

# 2016

## Working Toward a Complete Streets Approach in Greater Minnesota



**West Central Initiative**

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**Prepared for:**  
**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota**  
**Center for Prevention**

**Prepared by:**  
**West Central Initiative**  
**1000 Western Avenue**  
**PO Box 318**  
**Fergus Falls, Minnesota 56538-0318**  
**218-739-2239**  
**[www.wcif.org](http://www.wcif.org)**

**Principal Author:**  
**Wayne T. Hurley, AICP**  
**Planning Director**

**with assistance from:**  
**Greg Wagner, AICP, Economic Development Planner, West Central Initiative**  
**Andrew Besold, LCI, Transportation Planner, West Central Initiative**  
**Patrick Hollister, Active Living Planner, PartnerSHIP 4 Health**  
**Jessica Peterson, Health Educator, Horizon Public Health**

**Cover Photo: Downtown Battle Lake Complete Streets Project**  
**Photo courtesy MnDOT District 4 / PartnerSHIP 4 Health**

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## Introduction

The term “Complete Streets” has been featured more and more in discussions about transportation planning, health planning and active transportation planning. Complete Streets are viewed as a way to address issues related to individual health and traffic safety, while also providing opportunities for various modes of transportation – including automobiles, bicycles, trucks, pedestrians, and transit vehicles – to operate in a safe, convenient manner. Complete Streets have also served an economic development purpose. In one particular case in West Central Minnesota, a community with a finished Complete Streets project has seen their downtown revitalized, with more pedestrian and bicycle activity, new businesses opening, and an overall positive reception to the project.

So what are Complete Streets? According to the National Complete Streets Coalition:

*Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. People of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across streets in a community, regardless of how they are traveling. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time and make it safe for people to walk to and from train stations.<sup>1</sup>*

Communities in Greater Minnesota are recognizing the benefits of Complete Streets. Many communities have identified Complete Streets as a desirable way to improve the health and economy of their communities. However, many communities and individuals are unaware of opportunities to leverage the current transportation system to implement complete street principles into their project.

## Purpose

Several communities in West Central Minnesota – also known as Region 4 – have been involved in Complete Streets projects to varying degrees. Some communities are currently in the discussion and planning stages, while others have implemented successful Complete Streets projects. Partnerships for these projects include local leaders, Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) collaboratives, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) District 4, and West Central Initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/complete-streets-fundamentals>

The purpose of this report is to document the processes that these communities and their partner organizations have undertaken to address Complete Streets projects. This report will include recommendations for best practices that can be considered by SHIP collaboratives, MnDOT Districts, and Regional Development Organizations (RDOs) as they work with communities in their respective regions.

## Background / Issue Statement

The impetus for the development of this report arises from an anecdotal scenario that is frequently shared amongst Complete Streets practitioners – whether SHIP, RDO, or others who work on bicycle and pedestrian issues. The scenario plays out like this:

“Community X” finds out about a project that MnDOT has scheduled for their community some time within the next four years. This typically happens when the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is released, listing projects that MnDOT has programmed for the upcoming four-year period. The project identified for Community X is likely a “mill & overlay” project, meaning that the top layer of a street is removed via a “milling” process, and then a new pavement surface is put down – the “overlay” portion. For a typical mill & overlay project, curbs are typically left in place, unless there is a need to address American with Disability Act (ADA) issues, such as replacement or installation of a curb ramp at an intersection.

Community X has a desire to expand the scope of the project beyond a mill & overlay – often times driven by the need to replace underground utility infrastructure, and also frequently to implement Complete Streets concepts. However, because the project is already in the STIP, the community is told that it’s not possible to change the scope of the project, and that it’s already been budgeted for. Thus the community is faced with the prospect of delaying infrastructure replacement and Complete Streets elements, or they must pay full costs for any work done since the project isn’t being coordinated with another project. This often proves cost-prohibitive for communities – especially those with a population under 5,000 people, due to their lack of access to state funding for transportation (state aid funds).

There are of course many variables in the above scenario, and while it may not play out exactly as described, it is nevertheless a frequently shared story about how the processes and systems that are in place can make it challenging for communities – especially small ones – to implement Complete Streets projects.

Additionally, there are several assumptions made in the above scenario, not the least of which is that the main street in the community is a state trunk highway under the jurisdiction of MnDOT. While a similar scenario could play out if the main street were under the jurisdiction of a county, there has historically been better coordination at the local level between cities and counties than there has been between MnDOT and certain cities.

Another assumption of the scenario is that “Community X” is a smaller community that may not have the staff resources to keep abreast of future MnDOT projects. In addition, a smaller community often times has more difficulty coming up with project funding, so project coordination can become a “make or break” proposition in many cases.

As mentioned in the above scenario, underground infrastructure replacement is often the driving factor for many cases in which a community want to move from a mill and overlay project to a reconstruction project. While that may be the case, in many instances once a community determines that a project will become a reconstruction project, Complete Streets elements are on the table for discussion. This also assumes that the community is aware of Complete Streets concepts and/or has a desire to provide improved facilities for bicycles and pedestrians.

The education of communities about Complete Streets concepts is a role that RDOs and SHIP collaboratives can impact. Both RDOs and SHIP have the ability to influence community decision-making processes by educating city staff and elected officials about the benefits of Complete Streets, and can guide them in the planning process to ensure that coordinated projects can take place. This concept will be more thoroughly discussed in the Recommendations section later in this report.

## Organization Roles

It is important to define the roles that each organization involved in a Complete Streets project will play. This section will provide an overview of the roles of the various entities, including Regional Development Organizations, SHIP collaboratives, MnDOT, community members, and project champions.

### Regional Development Organizations

According to the Minnesota Association of Regional Development Organizations:

*There are nine Regional Development Commissions (RDC) that were established by Minnesota statute in 1969 to provide technical assistance to the local units of government in their region. RDCs perform a variety of unique services based on the needs of their region. RDCs partner with numerous state and federal agencies, obtaining and administering grants for programs and projects at the local level. The West Central Initiative Foundation performs some of the same functions as an RDC. Collectively the organizations are known as Regional Development Organizations (RDOs).<sup>2</sup>*

One of the specific roles that the RDOs play is that they are contracted by MnDOT to provide regional transportation planning services in their respective regions. Because of this transportation planning role, many RDOs get involved with Complete Streets projects in their region.

RDOs can provide education to communities that aren't familiar with Complete Streets concepts, and can provide technical assistance to communities that are considering or planning for Complete Streets. Additionally, RDOs can assist with other planning initiatives that can influence how successful a Complete Streets project is. Examples include work on comprehensive plans, land use plans, corridor studies, zoning ordinances, sidewalk ordinances, bicycle ordinances, and Safe Routes to Schools plans. The amount and types of technical assistance that are available in a given RDO planning area vary from region to region.

In this capacity, RDOs can play a significant role in assisting communities as they consider Complete Streets projects. This idea will be explored further in the Recommendations section of this report.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mnado.org/>

## Statewide Health Improvement Program Collaboratives

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) states that:

*SHIP is about creating good health for parents, kids and the whole community, by decreasing obesity and reducing the number of people who use tobacco or who are exposed to tobacco smoke.<sup>3</sup>*

Most counties in Minnesota are served by a multi-county SHIP collaborative, while some are served by SHIP collaboratives that work within a single county. As part of their strategy to address obesity, many SHIP collaboratives work on increasing physical activity in their service area. As such, Complete Streets projects are a natural fit, since they often provide improved facilities for walking and biking, thus making those modes a more accessible and attractive choice for people.

SHIP collaboratives often work directly with communities on increasing physical activity, and play an important role educating and encouraging the communities they partner with. Some SHIP collaboratives also have funding available for projects that can address increasing physical activity and Complete Streets concepts. Examples include funding for a Complete Streets planning process, or funding for small-scale infrastructure improvements, such as signage and striping.

In West Central Minnesota, two SHIP collaboratives together serve the same nine-county area (Region 4) as West Central Initiative – Horizon SHIP in the southern half of Region 4 and PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H) in the north. WCI, Horizon and PS4H have worked well in tandem to assist communities with Complete Streets projects. The SHIP collaboratives are able to play a stronger encouragement role than WCI is able to, and WCI is able to provide additional technical assistance to project-planning efforts. Keys to the relationship between WCI and the SHIP collaboratives include good communication and clarity of the roles each organization can play. The relationships between WCI and the SHIP collaboratives have developed over a period of several years, further leading to the positive working relationship that exists today.

Partnerships like this are something that could be replicated in other regions of the state, and have been, to varying degrees, with previous projects and programs. For example, RDOs and SHIP collaboratives in the northern part of Minnesota worked together on a Community Transformation Grant project that focused on active living and the development of regional active living plans. More recently, a program known as

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/oshii/ship/docs/shipfactsheet.pdf>

HEAL (Healthy Eating and Active Living) has brought SHIP and RDO staff together to discuss a variety of topics related to active transportation and Complete Streets concepts, among other topics.

## **RDO / SHIP Relationship in Region 4**

Much of the success of the Complete Streets work that has been accomplished in Region 4 can be attributed to the excellent working relationship between WCI and the SHIP collaboratives. The relationship between WCI and each of the respective SHIP collaboratives has evolved differently, but the end result in both cases has been a positive working relationship that has been a benefit to communities that are considering Complete Streets projects.

The relationship between WCI and PS4H goes back to 2009 and the inception of SHIP. Gina Nolte, PS4H Director, contacted WCI to request that Planning Director Wayne Hurley serve on the newly-forming Community Leadership Team (CLT). Gina and PS4H leadership recognized early on that if they were going to be involved in active transportation initiatives, they would need input from transportation planning professionals. PS4H has included discussions about Complete Streets concepts from the first days of the CLT.

In early 2010, the relationship between WCI and PS4H was further strengthened when PS4H hired Patrick Hollister to serve as their Active Transportation Planner. Patrick and Wayne worked on many similar transportation issues, and attended many of the same meetings relating to transportation projects. In addition, Patrick's first office space was located in WCI's building, which allowed for frequent communication and the ability to more easily coordinate efforts between WCI and PS4H.

This relationship is fairly unique in the state, and is not necessarily indicative of how other RDOs and SHIP collaboratives have worked together. The relationship between WCI and Horizon SHIP is, however, an example that could be followed by other organizations in Minnesota.

While Horizon was also addressing Complete Streets concepts in their work early on, the relationship between WCI and Horizon was much more informal and infrequent. Recognizing the benefits of increased collaboration – and due to increased staff capacity at WCI – it was mutually agreed upon in 2012 that WCI should have representation on Horizon's CLT. This increased level of involvement led to an improved relationship between the two organizations, and has resulted in improved and more frequent communication.

## Minnesota Department of Transportation

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is responsible for building and maintaining the state Trunk Highway (TH) system. MnDOT works with cities and counties on projects, and coordinates federal funding. MnDOT is responsible for development of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), which is a four-year list of projects that have been programmed. MnDOT also prepares the Capital Highway Investment Plan (CHIP), which is a 10-year list of projects that includes the projects in the STIP, plus an additional six years of planned projects.

MnDOT has a Complete Streets policy that it follows in the course of project planning and development. The following is an excerpt from the MnDOT Complete Streets page.<sup>4</sup>

*We incorporate a complete streets approach as part of every project we deliver. In so doing, we assess the context of each highway so that it balances and addresses the needs of all transportation users. Complete streets in a rural setting look different from complete streets on a main street running through a small community, which may look different from complete streets in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.*

*There is no one prescription for complete streets. We select appropriate options based on factors such as:*

- *Community context*
- *Topography*
- *Road function*
- *Traffic speed*
- *Freight volumes*
- *Pedestrian and bicyclist demand*

*Options that may - or may not - be selected, depending on each project's unique situation, could include:*

- *Paved shoulders*
- *Sidewalks*
- *Bicycle lanes*
- *Pedestrian refuge medians*
- *Truck mountable curbs in roundabouts*
- *Signal retiming*
- *Updated striping*
- *Bus stop access*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/completestreets/>

MnDOT also administers the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), which can serve as a funding source for Complete Streets projects. The RDOs are involved in the TAP process to varying degrees, ranging from project review to administering the program on behalf of MnDOT.

## **Community Members and Project Champions**

Perhaps the most influential group listed here is people from the community. This group could include concerned citizens, elected officials, business owners, city staff, and advocates for other people who may not have as much of a voice in the community.

Elected officials and staff will usually be the first point of contact for a Complete Streets project, and it's important for them to be familiar with the concept of Complete Streets, as well as knowing what the financial responsibility of the community will be for a project.

Early and frequent public input is essential for any Complete Street project. It's important to give concerned citizens, business owners, citizen advocates, and others an opportunity to be heard when they have questions, suggestions, or comments about a project. Public input can take a variety of forms, and all of the aforementioned organizations should play a role in facilitating public engagement.

An example of a successful public engagement approach comes from Parkers Prairie. The community secured funding from PartnerSHIP 4 Health to hire a consultant that led the community through a public engagement and concept design process. As part of this process, several public meetings were held. The initial meetings consisted of information and education sessions, where the consultant shared examples of what a Complete Streets project might include, and how various other communities have implemented similar concepts. Meetings held later in the process were open house meetings that gave the community an opportunity to view and comment on various design options for the project.

In addition, city staff in Parkers Prairie were proactive in reaching out to local businesses that were located within the project area to make sure they had an opportunity to provide input into the project development process. The combined efforts of city staff and the consultant resulted in an increased level of community input as the process moved forward through the city council review period.

In another community, ongoing communication issues impeded the public engagement process. The local chamber of commerce was the initial project champion, but the city council had limited involvement early in the project development phase. This, along with a prolonged project development timeframe, resulted in miscommunication about the

project, resulting in some contentious discussions during the public engagement process. Local business owners felt like there was a lack of information about the project, which resulted in incorrect information about the project being disseminated in the community.

Project champions are also essential for a successful Complete Streets project. Without a champion, the project will not move forward – especially if the community is trying to move from a mill & overlay to a more robust reconstruction project. The project champion could be one person, or more than one. They could be a resident, business owner, elected official, community advocate, or anyone else from the community who can bring people together around the project.

One example of a project champion is Reba Gilliland from Battle Lake. Reba is an active volunteer in the community, and serves on the City of Battle Lake Arts Advisory Committee. She was instrumental in helping infuse public art into the Complete Streets project that was being planned in Battle Lake. Reba worked to secure a Legacy grant through the Lake Region Arts Council for the construction and installation of several pieces of public art in the project area. The public art serves a very practical function as well, as it takes the form of benches, planter boxes and bike racks. Without Reba's involvement in this aspect of the project, it's likely that these project elements would not have been included.

## **Approach / Methodology**

This section of the report will document the approach and methodology that was undertaken for the project resulting in this report. Upon the launch of the project, an advisory group was formed that served to provide guidance. Several focus group interviews were conducted with communities in the region, as well as interviews with staff at MnDOT District 4. This section will conclude with some information about a pilot project approach recently implemented in Starbuck, MN.

### **Advisory Group**

To assist WCI staff in the approach for the project and development of this report, an advisory group from key constituencies was formed early in the process. Membership included:

- Jason Bergstrand – Manager, PartnerSHIP 4 Health
- Jane Butzer – Program Coordinator, MnDOT District 4
- Jill Chamberlain – Senior Project Manager, Blue Cross Blue Shield Center for Prevention
- Patrick Hollister – Active Living Planner, PartnerSHIP 4 Health
- Jessica Peterson – Health Educator, Horizon SHIP
- Mary Safgren – Planning Director, MnDOT District 4
- Tim Schoonhoven – City Engineer, City of Alexandria / Widseth Smith Nolting
- Rick West – County Engineer, Otter Tail County

Staff support for the advisory group was provided by WCI planning staff: Andrew Besold, Transportation Planner; and Wayne Hurley, Planning Director.

### **Community Focus Groups**

Six focus groups were conducted with communities in West Central Minnesota. These communities were selected because they had varying degrees of familiarity with Complete Streets projects. Two communities had very little knowledge of Complete Streets and were introduced to the concept of Complete Streets during the interviews. One community is in the very early stages of considering a Complete Streets project, while another is in the detailed design phase. Another community is anticipating construction of their Complete Streets project in 2016, while the final community wrapped up construction on their Complete Streets project in 2014.

The people who participated in the focus groups were primarily those who have been involved in project planning. In most of the communities, the focus groups included city clerks / administrators, city council members, mayors, chamber of commerce officials, public works staff, and SHIP staff. Additionally, in those communities where a local champion worked on the project, they were also included in the focus group discussion.

Communities in which focus groups were conducted included:

- Battle Lake
- Browns Valley
- Glenwood
- Parkers Prairie
- Starbuck
- Wheaton

Detailed information about the findings from these interviews is included in the following section of this report. The questions asked during the focus groups are in Appendix B.

### **MnDOT Interviews**

In addition to the focus groups held with communities in the region, a focus group was conducted with several of the District Project Managers and the District Planning Director at MnDOT District 4. This interview provided valuable information that led directly to the formation of several of the recommendations listed later in this report. More information about the results of this discussion is in the following section of this report.

### **Starbuck Pilot Project**

In 2015 WCI, Horizon SHIP, and MnDOT worked together on a “pilot” program for a potential Complete Streets project. This coordinated effort was a new approach and was an effort to have some conversations with community stakeholders at an early enough date to influence the scope of the project prior to its inclusion in the STIP.

This effort was in response to previous Complete Streets conversations that took place after projects were already programmed in the STIP. At that point, the projects had been scoped, budgets determined, and ready for the design phase. Changing the scope of a project after it’s already identified in the STIP usually results in the project being delayed and more expensive as budgets and timeline are adjusted to include the changes.

In January 2015, an informal meeting was held in Starbuck City Hall. Those attending included the city clerk, public works director, the mayor, and two council members. Project team members at the meeting included the project manager and district planner from MnDOT, Horizon SHIP staff, and planning staff from WCI.

The meeting started with an overview of the project as envisioned by MnDOT – which was planning for a mill & overlay of TH 29 through downtown Starbuck. MnDOT staff informed the community representatives that it would be possible to change the scope of the project to a reconstruction project if so desired by the community.

WCI planning staff then gave the community representatives an overview of Complete Streets concepts, and gave examples of similar projects in other communities in the region. WCI staff also explained the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) program.

Next, Horizon SHIP staff discussed their role in promoting active living, and how that role intersects with Complete Streets and SRTS concepts. SHIP staff also stated that they would have planning funds available should the City of Starbuck wish to pursue a Complete Streets project.

Two follow-up meetings were held, a project team meeting consisting of the individuals that met in January, and a public meeting to get some feedback on the concept of a Complete Streets project.

At this point, it remains to be seen what a Starbuck Complete Streets project might entail. The concept is still being discussed by city officials.

## Findings

The discussions with the communities in the region and the discussions with MnDOT have both yielded valuable findings. Since the discussions focused on slightly different things, this report will break the findings into each respective category. In addition, because the communities interviewed are all at various stages of implementing or considering Complete Streets projects, the findings vary significantly by community.

### Community Findings

In Region 4, communities learn about Complete Streets from a few primary sources. Most notable are the SHIP collaboratives – Horizon SHIP and PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H). Additionally, communities reported that they learned about Complete Streets concepts from WCI and MnDOT. However the SHIP collaboratives were usually the ones to introduce the concept, with WCI and MnDOT providing additional detail and/or technical info about Complete Streets concepts.

The replacement of underground infrastructure is one of the primary drivers that lead a community to consider Complete Streets projects. The need to tear the street up for utility replacement has led communities such as Alexandria, Glenwood and Parkers Prairie to request that MnDOT change the scope of a project from a mill & overlay to a reconstruction project. This change in project scope then presents the opportunity for the community to consider implementing a Complete Streets project.

### Barriers

Communities have faced a variety of barriers to implementing Complete Streets project, with varying levels of success in overcoming them. The barriers generally fell into two categories – infrastructure and communication. Multiple communities stated that perceived incompatibilities between various transportation modes caused changes to be made to initial project designs. Most frequently mentioned was the concern that bump-outs would impede truck-turning movements. This resulted in bump-outs being removed or reduced in size in some communities, including Battle Lake, Glenwood and Parkers Prairie.

Another significant point of discussion regarding infrastructure were lane widths – for both driving lanes and parking lanes. It was mentioned more than once by community officials that MnDOT District 4 is willing to go beyond what communities have been comfortable with. For example, MnDOT is willing to stripe 11-foot driving lanes, while many community officials and the public have expressed a desire to keep 12-foot driving

lanes (or wider), citing the perception of improved safety. The same was true of parking lanes, with MnDOT having a tolerance for lanes that were narrower than what the communities would typically consider.

The Complete Streets project in Alexandria was cited more than once as an example of an “unsafe” situation, with both driving lanes and parking lanes that are considered by many of the individuals interviewed to be too narrow. This perception exists despite the fact that the crash rate on Broadway has decreased by nearly 50% from the average crash rate of the five years prior to project completion.<sup>5</sup> This perception points to the need for additional education about the benefits of Complete Streets and the specific project elements that are typically associated with such projects, such as narrower lanes and reduced pedestrian crossing distances.

### Communication

With regard to communication, there were barriers cited with both internal and external communication. Internal communication issues were centered mostly around communication between city officials and the public – specifically business owners in more than one case. The general consensus amongst the communities interviewed was that early and frequent communication with the public is essential in moving a project forward successfully.

External communication issues – specifically between the community and MnDOT District 4 staff – were cited by at least two communities. The primary concern by these communities was that it was challenging to reconcile various project cost elements without knowing specific details about the project scope. Other communities reported that communication with MnDOT went very well throughout the process. Officials in the City of Starbuck specifically mentioned that it has been very helpful to have MnDOT take the proactive approach that they have in that community.

### Project Timing

Project timing wasn't seen as a negative issue by communities, despite the fact that projects were delayed in at least three cases. Some community officials felt that an abbreviated timeframe helped keep them on task, and mentioned that having regular project committee meetings was helpful. Another community felt that having a timeframe that was too lengthy could be detrimental, and shared concerns about

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<sup>5</sup> Alexandria City Administrator's report at City Council Meeting 1/11/16

<http://alexandriacitymn.iqm2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=1&ID=1053&Inline=True>

elected official turnover and the potential that it might be difficult to maintain momentum if a process were drawn out too long.

An alternative viewpoint was also cited, with one community stating that an abbreviated timeframe would make it difficult for the community to coordinate funding – specifically with regard to TAP funding deadlines.

### Advancing Projects

Most communities interviewed have decided to move forward with a Complete Streets project in some fashion. Others don't currently have projects in their communities, and are in the early phases of education at present.

A primary reason cited for deciding to move forward relates to the need to replace underground infrastructure. Another driving factor is the recognition of Complete Streets as playing a role with regard to economic development – although this was not a universally accepted sentiment. In one community, the comment was made that, because there are currently not many businesses on main street, the street shouldn't be planned as if there will be an increase in business in the future – that the “drive through” nature of the community is all they can ever hope for.

The positive impacts for pedestrian and bicycle safety – and the associated health benefits of improving conditions for those modes – were also cited as reasons communities are moving forward with Complete Streets projects.

### **MnDOT Findings**

Many of the same themes found in the community interviews also showed up in the conversation with MnDOT District 4 staff. As mentioned in the previous section, several District Project Managers, along with the District Planning Director, were engaged in a focus group interview to share what they saw as critical elements in moving Complete Streets projects forward.

District staff stated that early education and outreach are important. Planning projects that take place well in advance of projects are also extremely beneficial. These plans could consist of Capital Improvement Plans (CIP), comprehensive plans, SRTS plans, or plans generated by a Minnesota Design Team visit.

Identifying projects early is critical – once projects are in the STIP, it is challenging and costly to make adjustments. Projects that are a minimum of one year outside the STIP – and preferably two years – are the ones that allow sufficient time for the project to be

properly scoped and budgeted for, while taking into account the needs and desires of the community.

MnDOT staff stated that the process that is currently being followed in Starbuck is one that would work well in the future, but would ideally be started one year earlier. Elements that were identified as important include early public involvement, formation of a committee structure in the community, and education about project benefits – including things like pedestrian safety, truck accommodations, etc.

A suggested approach by MnDOT staff was for RDO and SHIP staff to work together in advance of projects to help communities identify their vision and any pertinent plans that would assist in identifying Complete Streets elements in the community. Identification of funding options is also an important element in seeing a successful project. District 4 staff also stated that it's important for MnDOT to remain flexible in meeting the needs of the community in the project development process.

The ultimate goal as stated by MnDOT staff is to make sure that once a project is in the STIP, "it's figured out."

## Recommendations

Recognizing the importance of timing, the following list of recommendations will be in an approximate chronological order. However, the order in which the recommendations are implemented may vary depending on a variety of factors. Additionally, some recommended steps may be undertaken simultaneously.

### Planning Ahead

In a perfect world, communities would have plans in place that identify Complete Streets elements that are desired in the community. These plans could be developed at any point prior to a project, but it's important to make sure that plans are updated periodically if a project isn't scheduled within the next several years.

Early planning and education can be roles played by RDOs and SHIP collaboratives. As such, the following are potential steps that could be taken with communities to prepare them for eventual Complete Streets projects:

- If the RDO and SHIP collaborative(s) in their region don't already have a good working relationship, it is important to develop that relationship prior to engaging with communities in the region. By collaborating ahead of time, the RDO and SHIP can gain an understanding of their respective roles, and thus better communicate those roles to the communities in their region.
- RDOs and SHIP can team up to provide education on Complete Streets to communities in the region. This education could be conducted in several ways, such as individual meetings with communities, or a regional Complete Streets workshop. Partnership 4 Health has conducted multiple Complete Streets workshops in the region, and has made those workshops available to a broad group of stakeholders from a variety of agencies.
- RDOs and SHIP should encourage early planning efforts in communities, including (but not limited to) development of a CIP, comprehensive plans, SRTS plans, corridor studies, sidewalk plans, etc. Ideally, these plans would be in place prior to the identification of a potential Complete Streets project, thus informing the project development process.
- RDOs can work with their MnDOT District office to develop a timeline of the project development process in their region. While a timeline of this nature would be fairly consistent statewide, each MnDOT District and their Area

Transportation Partnership (ATP) may have variations to how they operate, and a district-specific timeline would be more beneficial to communities that are considering future Complete Streets projects.

## Working with MnDOT

Coordination with MnDOT is essential for ensuring that a Complete Streets project will move forward. The following steps will be helpful in achieving this goal:

- RDOs should proactively review the 10-year CHIP with MnDOT on an annual basis. The primary purpose of the first review will be to determine potential Complete Streets projects that are still outside the 4-year STIP. After the initial CHIP review, annual reviews should be conducted to determine if new projects are added that might have potential for Complete Streets treatments.
- A CHIP project that is one year outside of the STIP would be considered a “Year 5” project. ***As identified in this report, a Year 6 project is the ideal candidate for beginning a dialogue with a community about the specific project.*** While a Year 5 project can move forward, there may be some challenges relating to timing. The RDO and SHIP should again take a proactive role in reaching out to the community to have an initial discussion about the project and do some education about Complete Streets, as necessary.
- CHIP projects in Years 7-10 are prime candidates for RDOs and SHIP to meet with those communities to do some education about the concept of Complete Streets, and inform the community that they have a potential project coming that may be a candidate for some Complete Streets elements.

## Working with the Community

Once a project is identified in a community as having potential for becoming a Complete Streets project, there are several steps that can be taken while working with the community:

- First, an informal informational meeting should be held, which will involve MnDOT, RDO, and SHIP staff, as well as city staff and elected officials. See previous description of the process followed in Starbuck for additional detail.
- RDO and SHIP can help the community identify stakeholders early in the process, which will lead to the development of a team or committee that will be charged with keeping the project on task. If planning work will be conducted as part of

the project development process, this committee will be critical in moving things forward.

- Early and frequent public involvement should be conducted. Methods of engagement could include public informational meetings, open houses, and one-on-one meetings (particularly with affected business owners). Education efforts with the public should focus on the benefits that the project will provide, such as improved safety for people walking and people on bikes, accommodations for truck traffic and turning movements, the potential for economic development, and ADA improvements, allowing easier access for persons of all abilities.
- RDOs – and in some cases SHIP – can help communities identify funding options and educate them about MnDOT's cost participation policy. RDOs can also work with the community to determine eligibility for TAP funding for a Complete Streets project, as appropriate in their region.
- Efforts should be made to ensure that communities plan for maintenance after the project is complete. Many Complete Streets projects contain elements like planter boxes or similar features that will need to be maintained after construction of the project is complete. This is sometimes an overlooked component of Complete Streets projects that should be planned for from the onset.

### **Further Considerations**

While this list of recommendations is not exhaustive, it can serve to guide the development of a process in different regions of Minnesota. Each RDO, SHIP collaborative, and MnDOT district has unique processes and procedures that they follow, and this report can be used to begin the dialogue about how to best approach Complete Streets projects in each respective area of the state.

## Appendix A – Glossary

**ADA** – Americans with Disabilities Act

**ATP** – Area Transportation Partnership; the ATP is made up of a variety of stakeholders from each respective MnDOT District. More information can be found at:

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/program/mpordcatp.html>

**CHIP** – Capital Highway Investment Plan; a 10-year list of planned projects that MnDOT updates annually

**CIP** – Capital Improvement Plan; typically a five-year list of planned projects that cities update regularly – often annually

**CLT** – Community Leadership Team; SHIP committee made up of regional stakeholders

**FHWA** – Federal Highway Administration; the FHWA plays in critical role in Complete Streets (in part) by determining the standards that cities, counties and states use to build streets and roads.

**HEAL** – Healthy Eating and Active Living; a program bringing RDOs and SHIP together to focus on these two topic areas

**MDH** – Minnesota Department of Health

**MnDOT** – Minnesota Department of Transportation

**PS4H** – PartnerSHIP 4 Health

**RDC** – Regional Development Commission

**RDO** – Regional Development Organization

**SHIP** – Statewide Health Improvement Program

**SRTS** – Safe Routes to School

**STIP** – State Transportation Improvement Program; a four-year list of programmed projects that MnDOT updates annually

**TAP** – Transportation Alternatives Program; a funding program that can be accessed for Complete Streets and other projects

**TH** – Trunk Highway

**WCI** – West Central Initiative

**Year 1-4** – These are the project years identified in the STIP

**Year 5-10** – These are the project years identified in the CHIP

## Appendix B – Focus Group Questions

The following questions were asked as part of the focus group discussions with communities:

1. How did your community first hear about Complete Streets concepts? What led your community to begin discussing Complete Streets?
2. Did your community face any barriers or obstacles to moving forward with a Complete Streets project? Were they overcome? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Did the project timing/schedule impact the community's ability to consider a Complete Streets project? In what way?
4. Did your community decide to move forward with a Complete Streets project? Why or why not?
5. What would you say worked well with regard to the Complete Streets project?
6. Conversely, what would you say didn't work well?
7. Are there other comments about the process that you'd like to share?