practical Solutions and integrate consideration of all modes of travel, and
• Have a discussion with NHDOT decision-makers and local stakeholders about how to make tradeoffs between the needs of different travel modes and throughput versus local trips based on context.

After a welcome and kickoff from NHDOT Assistant Commissioner William Cass, Emiko Atherton provided an overview of the Practical Solutions approach and examples of state DOTs using the approach to achieve cost savings and outcomes that are more aligned with community goals. The presentation focused on the need to carefully define the context for each transportation project, the relationship between land use and transportation in supporting or undermining Complete Streets objectives, and the value of using a Practical Solutions approach.

Mike Rutkowski then presented on the benefits of Complete Streets. He began by discussing the historical factors that have led to car-oriented transportation systems and development patterns around the country. He then defined Complete Streets and discussed the value that designing for all modes of travel can provide for safety, public health, and economic competitiveness. He also noted that Complete Streets is a process, not a product, there will always be tradeoffs between different modes of travel, and those tradeoffs should be discussed openly. The presentation prompted a discussion about measuring the return on investment of Complete Streets, as well as a conversation about the perception that Complete Streets projects increase maintenance costs, a challenging issue in New Hampshire because localities bear the responsibility for sidewalks.

Next, Bill Oldenburg, NHDOT’s Assistant Director of Project Development, provided an overview of how the NHDOT project development process currently works. Local participants provided feedback that when projects go through NHDOT’s full Context Sensitive Solutions engagement process, the localities tend to see great results in terms of broad support for the project and catalytic change for the community.

Emiko then facilitated a discussion in response to the presentation about opportunities to bring Complete Streets further into NHDOT’s project development process. Some participants suggested that a statewide Complete Streets policy would provide a helpful framework for localities that want to build Complete Streets. NHDOT participants expressed concerns that this would create an overly prescriptive environment for municipalities and reiterated NHDOT’s emphasis on letting localities define their own needs and solutions.

Based on this discussion, Emiko articulated several key questions to carry into the afternoon sessions:
• Who should be initiating Complete Streets projects? Who pays? Who should be responsible for maintenance?
• Where does decision-making power lie if there are conflicts between competing needs, roadway users, or priorities?
• Should communities be responsible for articulating what they want (and NHDOT responsible for responding)? If so, what is the best way for them to do that?

Following lunch, Emiko provided a brief presentation with more detailed examples of best practices from other state DOTs. This included an overview of the Massachusetts DOT’s Complete Streets technical assistance and funding program designed to assist municipalities in moving through the steps to develop a Complete Streets policy, create a plan for prioritizing Complete Streets investments, and ultimately construct Complete Streets projects. Some participants suggested that a similar model might provide a way for NHDOT to offer leadership and support to localities without being overly prescriptive.

Mike Rutkowski then facilitated a table exercise to apply a Complete Streets decision-making approach to a local case study — the King Street corridor in the Town of Boscawen, NH. Mike Tardif, Executive Director of the Central NH Regional Planning Commission (CNHRPC), set up the case study by providing local context. King Street is a relatively rural corridor that includes the merging of State Routes 3 and 4 through Boscawen, which split on either end of town. The community is interested in making Complete Streets improvements along the corridor, though the specifics of the improvements are not yet defined. CNHRPC’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) includes a project for $1.4 million, which has been submitted as a candidate for inclusion in the state’s 10-Year Plan. CNHRPC has also been working with the community since 2016 to update the zoning along the corridor.

Participants split into table groups to 1) identify needs for the King Street corridor based on the limited context they had received, 2) brainstorm and draw potential improvements to meet the needs on large printed maps, and 3) note when they were making tradeoffs between different objectives or modes of travel.

Emiko then brought the participants back together as a full group to discuss the tradeoffs or tension points they observed. She also had participants write their thoughts on notecards to capture a broader range of perspectives. Finally, she led the group through a discussion to revisit the questions raised before lunch and identify barriers in current practices. The discussion centered on several themes:
• Who should initiate Complete Streets projects?
• Who should pay for Complete Streets improvements, and how should maintenance be handled?
• How should limited funds be prioritized?
• How can NHDOT and its partners collect more robust and meaningful public input?
• How to work within NHDOT’s fluctuating political climate?
• How to measure and use return-on-investment?

Emiko again had participants write thoughts for each of these questions on notecards to capture a broad range of perspectives and ideas. To close the workshop, the GICD team summarized the day’s discussions and shared and received feedback on next steps.
Recommendations for NHDOT

The following section provides recommendations for NHDOT based on the workshop discussions and the major questions identified above. Where noted, some of these recommendations also apply to NHDOT’s local and regional partner agencies around the state.

Many of the following recommendations include brief reference to best practices from other state DOTs (or localities in some cases) that could help provide a model for NHDOT to build on and adapt. Appendix A contains case studies of a number of these best practice examples for further reference.

Summary of recommendations

Table 1 below summarizes the recommendations in the following sections and suggests timeframes for each action to maintain momentum from the workshop. It also suggests who should lead each action and who may be able to assist with implementation.

GICD’s suggested timeframes for each action are based on the likely complexity of implementation, rather than order of importance. For example, recommendations requiring a number of steps, coordination across many divisions and stakeholders, or action from the state legislature would likely take longer to implement. Table 1 is intended as a starting point, and GICD recommends that NHDOT refine the timeframes and suggested leads.

This report also recommends a number of procedural changes NHDOT can make, particularly to its project development process. These generally fall within the medium term timeframe of approximately 12 months, and while they are not necessarily the “lowest hanging fruit,” they are some of the most important changes NHDOT can implement.

Table 1: Recommended actions and roles

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<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Suggested lead</th>
<th>Who could assist</th>
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<td><strong>First 3 months</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Develop a more detailed action plan</td>
<td>Complete Streets Advisory Committee</td>
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<td><strong>6 months after an action plan is developed</strong></td>
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<td>2. Update guidance on community/stakeholder engagement</td>
<td>NHDOT Division of Project Development</td>
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<td>3. Integrate Complete Streets considerations into existing project development checklists at all stages</td>
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<td>4. Adopt a statewide Complete Streets Policy</td>
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<td>5. Create Complete Streets policy guidance for localities</td>
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<td>6. Create a Complete Streets technical assistance program for localities</td>
<td>NHDOT Division of Project Development</td>
<td>RPCs, health departments, AARP, Realtors</td>
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<td><strong>Project development procedural updates</strong></td>
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<td>7. Scale NHDOT’s existing CSS approach for each project type</td>
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are accepted into the 10-Year Plan to identify and make difficult decisions around tradeoffs.

9. Expand support/guidance for developing project scopes and defining purpose and need

10. Establish a required educational meeting with localities during project scoping

11. Develop methodologies and guidance for analyzing return on investment of Complete Streets projects

Local business community

Up to 24 months after action plan is developed

12. Integrate multimodal design criteria directly into NHDOT’s Highway Design Manual

NHDOT Division of Project Development

Complete Streets Advisory Committee

13. Create a project prioritization process that is performance-based and applies across modes

NHDOT Commissioner of Transportation

State legislature, Complete Streets Advisory Committee

In the first 3 months

1. Develop a more detailed action plan

NHDOT’s first step should be to develop a more detailed action plan based on the recommendations in this report and identify a group to oversee the implementation of the action plan. GICD recommends that the existing Complete Streets Advisory Committee be tasked with taking this first step, as well as guiding implementation of the other recommendations in this report. The action plan should also:

- Define roles for leading implementation of each recommendation NHDOT chooses to pursue; and
- Integrate specific milestones for implementation and a process for monitoring progress to keep the initiative on track, including a structure for regularly collecting status updates and publicizing major achievements.

The Florida Department of Transportation’s ongoing Complete Streets Implementation initiative may provide a useful model for developing an implementation plan and announcing progress around major milestones.3 The California Department of Transportation’s Complete Streets Implementation Action Plan can provide an example of tracking progress and roles across multiple divisions.4

Six months after an action plan is developed

2. Update guidance on community and stakeholder engagement

Participants in the workshop raised a need to reach more stakeholders through the engagement conducted by NHDOT and its partners, noting the limitations of traditional public meetings. Workshop participants brainstormed a number of strategies to expand community engagement, including social media and other platforms like YouTube. While this will likely help, it will only address certain demographics of stakeholders.

NHDOT should update its guidance on community engagement to encourage a broader range of approaches and emphasize bringing stakeholders who do not traditionally participate in transportation decision-making into the process. GICD suggests a multi-faceted approach, including some combination of the following strategies:

- **Make it clear how the outcomes of engagement will be used moving forward:** Other state DOTs have found that community residents who tend to be active around these issues can face engagement fatigue from participating in a number of meetings if they do not appear to produce immediate outcomes or change how decisions are made. This can be especially frustrating when residents have taken time off of work or overcome other hurdles to attend workshops and forums, only to feel that their voices have not been heard. Articulating clearly how feedback from community members will feed directly into future projects or policy decisions and providing concrete next steps can encourage better attendance.

- **Offer multiple ways to provide feedback:** NHDOT and its partner agencies can collect broader input by providing multiple ways for residents to provide feedback on a topic, such as online or phone surveys in addition to in-person events.

- **Meet people where they already are (i.e., traveling roadshows):** Rather than hosting separate workshops and events, NHDOT and localities should attend existing standing neighborhood meetings, school functions, or community events. This provides an opportunity to collect feedback from a broader group of residents that may not attend separate sessions.

- **Engage the community to help plan public meetings, workshops, and events, not just attend them:** Doing so can make a big difference in ensuring that engagement is responsive to specific community needs. It can also show members of the community that they will get value from participating in the sessions.

- **Host ribbon cuttings and community events for smaller projects:** Traditionally, transportation agencies only hold events for major capital projects. Something similar to mark smaller or pilot projects can be a great engagement strategy. It can also build excitement around broader initiatives.

- **Holding meetings and events at different times of day:** This can help reach a range of community members with different work schedules and needs. While decision-makers and stakeholders from NHDOT and the localities can attend public meetings through their jobs, some community residents would need to take the day off of work to do so.

- **Provide childcare and food during public meetings and events:** This may make it easier for community members to participate in sessions they might not otherwise be able to attend because of costs or logistical hurdles.

- **Hire trusted community leaders to act as liaisons:** Some residents will be more comfortable engaging with a community leader whom they know and trust. Hiring liaisons to support engagement efforts can cultivate longer-term relationships with residents who might otherwise be hesitant to engage.
3. Integrate Complete Streets considerations into existing project development checklists

State DOTs have found that creating checklists for scoping and other key phases of project development can help project managers consistently raise the right questions around context, the needs of all modes of travel, and tradeoffs between different desired outcomes for the project.5

For example, one of the biggest challenges in addressing the needs of all users is failing to provide the flexibility upfront in articulating the project purpose to allow for consideration of multimodal approaches. Too often, gaps in multimodal access come up during or after the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) stage of project development or the design process through local requests after the budget has been set and the scope is relatively difficult to change.

With guidance on what questions to consistently ask upfront, project teams can avoid this lack of information. Checklists make it possible to determine from the beginning which types of roadway users are currently using the facility and whether there might be latent demand for walking and biking if conditions were safer or if new development will be introduced. Checklists can also provide structure for NHDOT project managers to have conversations with localities and other stakeholders about difficult tradeoffs between the needs of different modes of travel and other desired outcomes (discussed further in recommendation 8 below).

Since NHDOT already uses checklists during various phases of project development and delivery, updating those checklists with additional considerations (i.e., questions about the land use context and needs of different users) would be a relatively quick first step compared to other procedural changes recommended below.

Twelve months after an action plan is developed

4. Adopt a statewide Complete Streets Policy

A major topic discussed during the workshop was NHDOT’s reactionary, rather than proactive, role in implementing Complete Streets. Currently, the Department will work with localities on Complete Streets projects if the locality requests it, but NHDOT will not guide communities toward a Complete Streets approach out of a concern for overstepping the role of the state agency.

Several local stakeholders noted that a statewide Complete Streets policy could provide a beneficial framework for municipalities. GICD recommends that NHDOT take this step.

More than half of the states nationwide have a state Complete Streets policy in place, whether enacted internally by the DOT or through legislation.6 A statewide policy can be flexible and allow ample room for localities to develop their own context-specific policies. Some states, like Florida, have seen a number of localities adopt policies in response to the new state Complete Streets policy because it provides a useful starting point to work from and assures localities that the state will support, rather than hinder, their Complete Streets efforts.

5 Examples of checklists bringing Complete Streets considerations into project development are provided in Appendix A.

The National Complete Streets Coalition provides guidance for developing Complete Streets policies that are flexible and context-sensitive, yet include the necessary elements and level of detail to set the agency up for successful implementation.\(^7\)

5. Create Complete Streets policy guidance for localities

If NHDOT does not adopt a policy at the state level, it can still support municipalities by offering written guidance on local policy development. This would help localities tailor policies to their unique needs and contexts while still providing a starting point and solid foundation. This guidance would ideally include the core elements of a good Complete Streets policy by building on the National Complete Streets Coalition’s guidance and addressing New Hampshire-specific values. Providing multiple examples of policy language from communities in New Hampshire or peer states would give localities models without being overly prescriptive.\(^8\)

6. Create a Complete Streets technical assistance program for localities

As the state agency, NHDOT is in a good position to provide support and expertise to communities at various levels of knowledge and awareness. NHDOT can do so by pointing them to resources that show available design options as well as providing individual consultation or direct financial support to hire consultants.

NHDOT should offer direct technical assistance through Complete Streets workshops in all districts on a regular schedule, such as twice per year. During the GICD workshop, participants discussed MassDOT’s Complete Streets funding and technical assistance program\(^9\) as a potential model for NHDOT to help localities build their understanding of and capacity to design Complete Streets. While MassDOT received dedicated funding for the program through legislation, NHDOT could offer a modified version of the program to localities without a similar funding package.\(^10\)

While methods for funding may be a concern, capacity building for localities does not need to come at a major expense to NHDOT, particularly once the curriculum for training is established. The Department should seek partners who share an interest in the goals of Complete Streets and could fund training for localities.

For example, decision-makers in the public health field tend to be advocates for Complete Streets because of the connection between the availability of safe and convenient biking and walking options and incidence of chronic diseases like asthma and diabetes in communities. While partnering with public health organizations will not help NHDOT pay for infrastructure investments, public health stakeholders are frequently willing to contribute funds towards education and training.

In addition to potential funding partners, NHDOT could look to other agencies like the Regional Planning Commissions to provide the expertise and capacity needed to deliver local training. The


\(^8\) Examples of state guidance for localities on developing Complete Streets policies are provided in Appendix A.


\(^10\) More about MassDOT’s program is provided in Appendix A.
RPCs will benefit from having more knowledgeable local municipalities to work with and some may be eager to partner.

7. Scale NHDOT’s existing CSS approach for each project type

NHDOT uses a “Context Sensitive Solutions” (CSS) approach in project development for some projects, which involves more extensive community engagement upfront to identify the problem statement and set a vision statement before a project is scoped. It also involves more detailed evaluation of the project context during scoping and a more robust process for evaluating alternatives developed and selecting the best alternative using criteria defined in partnership with stakeholders.11

As noted previously, workshop participants shared that NHDOT’s CSS process has produced good results, from building broad community buy-in to catalyzing other initiatives such as a zoning update. For example, Bill Oldenburg presented on the Pelham Main Street project, a great example of a well-planned, collaborative process that resulted in a “win-win” for everyone involved.

NHDOT should replicate elements of the CSS process in the project development process for other types of projects, including state of good repair projects. Bringing some of the same engagement practices into the scoping process for repair projects gives localities the chance to raise needs or issues that could be addressed during the project, potentially with a local funding match. For example, simply restriping during resurfacing to narrow travel lanes, add bicycle accommodations, or enhance pedestrian crossings can lead to significant improvements in pedestrian and bicycle safety and access. These investments are also relatively low-cost and easily reversible if they do not produce the expected outcomes. Without engagement upfront, these needs will not come to light until much later in the process, requiring an increase in project delivery time or costs to accommodate them.

NHDOT can use the draft guidance it already has on how to scale the CSS approach for different types of projects,12 which provides a good starting point. NHDOT should prioritize:

- Integrating this guidance directly into the Department’s existing project development procedures (rather than providing a separate CSS process document); and
- Enforcing the routine use of the approach by continuing to provide training to engineers and rewarding exemplary use in internal review processes.

This should also include integrating specific required stakeholder conversations into NHDOT’s project development flowchart at various stages and providing supporting guidance for these conversations. These meetings should happen when projects are accepted into the 10-Year Plan, during planning and scoping, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) stage for projects to which it applies, and likely several times throughout design.

Recommendations 8-10 suggest additional specific ways to expand the project development process in line with a Practical Solutions and CSS approach.

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8. Establish required visioning sessions when projects are accepted into the 10-Year Plan to identify and make difficult decisions around tradeoffs

NHDOT should establish a specific point in the process to routinely have corridor or project visioning sessions with localities. Their purpose would be to prompt a discussion and decisions about tradeoffs between the role of the road in serving regional and local trips, community goals, and modal needs that should be prioritized in the project. GICD suggests that this happen as a requirement when projects are added to the 10-Year Plan.

NHDOT and its local partners make a number of tradeoffs during planning and project development: prioritizing regional throughput versus local travel and economic development, prioritizing the needs of different roadway users, and balancing those needs with other considerations like maintenance costs. If a road’s primary function within the context of the broader network is to serve shorter local trips, it may make sense to prioritize the needs of people walking and biking. However, a road that serves as a major regional connection might require more focus on higher-speed car travel and potentially transit.

As the state agency, NHDOT’s traditional role is focused on serving regional and statewide throughput. Some NHDOT engineers likely default to using roadway design standards in line with this objective during project development. However, as participants noted during the workshop, designing roadways for regional throughput often presents a direct conflict to pedestrian and bicycle safety and access. This includes design decisions related to lane widths, travel speeds, frequency of pedestrian crossings, crossing distances, vehicle turning movements, and a host of additional considerations.

Therefore, it will be important for NHDOT and its local partners to make decisions upfront about what role the road should play within the surrounding community and region to provide a framework for guiding future design decisions during project development.

The best way to address this is having the tough but necessary conversations about these tradeoffs upfront—a challenge all state DOTs face. While none have implemented a comprehensive approach yet, several examples in Appendix A can be used as models to support parts of the process. NHDOT should consider the following actions to support the recommended visioning sessions:

- Use a checklist of questions/considerations to guide the visioning session: Without a formal procedure, the process of considering tradeoffs will vary substantially depending on the project manager. As noted in Recommendation 3, NHDOT should develop a required checklist of questions to guide the process of discussing tradeoffs with local stakeholders. This will support consistent robust conversations during visioning sessions. NHDOT may also want to provide an agenda template for the visioning sessions. Examples to draw from in Appendix A include:
  - The Minnesota DOT’s project scoping worksheets.\(^{13}\)
  - The Massachusetts DOT’s Project Need Form and Project Initiation Form.\(^{14}\)

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• **Document a clear decision:** NHDOT should use the checklists to formally document the outcomes of the visioning sessions, including specific determinations about the role of the corridor, surrounding land use, and which modal needs should be prioritized. This will serve as a basis for decisions during scoping and design.

• **Establish criteria to make a determination about through versus local trips (and integrate them into the checklist):** Basic criteria will make conversations with stakeholders easier and decisions about priorities more transparent. Criteria can include evaluating parallel roads or highways that serve through or local traffic, the current land use context, future planned growth, current travel patterns, economic development benefits of promoting travel within the area versus through the area, and other considerations to determine what the primary role of the road should be in relation to the community and surrounding transportation network. NHDOT may be able to draw from:
  o Florida DOT’s work establishing context classifications for the state and developing supporting guidance on how to identify context and determine modal needs.\(^{15}\)

• **Provide guidance to communities on how to develop street typologies:** NHDOT should also consider offering guidance to communities on how to better define the function and design characteristics of their street network based on different roles a road can play in the community (ex. rural highway, main street, access road, etc.). This will help localities do some of the necessary visioning upfront before meeting with the state.

**9. Expand support/guidance for developing project scopes and defining purpose and need**

During the workshop, GICD noted that considering the needs of all users upfront in planning and early project scoping can reduce project costs down the line. Otherwise, multimodal features to address community needs and concerns become “add-ons” to the scope later in the process.

Workshop participants raised the value of investing more upfront to bring on additional capacity or consultants who can assist localities in developing project scopes and getting accurate budget estimates. GICD recommends that NHDOT provide leadership and recommend this to localities as part of the process for submissions to the 10-Year Plan. It may also reduce the need for NHDOT to go back to localities and ask for budget revisions or clarifications due to poor initial estimates.

NHDOT should also work with its partners and stakeholders to refine how project needs are articulated. Tailoring a project to a well-defined set of needs helps agencies avoid over-engineered solutions that are high in cost, high in environmental impact, and can require further intervention and expenditure. With a clear needs statement that does not prescribe a solution, it is easier to identify when a lower-cost strategy or multimodal investment is ideal. This can also lead to a more streamlined project delivery process, addressing another barrier participants identified during the workshop: frequent political turnover and shifting priorities. GICD suggests providing more robust guidance to NHDOT staff and localities on defining project purpose and need. WSDOT’s guidance in Appendix A provides a good example.

NHDOT should also consider facilitating a process with its stakeholders to revisit the needs behind some of the regional projects that are already in the statewide plan. The purpose would be to

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\(^{14}\) MassDOT’s Project Need Form and Project Initiation Form are both available at: http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/highway/Departments/ProjectManagement/ProjectReviewCommittee.aspx.

identify potential project scope changes to make them more cost-effective while still accomplishing most of the identified objectives, such as operational improvements. These savings can then be redirected to fund other priorities. Several state DOTs have conducted this type of evaluation to achieve cost savings across their program. TDOT’s approach in Appendix A may provide a model.

10. Establish a required educational meeting with localities during project scoping

NHDOT should take a more proactive role in educating localities during initial project scoping about the options available to address their needs. GICD recommends that NHDOT require a meeting at the beginning of the scoping process between NHDOT and the locality to provide an overview of the available options, including visual examples from other localities or resources like the National Association of City Transportation Officials’ design guidance and the Federal Highway Administration’s rural design guidance. This step should be explicitly built into NHDOT’s project development procedure and guidance documentation.

As workshop participants noted, some of the municipalities in New Hampshire are small with limited staff capacity and may not have a clear understanding of the needs of different types of roadway users. They may simply not know what to ask for from NHDOT when they articulate their goals for a project. Municipalities with greater capacity would still benefit from being presented with a menu of options to consider. This type of education upfront can also give local decision-makers the vocabulary to ask for the right things from NHDOT.

11. Develop methodologies and guidance for analyzing return on investment of Complete Streets projects

NHDOT and its local partners can build support for proposed Complete Streets projects and potentially secure additional funding by expanding its ability to explain project benefits to elected officials and other decision-makers. Evaluating economic impact or return-on-investment is one of the most compelling ways to do this. Demonstrating the expected economic returns from a project can build the case for Tax Increment Financing districts and other mechanisms for getting those who will benefit from the investment to contribute funding, including for maintenance.

The economic impact of Complete Streets will be a component of the Department’s new bicycle and pedestrian plan. NHDOT should also consider conducting before and after studies for successful Complete Streets projects to build a broader case. Before and after studies can be a powerful tool to show elected officials the value of Complete Streets, particularly for pilot projects or temporary installments that are low cost but build buy-in for more transformative change. Doing this means collecting baseline data relevant to the project goals before the project starts, establishing a process and timeline for collecting data again once the project is complete, and publicizing positive results by working with local media, advocates, or other messengers.

Smart Growth America has produced several resources providing guidance and examples for analyzing the economic benefits of Complete Streets projects after they have been completed, most notably the 2016 report, Safer Streets, Strong Economies, which profiles a number of regions and communities that have assessed the economic benefits of their past or proposed multimodal

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16 https://nacto.org/publications/design-guides/.
projects.\textsuperscript{18} Smart Growth America’s guide, \textit{Evaluating Complete Streets Projects: A guide for practitioners}, is another useful resource that recommends performance measures based on a variety of goals.\textsuperscript{19} Health institutions and agencies can be useful partners in helping to fund studies.

\textbf{Up to 24 months after an action plan is developed}

\textbf{12. Integrate multimodal design criteria directly into NHDOT’s Highway Design Manual}

Workshop participants noted that NHDOT is currently developing draft multimodal design criteria. This is a great step. However, if this guidance is in a separate document than NHDOT’s main Highway Design Manual, it will perpetuate the mindset that multimodal design features are add-ons to a project rather than considerations that should be integrated upfront.

GICD therefore recommends integrating the multimodal design criteria directly into each relevant chapter of NHDOT’s Highway Design Manual through a comprehensive update process, rather than providing a separate document that engineers must take the initiative to use. FDOT’s recent updates to the Florida Design Manual to include Complete Streets provide an excellent model for this and can be found in Appendix A.

\textbf{13. Create a project prioritization process that is performance-based and applies across modes}

Participants identified limited funding as one of the key barriers to implementing Complete Streets during the workshop. The most impactful thing NHDOT can do to address this is establish a project prioritization process that enables all available funding pots to more readily support Complete Streets improvements.

State DOTs often assume that providing ample funding for Complete Streets projects would require a new dedicated funding source. While dedicated funding can present some advantages (see MassDOT’s approach in Appendix A), in reality NHDOT can make Complete Streets improvements using many existing funding programs as integrated pieces of broader projects, including by considering Complete Streets improvements during routine resurfacing.

GICD recommends that NHDOT establish one project selection process that applies across modes of transportation. Further, such a process should prioritize projects based on their expected performance in achieving state goals, including Complete Streets-focused goals. A number of states around the country have recognized a need to integrate performance measures directly into budgeting and project selection decisions to demonstrate that limited funds create the best possible return for the state’s investments. Virginia DOT’s Smart Scale process in Appendix A is a great model of objective-driven project selection, and applies to all capital projects in the state across modes of transportation.

\textsuperscript{18} http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/safer-streets-stronger-economies.pdf.

\textsuperscript{19} https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/evaluating-complete-streets-projects-a-guide-for-practitioners-2/.
Next steps and conclusion

NHDOT has already taken important steps to increase safety and access for all roadway users by developing *NHDOT Multimodal Design Criteria*, expanding its existing design guidance, and establishing the NHDOT Complete Streets Advisory Committee.

To build on that momentum, this report recommends that NHDOT:

- Develop a more detailed action plan based on the recommendations provided;
- Update its community engagement guidance;
- Establish a statewide Complete Streets policy and/or policy guidance and technical assistance for localities;
- Make a number of procedural changes to the project development process to integrate consideration throughout of all roadway users and the tradeoffs between their needs;
- Expand its ability to analyze and convey the benefits of Complete Streets projects;
- Integrate multimodal design criteria directly into its Highway Design Manual; and
- Establish a project selection process that applies across modes.

The agency’s challenge is to shift organizational decision-making culture to implement a Complete Streets approach consistently and effectively support its local partners in doing so. Making this kind of change takes time, will need to be driven and empowered by NHDOT’s leadership, and will need ongoing coordination between NHDOT and its partners.

By working together, NHDOT and its local and regional partners can ensure that state transportation investments support economic vitality, meet the evolving mobility needs of residents, and provide a safer environment for all modes of travel.
Appendix A: Case studies

The following Appendix provides examples of best practices referenced in the recommendations above. NHDOT may be able to draw from these examples in updating its own procedures to support Complete Streets and working with localities.

Case studies are organized into the following headings:

- Checklists to use in project development (page 18);
- Expanding community engagement guidance (p19);
- Providing Complete Streets guidance and capacity building to localities (p19);
- Creating context classifications to help make tradeoffs in project development (p21);
- More clearly defining the need behind projects to develop solutions (p22);
- Bringing Complete Streets considerations into repair projects (p23);
- Demonstrating the benefits of Complete Streets projects (p23);
- Integrating multimodal considerations throughout existing design standards (instead of creating separate guidance) (p25); and
- Prioritizing projects across modes based on outcomes (p25).

Checklists to use in project development

Minnesota DOT: Using checklists to identify Complete Streets needs

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has a series of project Scoping Worksheets\(^\text{20}\) with detailed checklists of considerations to help identify the needs for a project and other context. These include checklists of stakeholders to engage, local businesses to consider, and possible issues that should be identified in advance (land owner issues, access issues, utility issues, etc.).

In addition to the Scoping Worksheet, MnDOT has also developed a Planning Worksheet Scoping Guide.\(^\text{21}\) Project managers answer a short series of yes or no questions about the project such as the following, which guide them to consult specific stakeholders and emphasize the needs of specific modes of travel:

- Is there a school within a 1-mile radius of the project?
- Are there medical facilities within 1 mile of the project?
- Is the project occurring near significant freight or truck traffic generators, or near a significant freight route?
- Is the project occurring on a portion of a Scenic Byway?

While currently optional, these worksheets and checklists carry the dual benefits of encouraging project teams to do their due-diligence to understand the project context upfront while also providing documentation of that context that can be referenced and updated later in the project development process.

\(^\text{21}\) http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/completestreets/docs/PlanningScopingWorksheetGuide.pdf.
Massachusetts DOT: Project Need and Project Intake Forms

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) developed new versions of the forms it uses to initiate projects in 2013, including its Project Need Form and Project Initiation Form. MassDOT revised the forms to be easier to complete and conducive to a more consistent and predictable project initiation process. The updated Project Needs Form includes, for example:

- A checklist to identify the type of area where the project is located (ex. rural village, suburban low density, urban residential, etc.).
- A checklist to identify how the roadway functions in the community (ex. “high-speed primary corridor with limited access,” “low to moderate speed corridor between towns/regions,” etc.).
- A series of targeted questions about the problems, needs, or opportunities the project will address, categorized based on identified goals for the transportation network (Safety and Security, Mobility, Environmental, Community, etc.).

Expanding community engagement guidance

Hawaii DOT: Guidelines for engaging a broad range of stakeholders

The Hawaii Department of Transportation has developed an excellent Guide for Public Involvement for its Highway Division that could provide a model for guidance. The Guide discusses the values of Hawaii culture, different levels and types of engagement for different purposes, and how to make engagement successful. It also includes a detailed Project Delivery Checklist at the end with steps for identifying the community context and risks and benefits of the project, determining the appropriate engagement strategies, and identifying key messages to share with the public.

Providing Complete Streets guidance and capacity building to localities

New Jersey DOT: Flexible Complete Streets policy development guidance for localities

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT)’s guide, Making Complete Streets a Reality: A guide to local policy development, offers a flexible approach localities can build on in developing local Complete Streets policies. It recommends key elements of a local Complete Streets policy and provides examples of model policy language for each element from New Jersey localities that already have policies in place. NJDOT’s identified key policy elements reflect the National Complete Streets Coalition’s guidance as well as New Jersey-specific needs. NJDOT’s resource also offers guidance on building local support for policy adoption.

Florida DOT: Complete Streets training program

As part of its Complete Streets implementation effort, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) provides Complete Streets training periodically in each of its districts to educate localities and MPOs on Complete Streets implementation. The curriculum for these training sessions evolves as FDOT makes progress in its own implementation efforts. For example, FDOT recently held district trainings for their local partners to educate them on how to use FDOT’s Florida Design

http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/highway/Departments/ProjectManagement/ProjectReviewCommittee.aspx.
Manual, which the Department recently updated to better support Complete Streets.²⁵

Massachusetts DOT: Comprehensive technical assistance and funding program for localities

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)’s Complete Streets program came up as a potential model for NHDOT during the Accelerating Practical Solutions workshop.

MassDOT established a technical assistance and funding program designed to assist municipalities in the state in moving through a series of steps to develop a Complete Streets policy, create a plan for prioritizing Complete Streets investments, and ultimately construct Complete Streets projects.²⁶

In 2013, MassDOT issued a Healthy Transportation Policy Directive “….to ensure all MassDOT projects are designed and implemented in a way that all our customers have access to safe and comfortable healthy transportation options at all MassDOT facilities and in all the services we provide.”²⁷ Building on this direction, the state legislature established the MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program as a part of the state’s 2014 Transportation Bond Bill.²⁸ The program is designed to assist and reward municipalities demonstrating a commitment to integrating Complete Streets in their policies and practices.

MassDOT conducted a robust stakeholder process for more than a year to design the program. This included engagement with local public works and planning officials, regional planning agencies, the Massachusetts Bicycle and Pedestrian Board, the MA Healthy Transportation Compact Advisory Group, the MA Partnership for Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention’s Built Environment Community of Practice, and the Transportation Managers Group. MassDOT also conducted training sessions with select communities and agencies throughout the State to enhance Complete Streets awareness and better educate practitioners of the planning and implementation process.

The resulting program, launched in February of 2016, includes three tiers designed to assist municipalities based on where they are in the process of developing Complete Streets policies and integrating Complete Streets into their practices:

- Tier 1 – Complete Streets training and policy development
- Tier 2 – Funding for technical assistance to develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan
- Tier 3 – Project construction funding

Under the program, municipalities must complete each tier to be eligible for the next tier. For example, in order to be eligible for technical assistance in Tier 2, each municipality is required to attend training offered by MassDOT and develop a Complete Streets policy. Municipalities can submit policies to MassDOT for review and scoring using criteria developed by MassDOT based on the National Complete Streets Coalition’s Ten Elements of an Ideal Policy. Each policy is required to score at least 80 out of 100 points to receive approval, while policies that score fewer points are returned to the municipality for revision.

Tier 2 of the program includes up to $50,000 per municipality for technical assistance to support development of a prioritized list of Complete Streets investments in the form of a “Complete Streets Prioritization Plan.” Each plan must include a targeted investment approach to improve safety, mobility and accessibility, and must identify locations, infrastructure needed, cost estimates, and timing for the desired improvements. The Prioritization Plan must also align with the municipality’s master plans and roadway maintenance schedule.

Tier 3 of the program provides up to $400,000 per municipality per year in funding for construction of specific Complete Streets infrastructure projects identified in the Prioritization Plan. Municipalities submit an application for funding annually highlighting five projects for which they would like to receive funding. They can receive funding for numerous less expensive projects up to the funding cap or a single larger project.  

MassDOT allocated $12.5 million for the first two years of the program. As of April 2018, MassDOT has approved 157 policies, 95 Prioritization Plans, and 71 Complete Streets construction projects.

Working with public health partners to fund Complete Streets training
There are many examples from around country of health organizations and agencies providing funding for Complete Streets workshops. Voices for Healthy Kids funded a recent Complete Streets workshop for Tucson, AZ that included participation from the local DOT, and the Winter Park Health Foundation in Florida funded a series of three workshops for eight municipalities in Central Florida focused on Complete Streets implementation. Likewise, AARP chapters see clear benefits of Complete Streets in terms of preserving mobility and quality of life for seniors aging in place and can be great partners in providing resources for training and education.

Creating context classifications to help make tradeoffs in project development

FDOT: Developing context classifications and integrating them into statewide design standards
As part of its Complete Streets Implementation, FDOT recently adopted eight context classifications to guide road design decisions. Under this new system, planners and engineers will consider existing and future characteristics such as land uses, building configuration, and street connectivity to ensure that roads are designed for the right vehicle speeds, road users, and trip types. The classifications include categories such as “rural town,” “suburban commercial,” and “urban core.”

These classifications determine allowable design speeds, lane widths, and other design controls and geometrics within the updated Florida Design Manual. FDOT’s guidance also offers performance measures and indicators for FDOT decision-makers to use in determining the context classification for a road and identifying travel demand for different modes.

Sussex County, NY: Creating rural corridor typology guidance
Sussex County, NY adopted a Complete Streets policy and created an implementation plan that establishes a number of “corridor types” and provides guidance on which types of Complete Streets initiatives are appropriate for each type.

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29 http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/Portals/8/docs/CompleteStreets/FundingProgramGuidance.pdf.
30 https://masscompletestreets.com/Map/.
Streets improvements are best suited to each, from road diets and narrowing of lanes to roundabouts. Sussex County is relatively rural and its corridor types may provide a good model for many New Hampshire communities.32

More clearly defining the need behind projects to develop solutions

Washington State DOT: Guidance on defining Purpose and Need
The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has integrated guidance on identifying and documenting the need for a project in the agency’s Design Manual as a part of WSDOT’s Practical Solution’s initiative. The manual provides guidance on how to develop a Project Need Statement in clear and simple terms that is quantifiable and performance-based and does not prescribe a solution. It also outlines an approach for translating the identified needs into specific performance metrics and targets.33

Virginia DOT: Helping localities identify innovative, lower-cost solutions
As part of the Smart Scale program discussed below, VDOT accounts for both the benefits of each proposed project (based on 6 policy goal areas established by the state legislature), and the cost. As a result, local projects are most competitive in the prioritization process if they accomplish the identified objectives at relatively low cost.

VDOT has found through the scoring process that traditional highway widening projects do not tend to rank well in Smart Scale. This is because they are generally not cost-effective in terms of the benefit in reduction in delay compared to the project cost. By contrast, projects that include lower-cost and more targeted strategies for addressing the specific congestion issues such as signal timing improvements and intersection treatments tend to perform significantly better.

Based on these findings, VDOT has developed a program, Strategically Targeted Affordable Roadway Solutions (STARS), to help localities develop projects that will be more competitive to receive state funds. The objective of STARS is to develop comprehensive, innovative transportation solutions to relieve congestion bottlenecks and solve critical traffic and safety challenges. VDOT has created a streamlined STARS project development process to assist localities with data analysis and mapping, scope projects, and submit them for scoring in Smart Scale over the course of one year. The process includes bringing together VDOT engineers and specialists with different areas of expertise to help localities evaluate potential solutions more carefully and build stakeholder consensus.34

Tennessee DOT: Revisiting the need for and scope of projects already in the queue
Tennessee DOT created the Expedited Project Delivery (EPD) process to address decades of project backlog. As of 2012, TDOT had a backlog of more than 800 roadway projects in various phases of development, with total costs estimated at $6.1 billion. Several projects had been in the TDOT work program for many years with little to no progress, mainly due to high estimated costs and lack of funding.

34 http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/stars.asp.
TDOT began by identifying projects that had been on the books for a long time and were not slated for funding in the near term. TDOT specified the intended outcomes of each project, and then staff looked for less expensive alternatives that accomplished the same or a substantially similar result. Some examples were reduced to 1/20th the cost of the original design while accomplishing 80-90 percent of the goal. For example, TDOT reevaluated an expansion project that proposed converting a 2-lane road into a 4-lane road. The cost was estimated at $58 million. Instead, TDOT introduced curve warnings, school speed limit signs, stop signs, and other pavements and signage improvements at a cost of $85,000. This improved the estimated level of service, while reducing costs by more than $57 million.\(^{35}\)

**Bringing Complete Streets considerations into repair projects**

**Tennessee DOT: Announcing upcoming repaving projects earlier**

The Tennessee Department of Transportation recently began developing a process to announce upcoming repaving projects further in advance so that stakeholders have the chance to raise needed Complete Streets improvements and other desires or needs that could be addressed as a part of the project (including through a local funding contribution). While the new process is still being refined, TDOT’s resurfacing division is planning to start releasing resurfacing lists three years in advance, with the understanding that said list is subject to change. This will include sharing the list with TDOT’s Office of Community Transportation (local liaison) staff, and MPOs, RPOs, and local governments as appropriate.

**Longwood, FL: Benefits of better coordination around repair projects**

Staff within the Planning Department of the City of Longwood noticed an upcoming resurfacing project on Church Avenue on a meeting agenda and reached out to the city’s Public Works Department about the possibility of doing the project better. Public Works was on board, and the City ultimately used the resurfacing project as a Complete Streets pilot, adding sidewalks and bike lanes which now connect neighborhoods on the corridor to a major park downtown and the nearby train station. The project was successful thanks to supportive decision-makers, but had already gone through initial scoping by the time planning staff became aware of it, and integrating the sidewalks and bicycle lanes happened relatively late in the process.

The Longwood agencies now communicate upfront to consider how each street could be improved during resurfacing, as well as during other projects that temporarily disrupt the street, such as utility replacement. When those types of cross-agency conversations happen upfront before projects have been programmed, improving walking, biking, and transit access can be built into the project from the beginning, rather than added later with an associated increase in cost.

**Demonstrating the benefits of Complete Streets projects**

**Examples of Complete Streets projects around the country bringing private investment**

The National Complete Streets Coalition’s report, *Safer Streets, Strong Economies*, profiles a number of regions and communities that have assessed the economic benefits of their past or proposed multimodal projects, some of which may provide useful examples.

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For example, when Dubuque, IA was planning the redevelopment of its historic Millwork District, local leaders knew the project’s success hinged on whether people would want to walk or bike there. So the city took a long look at the District’s four main avenues—Jackson, Washington, 9th and 10th streets—and figured out how to make them work better for people walking and biking. They replaced sidewalks, made it easier to cross the street, added new street lights, painted “sharrows,” and created a multi-use trail. Within a year, bicycling use increased by 273 percent—and that was just the beginning.

Since the project’s completion, the neighborhood has experienced more than $34 million in new private investment, with another $150 million in the pipeline. The first warehouse to be redeveloped is leasing 72 residential units, 39,000 square feet of retail and commercial space, and 20,000 square feet for an incubator for arts and nonprofit organizations. The fact that the neighborhood’s streets work for everyone who uses them is a key part of this success.

Other communities around the country have seen significant private investment along their Complete Streets projects:

- Private companies invested $160 million in the Uptown District in Normal, IL after that area’s Complete Streets project was completed. The new roundabout that replaced a complicated intersection now serves as the heart of the uptown District and is a place that residents of all ages can enjoy. “People love Uptown Normal,” said Normal Mayor Chris Koos. “They ride the bus, they bike the trail, they shop, they socialize, and they recreate in a wonderful urban center.”
- Both Washington, DC and Raleigh, NC saw new or renovated apartment buildings and hotels built along their Complete Streets projects, totaling $63.3 million and $25.5 million, respectively.
- And in Cleveland, OH—a city recovering from population loss and widespread disinvestment—private companies invested an astonishing $5.8 billion along Euclid Avenue’s HealthLine. Several Cleveland-based institutions, including the Cleveland Clinic and University Hospital, have built new projects in tandem with the new bus rapid transit line making Euclid Avenue a “front door” for people visiting the area. Cleveland’s reconstruction of Euclid Avenue as a Complete Street, along with investment in bus rapid transit, also improved access to two employment hubs that together are home to more than 170,000 jobs.\[36\]

Alexandria, MN: Building support for Complete Streets through partnerships with health

In Alexandria, MN, Blue Cross provided funding to support the planning of a downtown revitalization effort, including Complete Streets improvements to Broadway Street, one of the city’s main thoroughfares. Construction of the project was completed in 2014. The initiative included a robust engagement process of the businesses in the area. Blue Cross also commissioned a multi-year study to measure the economic benefits of a more walkable downtown. The results of this study as of 2017 indicate a major improvement in business owners' opinions of the project since its completion. Of those surveyed, 88% responded that the appearance of the street had improved.

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36 More information about these Complete Streets projects is available in Smart Growth America’s report Safer Streets, Strong Economies: http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/safer-streets-stronger-economies.pdf
51% noticed an increase in pedestrian traffic, and 49% noticed an increase in tourist traffic visiting the area. Traffic crashes also decreased in both 2015 and 2016.37

Integrating multimodal considerations throughout existing design standards (instead of creating separate guidance)

Florida DOT: Updating the Florida Design Manual to include Complete Streets considerations

When FDOT adopted a Complete Streets policy in 2014, leadership recognized that implementing the policy would require updating the way the Department does business at all levels of decision-making. They developed a Complete Streets Implementation Plan through a stakeholder engagement process that outlined five steps for implementation:

- Revising guidance, standards, manuals, policies, and other documents
- Updating other decision-making procedures
- Modifying approaches for measuring performance
- Managing internal and external communications
- Providing ongoing education and training on Complete Streets

One of the first steps FDOT took in their implementation initiative was conducting a process to review and update the Florida Design Manual, previously referred to as the Plans Preparation Manual, so that all relevant chapters included reference to multimodal needs. The new design manual describes how FDOT will consider land use when making decisions about planning and road design. It increases design flexibility and considerations for people walking, bicycling, using transit, and driving, as well as freight. Design flexibility allows engineers to choose from a menu of design options so they can better adjust the road design to the needs of a community. One important component of the new manual is that it calls for lower design speed on roads, based on context.38

Prioritizing projects across modes based on outcomes

Virginia DOT: Smart Scale performance-based project scoring framework

In 2014, the Virginia legislature unanimously passed legislation requiring VDOT and the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to develop a quantifiable and transparent prioritization process for making funding decisions for capacity enhancing projects within the state’s six-year improvement program. VDOT and the CTB established the new project scoring framework, now called Smart Scale, to ensure that the state picks the right transportation projects for funding and makes the best use of limited tax dollars.

The legislation explicitly established six factors to be used in the scoring process, but tasked VDOT and the CTB with developing the methodologies for measuring each. The factors include: congestion mitigation, economic development, “accessibility,” safety, environmental quality and (in areas with a population over 200,000) coordination with land use.

In response to the legislation, VDOT and CTB researched best practices from other state DOTs and MPOs, held a peer exchange workshop, and held extensive outreach meetings with key stakeholders. From this, they developed six guiding principles for the application of the scoring framework:

- Analyze what matters to people and has a meaningful impact
- Ensure fair and accurate benefit-cost analysis
- Be both transparent and understandable
- Work for both urban and rural areas
- Work for all modes of transportation
- Minimize overlap between measures

The new scoring approach applies to all new capacity projects that receive state funding across transportation modes, which represent about half of VDOT’s overall program (a different scoring process applies to state of repair projects).

VDOT first screens projects for eligibility based on whether they meet an identified need in the state’s long-range plan. All projects that pass the eligibility screening are scored by VDOT to determine their cumulative benefits in the six factor areas based on a combination of state and locally submitted data. VDOT assigns up to 100 points to each project under each of the six scoring factors.

VDOT then divides the total benefit score by the cost requested from the state to determine the final Smart Scale score and rank compared other projects. This approach provides a number of benefits, including encouraging localities to make their projects more competitive, either by identifying innovative ways to accomplish their objectives through smaller improvements or by identifying local matching funds to offset the funding needed from the state.

VDOT has conducted three rounds of project scoring so far using the new approach, and has made minor adjustments to the scoring methodology with each round of prioritization. VDOT also continues to conduct meetings with stakeholders to build buy-in and address concerns, including VDOT staff across the Commonwealth, metropolitan planning organizations, planning district commissions, and counties, cities, and towns.

The Smart Scale project prioritization process has largely been greeted positively for taking politics out of the process and has made clear to the taxpayers why projects are funded and how projects not chosen for funding can be improved in order to receive funding in the future. It has allowed the state to put priorities like multimodal accessibility to jobs on par with other, more typical transportation measures, like congestion mitigation and safety.
Appendix B: Relevant resources

Safer Streets, Stronger Economies – A report that shows the return on investment for complete streets improvements
https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/evaluating-complete-streets-projects-a-guide-for-practitioners/

Evaluating Complete Streets Projects – A guide that suggests Complete Streets performance measures for different goals from safety to public health and provides case studies for each.
https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/evaluating-complete-streets-projects-a-guide-for-practitioners-2/

Complete Streets Policy Development – The National Complete Streets Coalition’s guidance on developing Complete Streets policies tailored to local context.
https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/policy-development/

Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks – A guide to implementing Complete Streets in Small Towns and Rural Communities from the Federal Highway Administration.