

Complete Streets are Sweet

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Because every trip begins and ends on foot, universal access to work, education, and recreation is the guiding principle that gave rise to complete streets, the design and operation of streets that are safe for all users inclusive of people with disabilities and public transit users as well as motorized and non-motorized vehicle operators. Since 2009, the Department of Transportation (ConnDOT), guided by its Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board (Bike and Ped Board), is bringing safer commuting to Connecticut's cities and towns. This article illustrates some benefits attributable to complete streets along with a brief description of how ConnDOT supports municipal efforts to bring complete streets to their residents.

The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) outlines five categories of Complete Streets' benefits in its bike and ped plan for the region:

- Mobility – because everyone is a pedestrian, individuals rather than motor vehicles become the focal point of street movement. Complete streets accommodate the transportation needs of people with disabilities, bicycle commuters, and people who walk for recreation, work, and school. Complete streets extend public transit's reach by accommodating the first and last mile between transit and trip origins and destinations.
- Public health – sixty percent of American children are being driven to and from school,

likely increasing their risk of developing health conditions associated with sedentary life styles. The American Heart Association reported that physical activity is used to treat people with mental illness, and West Virginia University study concluded that promoting walking and cycling encourages physically active lifestyles. Complete streets, in combination with walking and cycling trails, provide the means by which people can be more physically active.

- Economy – complete streets bring people to businesses while bike paths can create economic vitality in the places through which they pass. Developments supporting biking and walking make for more valuable housing as demonstrated by a housing study finding that clustered homes¹ in both Amherst and Concord, MA yielded higher values than those with larger lots. For those who cannot drive or afford a car, complete streets provide access to jobs.
- Environment – complete streets reduce private automobile trips that contribute 62% of transportation-related CO₂. The Connecticut Climate Change Action Program concluded that vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reductions of 20 to 30 percent are achievable through increased transit use, walking, and bicycling. Cities and towns with complete streets had 5 to 15 percent fewer VMT than automobile-dependent places.

- Family and Community – complete streets foster neighborhood connections that are the building blocks of community pride that nurtures desirable places to live. As the use of walkability scores on real estate web sites indicates, sidewalks and places to walk are important factors people consider when searching for a place to live. A CRCOG survey found that majorities of 86%, 81%, and 65% among Hartford, West Hartford, and Suffield survey respondents agreed on the need for more places where people can walk, rather than drive, from their home to shops, work, and recreation.

Focused on vision, goals, and strategy developed with public input, ConnDOT updated its bike and ped plan and map to support complete streets. The update included these projects and programs:

- The Community Connectivity Program to improve walking and bicycling conditions with road safety audits (RSA) at bike and pedestrian corridors and intersections; a RSA identifies safe-travel impediments and recommends measures to reduce vehicle crashes; 80 municipalities have conducted RSA as of early this year;
- The Strategic Highway Safety Plan that sets statewide death and injury reduction goals and objectives; emphasizing engineering, education, emergency medical services,

- and enforcement, the plan seeks to improve non-motorized users' safety;
- Educational Outreach and Awareness Campaigns that seek to reduce pedestrian deaths and injuries while addressing pedestrian visibility and driver distraction by encouraging drivers to be aware of their surroundings; Watch for Me CT is a media campaign promoting safety awareness that seeks to reach all pedestrians and drivers with messages in English and Spanish;
 - ConnDOT is upgrading pedestrian warning signs to a fluorescent yellow background with colored posts to enhance visibility, especially during dawn and dusk. All mid-block cross walks received yield-line pavement markings and yield-to-pedestrians signs on state routes.
- In the ten years since Connecticut has had complete streets as a matter of law, it has seen increased complete streets' acceptance from New Haven's first-in-the-state complete streets ordinance, bike-share program, and signalized bike lanes to East Hartford's first complete streets project on a state road to Metro North's installation of bike racks on its trains. With the adoption of complete streets plans in an increasing number of municipalities, the state is on a path to widespread adoption of complete streets' universal design concepts. Inclusion of people with disabilities and other communities for whom complete streets break down the barriers of isolation will give them equal opportunity to contribute to the community at large. ■

1 Clustered housing, generally associated with greater walkability, allows developers to build more homes on less total land.

GENERAL ECONOMIC INDICATORS

(Seasonally adjusted)	4Q 2018	4Q 2017	CHANGE NO.	CHANGE %	3Q 2018
General Drift Indicator (1996=100)*					
Leading	118.2	115.1	3.1	2.7	116.6
Coincident	116.7	115.4	1.3	1.1	116.2
Liberty Bank Business Barometer (1992=100)**	138.9	137.6	1.3	0.9	138.2
Philadelphia Fed's Coincident Index (2007=100)***	Feb 2019	Feb 2018			Jan 2019
(Seasonally adjusted)					
Connecticut			0.0	###	
United States			0.0	###	

Sources: *Dr. Steven P. Lanza, University of Connecticut **Liberty Bank ***Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

General Drift Indicators are composite measures of the four-quarter change in three coincident (Connecticut Manufacturing Production Index, nonfarm employment, and real personal income) and three leading (housing permits, manufacturing average weekly hours, and initial unemployment claims) economic variables, and are indexed so 1996 = 100.

The **Liberty Bank Business Barometer** is a measure of overall economic growth in the state of Connecticut that is derived from non-manufacturing employment, real disposable personal income, and manufacturing production.

The **Philadelphia Fed's Coincident Index** summarizes current economic condition by using four coincident variables: nonfarm payroll employment, average hours worked in manufacturing, the unemployment rate, and wage and salary disbursements deflated by the consumer price index (U.S. city average).