

Street, bike concept betters communities

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How do you use the streets of Lee County? Drive your car or motorcycle on them? Ride your bike? Rollerblade or skateboard? Maybe you run or walk on (or next to or across) them, or negotiate your way using a wheelchair. Let's not forget buses and trolleys, trailers and trucks of all sizes and shapes.

That's a lot of users all competing for their own slice of asphalt, each with their own needs and concerns. Finding a balance that allows every user full and fair access is no simple task, and it's too easy for one interest to outweigh all others.

In hopes of better balancing all the potential users, communities such as Lee County have adopted "complete streets" policies — road networks that are designed to allow all users safe and convenient access to streets, with accommodations for the unique needs of each whenever possible.

Not a "one size fits all" approach, it is a method of designing new streets to benefit every likely user and improving existing streets to enhance access and safety.

Why is this important? Because complete streets help create complete communities:

- **More economic revitalization:** Complete streets can reduce household transportation expenses, stimulate and revitalize area businesses, create jobs and increase property values.
- **More walking and bicycling:** Experts are encouraging walking and bicycling as a response to the obesity epidemic. Streets safe for bicycling and walking help people of all ages be physically active.
- **More return on infrastructure investments:** Integrating sidewalks, bike lanes, transit and safe crossings into a road design spares the expense of building them later.
- **More quality of place:** People using the streets in all kinds of ways — for travel, business and social interactions — is a hallmark of a vibrant and livable community.
- **More transportation choices:** Streets that provide travel choices give people the option to avoid traffic jams, save time and peace of mind.
- **More safety:** Improved design and accommodation for bicyclists, pedestrians and mass transit reduces the incidence of crashes.

BikeWalkLee is a community coalition raising public awareness and advocating for complete streets in Lee County — streets that are designed for safe and convenient travel for all users. Its members work to create opportunities for residents to enjoy this county's streets and to enact better policies to ensure those streets are complete.

In the weeks ahead, we will be writing about ways you can get out and play on Lee County's streets; introduce you to some of the groups, events and opportunities to make our area a better place to walk, run, bike and try transit; explain why street design matters for use and safety; discuss how local, regional, state and federal policies impact what our streets look like now and into the future; and much more.

Visit bikewalklee.org