Completing the Picture in Michigan’s Capital

As the Complete Streets model is being mulled over by state legislators, Lansing’s Transportation and Parking Office and the Lansing Master Plan Team are preparing to be the first city in Michigan to present a draft of a Complete Streets Network Plan.

Support for a more walkable, bike-friendly Lansing grew from grassroots public engagement, spurred along by the Walk and Bike Lansing! Task Force. This is a partnership between the Mid-Michigan Environmental Action Council and Michigan Complete Streets community organizers, including the League of Michigan Bicyclists and the Michigan Environmental Council. Proponents of Lansing’s ordinance united under Complete Streets’ mission, arguing for increased safety conditions for walkers and bikers, environmentally friendly alternatives to motorized traffic, improved traffic conditions, and healthier people. More than 100 volunteers collected over 4,500 signatures in order to petition for Complete Streets policy making. In August 2009, when the ordinance was on the table, residents in Lansing were impassioned by the cause—writing letters to Lansing City Council and speaking up at public meetings.

The Lansing City Council adopted the Lansing Complete Streets Ordinance, in a unanimous decision, on August 17, 2009. According to the ordinance, required improvements to Lansing’s non-motorized network include “at a minimum, accommodations for accessibility, sidewalks, curb ramps and cuts, trails and pathways, signage, and bike lanes, and shall incorporate principles of Complete Streets and maximize walkable and bikeable streets within the city.” It also requires, “to the extent financially feasible, future construction or reconstruction of city rights of way or any part thereof shall be in conformity with the non-motorized network plan.” Lansing will update the plan every five years.

Complete Streets mean including bicyclists in the street equation. Photo by Jhenifer Pabillano.
Another significant impact of the ordinance will be an increased minimum requirement for state transportation fund allocation in Lansing. Michigan law currently requires that a minimum of 1 percent of state funds be allocated to non-motorized networks, like bike lanes and sidewalks. Before adopting the Complete Streets Ordinance, Lansing was already spending more than the state required, about 2 percent. The new plan will raise the bar to 5 percent.

Making Mt. Pleasant More Pleasant for Walking and Biking
The city of Mt. Pleasant decided to incorporate Complete Streets principles into the reconstruction of Michigan Street, which is scheduled for the summer of 2010. The decision follows the city’s unanimous decision, in October 2009, to reject MDOT’s recommendation to address a high accident rate and congestion by banning left-hand turns at the corner of Mission and Broomfield Streets and putting in “Michigan Lefts.”

Concluding that MDOT’s solution was not the best option for the commercial neighborhood, the city found a solution that they argue is more conducive to their master plan for the city’s design. Improved safety conditions for walkers and bicyclists will include “narrower driving lanes, new bike lanes, ‘bump out’ parking areas (also known as designated parallel parking areas), and wider sidewalks,” in order to slow motorized traffic and make the streets safer and more convenient for pedestrians and bicyclists, according to the city of Mt. Pleasant.

Taking it to the Streets, and the State
Complete Streets legislation at the state level proposes that “a transportation network that provides active options for people holds many benefits,” including improving public health, according to a resolution put forth in December 2009. Efforts to create Complete Streets legislation, by proponents like Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan, have contended that an “active transportation infrastructure” will support a healthy lifestyle, and reduce childhood obesity.

The proposed legislation also takes the stance that a well-planned non-motorized network increases “safety” for walkers and bikers, “reduces pollution, and holds great potential for revitalizing communities and spurring economic development.”

As communities and lawmakers in Michigan endeavor to put Complete Streets concepts into practice, now is the perfect time to get educated about the benefits of non-motorized traffic networks. The Complete Streets initiative seeks to define a new standard. Every community has different needs and each must approach physical design and transportation planning from their own, unique perspective, however, the Complete Streets initiative supposes that everyone can be doing more to encourage environmentally conscious, safe, healthy and active modes of travel.

Follow these links to find out more:
National Complete Streets Coalition http://www.completestreets.org/
Michigan Complete Streets http://michigancompletestreets.wordpress.com/
Bike Walk Lansing! http://www.walkbikelansing.com/

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