

## *RGVMPO Complete Streets Policy*

### **Background**

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, President Joe Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Public Law 117-58, also commonly known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). BIL Section 11206 dictates that all MPO's must conduct specified Complete Streets planning activities, with the term "Complete Streets standards or policies" defined as "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."

Furthermore, a survey conducted in FY 2022 among RGVMPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) members identified Complete Streets as a top priority for the MPO, and the Active Transportation Plan, adopted by the RGVMPO's Transportation Policy Board on 12/10/2020, identified only one municipality in the region which had an existing Complete Streets Policy, thus signaling both a demand and a need for a regional policy.

### **Definition**

Complete Streets are streets, highways, bridges, and facilities that are planned, designed, constructed, operated, and maintained for the needs and safety of all users across the entire public right-of-way. This includes users of all ages and abilities who are walking; using powered, street-legal vehicles such as cars, trucks, motorcycles, buses, or scooters; bicycling; using transit; and shipping freight.

### **Policy Statement**

The RGVMPO seeks to achieve the regional vision of a safe, balanced, regional multimodal transportation system that is coordinated with land use planning, supports equitable access to opportunities, and protects the environment. This vision can be furthered through the implementation of Complete Streets and contextually appropriate solutions.

The RGVMPO promotes the development of Complete Streets throughout the region and encourages all local jurisdictions to adopt and implement Complete Streets policies.

This Complete Streets Policy applies to the following:

1. All RGVMPO planning activities that involve public rights-of-way, included in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).
2. All activities conducted by the RGVMPO to program federal funds for projects in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

### *Requirements*

1. This policy does not supersede any federal, state or local laws.
2. Planned and programmed projects shall provide safe accommodations for all users who have legal access and who may reasonably be expected to use the facilities, while being sensitive to both current and future community standards.
3. This policy applies to all phases of a project, including planning, design, rights-of-way acquisition, construction, operations, and maintenance.
4. Planned and programmed projects shall make use of policies, guidelines, and design standards that reflect contextually-appropriate best practices. Project sponsors retain design decision authority over their projects.

### *Recommendations*

1. Integrate planning and design practices to help achieve economic, community, and environmental benefits. In addition to planning and engineering approaches to implementing Complete Streets, the RGVMPPO also encourages project sponsors to utilize enforcement and education strategies to further these goals.
2. The RGVMPPO encourages local governments to stay abreast of best practices by reviewing design guidelines, standards, and resources, and to amend and/or adopt local design approaches as suitable to meet the community's needs.
3. The RGVMPPO encourages local governments to continuously evaluate adopted Complete Streets policies and procedures, through both quantitative and qualitative metrics, and to amend local approaches as deemed necessary.
4. The RGVMPPO encourages local communities to coordinate and collaborate with each other, specifically in strategies for livable and sustainable communities, as well as in the integration of land use and environment with transportation.

### *Current Best Practices and Design Guidance*

Project sponsors are encouraged to work with RGVPMO and TxDOT staff to determine appropriate design for a project and to ensure that the design does not conflict with required standards. National best practices should be referenced in the design and implementation of Complete Streets. Current guidelines and resources supported by the RGVMPPO that can be utilized include:

- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Guide for Planning, Designing and Operating Pedestrian Facilities
- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities
- Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach
- National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guide
- National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Bikeway Design Guide

- FHWA Bikeway Selection Guide
- FHWA Separated Bike Lanes Planning and Design Guide
- FHWA Designing for Pedestrian Safety
- TXDOT Roadway Design Manual

As of October 2022, the following are recommended by the RGVMPO when designing streets:

1. Locations for safe street crossings should be considered throughout the length of a project.
2. Consideration should be given to street design that encourages safer travel speeds. Speed management and traffic calming elements including, but not limited to, road diets, street trees, and narrowing of lane widths, should be considered where safe and appropriate.
3. Proposed/existing undivided roads with high traffic volumes are recommended to have non-traversable medians installed. Should a non-traversable median be deemed non-practical, Two-Way Left Turn Lanes (TWLTL) may be appropriate on roads which meet the following criteria:
  - A. Traffic volume is less than 24,000 Annual Daily Traffic (ADT) AND there are less than 40 access points per mile.
  - B. There is not a high volume of pedestrians walking along or crossing the road.
4. If a parcel has street access via two different streets, the parcel should generally only be allowed access point(s) (driveways) on the street of lower functional classification and/or with lower traffic volumes.
5. Roundabouts should be considered as a viable alternative to signalized intersections, during the design process, so long as sufficient right-of-way exists or can be acquired.

### *Exceptions*

Not every street can or should be a complete street for all modes of transportation, and exceptions need to be made for some projects.

Entities sponsoring projects shall be responsible for determining when designs accommodating various modes of transportation are appropriate, but shall make a good faith effort to accommodate all users wherever feasible. RGVMPO Staff reserve the right to award fewer points in the project scoring process for projects that do not incorporate contextually-appropriate complete streets design, in accordance with the current project scoring criteria adopted by the Transportation Policy Board.

However, RGVMPO Staff shall award full points to projects that do not include these designs when they determine that it would be unduly burdensome (e.g. if the addition of complete streets facilities would increase the cost so as to endanger the ability to secure local funds, would result in the significant expansion of a project schedule, or would create significant impacts to natural, topographical, cultural or historic resources that cannot be reasonably mitigated). RGVMPO staff shall make this determination based on current transportation best practices, knowledge of the local area, and/or other factors as appropriate. In any case, the intent of this policy is that the sponsoring entity shall make a good faith effort to accommodate users of all transportation modes where feasible, regardless of

whether the improvements may not be fully accounted for in the scoring process or whether the increase in the project's score may be negligible to the acquisition of federal funds for the project.

Per best practices, as of October 2022, cases where scores for projects will not be reduced for not accommodating all transportation users shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Where using specific modes of travel are prohibited by law, such as bicyclists and pedestrians on some sections of interstate highways or trucks on boulevards. In such cases, efforts should be made to accommodate prohibited modes elsewhere, as appropriate for each mode, to ensure network connectivity. Where a proposed project for a limited-access facility would cross a major barrier (such as a river, railroad, or highway), consideration should be given to including access across the barrier for otherwise limited modes.
2. Where the cost of providing facilities for all users, especially pedestrians and bicyclists, would be excessively disproportionate to the need or likely use. Federal guidance defines this as exceeding 20 percent of the total project costs; however, this exception should also be context sensitive. For example, lower-income communities generally have both more bicyclists and pedestrians and more casualties for these users, necessitating additional investment in improvements for these users, which is also in keeping with the spirit of the federal Justice 40 Initiative (Section 223 of EO 14008). Additionally, a larger percentage of project costs for pedestrians and cyclists may be appropriate in downtown streetscapes.
3. Where population scarcity or other factors indicate an absence of need for both current and future conditions of the anticipated project life (usually a minimum of 20 years for roadways and 50 or more years for bridges).

All exceptions, where scores are not reduced, will be documented and made public.

## **Performance Measures**

To assist with the evaluation of this policy, RGVMPPO will continue to encourage meaningful progress in the region using measures included in the RGVMPPO's 2045 MTP. RGVMPPO staff may also use bicycle and pedestrian counter data, when available, to monitor bicycle and pedestrian traffic in affected areas, per the RGVMPPO's Active Transportation Plan.

## **Implementation**

To implement this Complete Streets Policy into planning and programming processes at the regional level, the RGVMPPO will take the following steps:

1. Ensure the directives of this policy are reflected in ongoing planning and programming work and current policies.
2. Review all project applications seeking federal transportation funding through the RGVMPPO's programming process for compliance with the Complete Streets Policy, as reasonably feasible.
3. Score all project applications using criteria which includes points for complete streets designs.

4. Monitor all projects receiving federal transportation funding through the RGVMPO's programming process for compliance with the Complete Streets Policy, as applicable.
5. Engage project sponsors in evaluating projects for the Transportation Improvement Program that receive federal funding outside the RGVMPO's programming processes.
6. Re-evaluate the policy as needed.

To carry out this Complete Streets Policy and encourage all local governments to address the needs of all road users through context-appropriate solutions, the RGVMPO will take the following steps:

1. Encourage all local governments to adopt Complete Streets policies and incorporate their policies into facility designs. This includes working with local governments to develop and implement their policies.
2. Provide assistance to local communities seeking to develop a Complete Streets policy, including providing resources detailing Complete Streets best practices and providing a sample Complete Streets ordinance.
3. Help coordinate inter-jurisdictional discussion and efforts.