Crafting an Effective Complete and Green Streets Policy

A Summary Report of the September 17, 2024 Webinar and the October 30, 2024 Virtual Open House
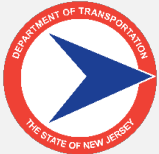
RUTGERS–NEW BRUNSWICK
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy

Acknowledgments

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September 17, 2024 Webinar

About the September 17, 2024 Webinar

Crafting an Effective Complete and Green Streets Policy

Learn how to create and adopt your own custom municipal Complete & Green Streets Policy. If you already have a policy, learn how to upgrade with NJDOT's Complete & Green Streets for All: Model Policy & Guide. This free one-hour webinar for municipal officials, staff, or consultant representatives is sponsored by the NJDOT Bureau of Safety, Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority and organized by Sustainable Jersey.

Speakers:

Leigh Ann Von Hagen, Voorhees Transportation Center
Elise Bremer-Nei, New Jersey Department of Transportation
Peter Bilton, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

Useful Links:

Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnasdAl98Ec
Handout: https://njbikeped.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-NJ-Complete-Streets-Webinar-Handout.pdf
Website: https://njbikeped.org/complete-and-green-streets-policy-webinar/

September 17th Webinar Attendees

What occupations did attendees represent?

14
2
2
1
1
1

- Planner/Engineer/Landscape Architect
- Elected Official
- Community Advocate
- Grants Writer
- Business Administrator
- Other
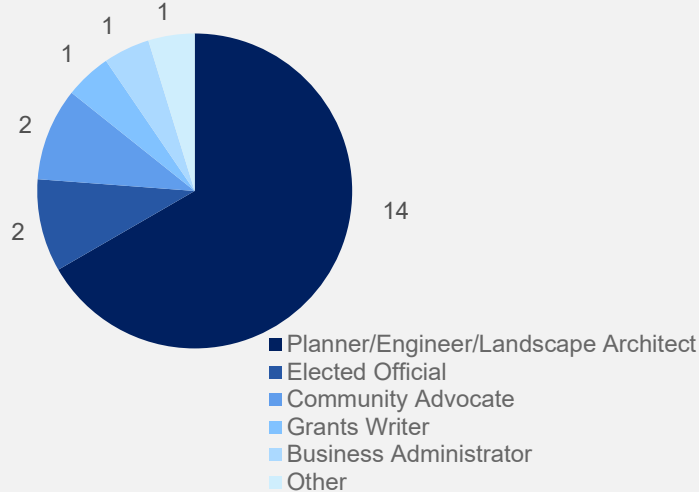
n = 21

What organizations did attendees represent?

6
6
4
2
1
1

- Municipal Government
- Private Company
- Non-Profit Organization
- County Government
- State/Regional Government
- Community Advocate
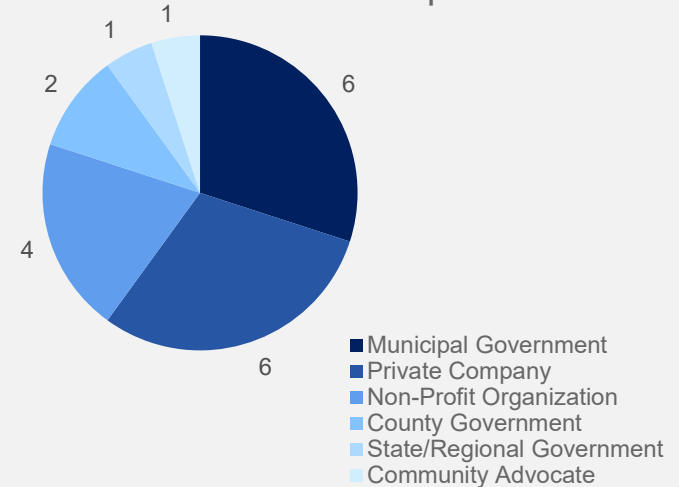
n = 20

The majority of webinar attendees were planners, engineers, or landscape architects, and the majority of organizations represented were municipal government offices or private companies.

120 out of 207 (58%) registrants attended the webinar, and 87 did not.

Does your town have a Complete and Green Streets Policy?

8%
13%
30%
22%
27%

n = 77

- No
- Yes, but needs revising
- I don't know
- Yes
- It's under development
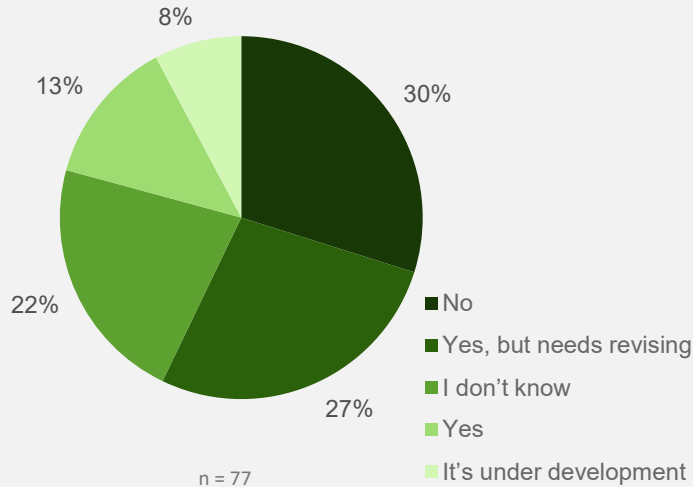
Which of the following transportation initiatives have you heard about?

14%
18%
46%
22%

n = 50

- Complete Streets
- Vision Zero
- Safe Routes to School
- Safe System Approach
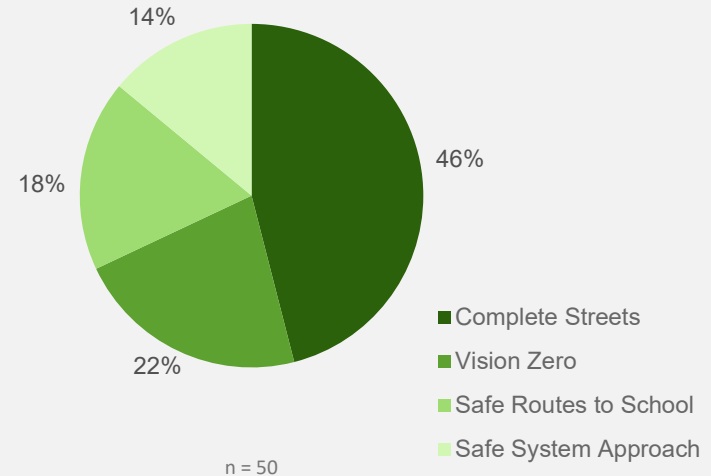
According to poll results, less than 50% of attendees know of a Complete and Green Streets policy in their town, but participants previously heard about Complete Streets most often compared to other initiatives.

What Topics did attendees have questions about?
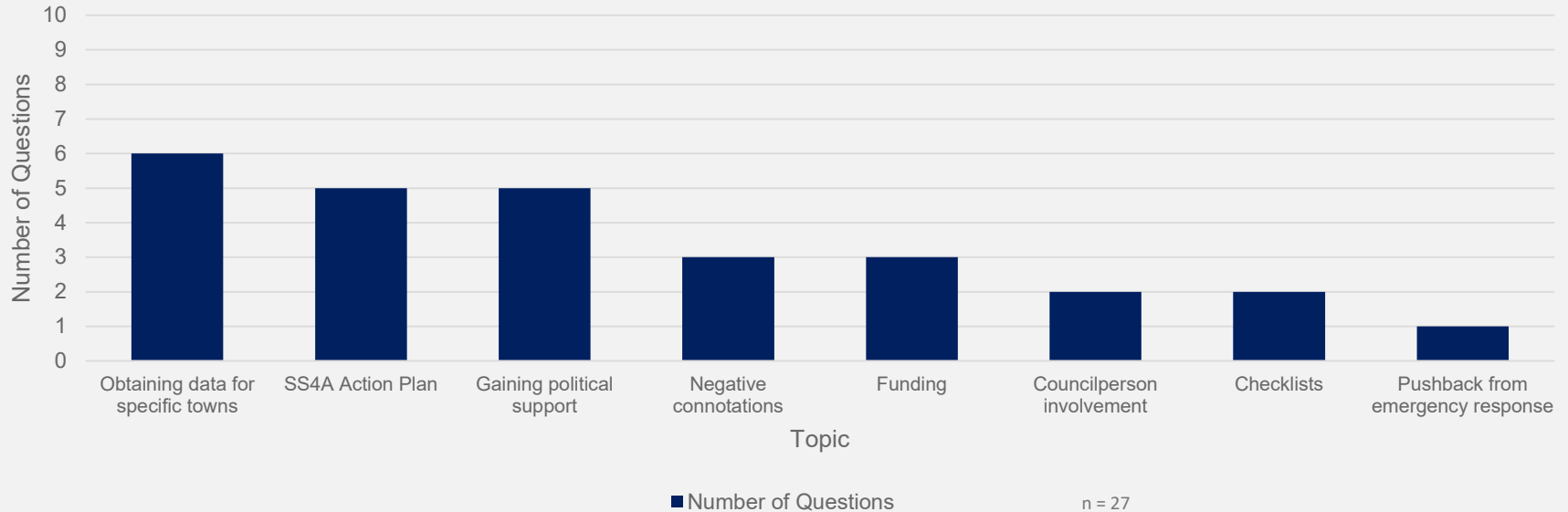
Questions about data, SS4A action plans and political support were asked most frequently. Questions about the negative connotations of Complete Streets, funding, councilperson involvement, checklists, and pushback were asked relatively infrequently.

September 17th Webinar Q&A

Which submitted questions were answered during the Q&A?

Are the checklists included directly in the Complete Streets policy or are they separate?
Checklists are generally part of the policy or adopted as part of an ordinance (answered by Peter Bilton).

Should checklists be edited beforehand, or should municipalities try to use the language written provided verbatim?
The language and checklists are provided as a starting point. Municipalities may adopt them in full, but we cannot let perfect be the enemy of good if there is opposition to some elements in the language. Ultimately, the municipal government will pass what they are comfortable with (answered by Gregory Woltman).

Is the Complete and Green Streets Open House appropriate for those in communities in other states?
The focus will be mostly on NJ, but you are welcome to join us (answered by Gregory Woltman).

September 17th Webinar Q&A

Which submitted questions were answered during the Q&A?

Do we have access to the collision statistics compiled by the New Jersey State Police from local police departments?

State crash data is available to law enforcement agencies, transportation agencies, and their consultants. If you're not part of one of these groups, police departments and Transportation Management Associations can help with crash data (answered by Peter Bilton).

How do we counter the argument that county policy needs to be in place before municipal policy because many of our major roads are county roads?

New Jersey is a home rule state. The vast majority of roads in any locale are municipally-owned, and Complete Streets can help address safety issues on these local roads (answered by Gregory Woltman).

We've implemented complete streets and are rolling out 'phases'. The biggest resistance to our improvements seems to come from emergency response.

The Biking Fireman, an Elizabeth local, talks about the intersection of Complete Streets and EMS here (answered by Gregory Woltman).

Which submitted questions were answered during the Q&A?

What does SS4A stand for?
SS4A is short for <u>Safe Streets and Roads for All</u>, which is a federal grant program dedicating $1 billion per year since 2022 to safety action planning and implementation of roadway projects that improve safety for ALL road users (answered by Gregory Woltman).

Does an SS4A action plan address data collection?
Yes, SS4A plans must include a data-driven safety analysis, is outlined <u>here</u> (answered by Gregory Woltman).

Is the SS4A program continuing into the 2025 fiscal year?
Yes. Congress funded the SS4A program in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 for five years. The program is slated to continue funding through fiscal year 2026 (answered by Gregory Woltman).

September 17th Webinar Q&A

Which submitted questions were answered during the Q&A?

What are the negative connotations to Complete Streets?
Many people are resistant to making changes to their familiar streets. There is a fear of losing parking in front of a particular business or being delayed when they need to drive somewhere. (answered by Gregory Woltman).

A negative response to Complete Streets in our town is that it will cost too much. Is there data to show that this is not true?
There are a wide variety of approaches to implementing Complete Streets with varying costs. Many Complete Streets treatments can be done with low-cost materials. (answered by Gregory Woltman).

Union County was not on the list provided. Where can I get updates for Union County?
Union County received SS4A funding directly from the federal government to complete their plan. More information may be available from the Union County planning department (answered by Gregory Woltman).

October 30, 2024 Open House

About the October 30, 2024 Open House

Crafting an Effective Complete and Green Streets Policy

Virtual Open House on crafting an effective Complete and Green Streets policy on October 30th from 3pm to 5pm. At this live Q&A session we will discuss and troubleshoot your specific questions about how to adopt and implement a policy to design safer, greener, and more accessible streets for your community. You can come and go at any point during the two-hour session. Breakout rooms will be available for in-depth discussion of specific challenges.

Facilitators:

Leigh Ann Von Hagen, Voorhees Transportation Center

Elise Bremer-Nei, New Jersey Department of Transportation

Peter Bilton, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

Blythe Eaman, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

Anne Heasley, Sustainable Jersey

James Sinclair, Voorhees Transportation Center

Samuel Rosenthal, Voorhees Transportation Center

Greg Woltman, Voorhees Transportation Center

With support from:

Lindsey Massih, New Jersey Future

Andras Holzmann, Passaic County

VTC Student Research Assistants:

Halleigh Johnston, Voorhees Transportation Center

Nikita Soni, Voorhees Transportation Center

Julia Kohn, Voorhees Transportation Center

October 30th Open House Pre-Event Questions

Which submitted questions were discussed?

Question 1: Which elements must and shall be part of the Complete Streets Policy?
This was not discussed because the person who submitted the question did not attend the open house.

Question 2: Who signs off on checklists, and do they advocate or oppose Complete Streets?
This was discussed at the end of the program. The main points expressed were that signing off on checklists is most commonly the responsibility of the municipal engineer, clerk, or code enforcement officer. The New Jersey model policy is set up to require committee to oversee this. A project developer, consulting engineer, or other non-town staff can also sign off on the checklist if deemed appropriate. Committees should follow best practices and successful examples to ensure that it is operational.

Question 3: Are there grants available for Complete Streets? ?
This was talked about in the Green Infrastructure breakout meeting and the Funding for Implementation discussion. Resources mentioned include the USDOT PROTECT Discretionary Grant Program, NJDOT Safe Routes to School grants, and the funding resources web page at https://www.saferoutesnj.org/grants-funding-overview/.

October 30th Open House Pre-Event Questions

Which submitted questions were discussed?

Question 4: Does the municipality need to adopt Complete Streets within their master plan, or can via ordinance do?

> This question was brought up during the Policy Nuts and Bolts discussion, and participants discussed how various towns have adopted a Complete Streets policy as a resolution or by ordinance.

Question 5: I find that municipalities are often willing to explore including Complete and Green streets, but run into roadblocks when it comes to counties; do you have any guidelines or tips for working with counties?

> Similar topics were mentioned briefly during the Working with County and State Agencies discussion. Participants discussed community volunteer groups and how they can encourage county authorities to support the projects by showing strong public interest.

Question 6: Do you have guidance for (for-profit) consultants to work with municipalities, or advice on how to secure funding and grants for a municipality?

> Funding resources were collected and recorded during the Funding for Implementation section, and specific grants were brought up during the Green Infrastructure breakout discussion.

October 30th Open House Pre-Event Questions

Which submitted questions were discussed?

Question 7: What experience have you had with integrating Complete Streets in project application review processes? Is it possible/ideal to substitute Complete Streets advisory committees with municipal staff?
> This was discussed during the Working with County and State Agencies conversation, where it was mentioned that municipal staff may be responsible for review, but an advisory committee should also be maintained.

Question 8: How can we get the governing body to take any action regarding safety when they have no interest?
> This was mentioned during the Green Infrastructure discussion. A useful way to encourage governing bodies to take action when they seem uninterested is to ensure that they are aware of the NJDEP MS4 permit requirement, and specifically Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP), since many Complete Streets projects could help municipalities fulfill their requirements for this.

Question 9: How can we get grants to pay for speed humps and other pedestrian safety measures?
> Many of the funding resources in the Funding for Implementation section can be used for implementing pedestrian safety measures.

October 30th Open House Pre-Event Questions

Which submitted questions were discussed?

Question 10: What are the best ways to handle emergency medical service opposition to traffic calming measures?

Handling emergency opposition was discussed in-depth during the Common Local Concerns talk. Participants suggested introducing pilot projects and pointing out that reducing parking and speed often does not negatively impact emergency services.

Question 11: How can we handle snow plowing and speed humps with Complete Streets?

Snow plowing was also discussed in the Common Local Concerns conversation. It was mentioned that municipalities are often responsible for snow plowing on critical routes. Programs that give high school students community service hours for shoveling snow can also be useful.

Question 12: What are the impacts of and best practices for implementing Green Complete Streets on a Central Business District in a Special Floodplain Hazard Area?

This was not discussed because the person who submitted the question did not attend the open house.

What topics would you like to learn more about during the Open House?

Respondents were given ten topics and asked to rank the choices from how much or how little they would like to learn more about them.

1   Applying for and using funding

2   Green infrastructure

3   Working with the county or state

4   Complete Streets advisory committees

5   Working with and addressing the concerns of elected officials

6   Working with and addressing the concerns of residents

7   Updating an existing Complete Streets policy

8   Working with and addressing the concerns of municipal staff

9   Implementation Challenges

10   Liability

October 30th Open House Topics and Speakers

The structure of the topics mentioned during the Open House proceeded as seen below. There were breakout groups available for participants to discuss specific topics in more detail. As attendees asked questions about specific topics, facilitators used the breakout rooms to allow multiple discussions at once.

Common local concerns	Green infrastructure	Funding for implementation
Policy nuts and bolts	Working with county and state agencies	Redevelopment

Common Local Concerns

Concern	Strategy/Response
Traffic calming will slow emergency response; fire trucks won't be able to travel on traffic calmed streets.	It is important to consider the complete safety picture of implementing complete streets. We must balance the importance of emergency response times with the safety benefits of traffic calming. No one organization has full control, so they must find a way to compromise. A few ideas come to mind: • Implement a demonstration or pilot project to "try things out" before making permanent changes. This allows a municipality to make adjustments and iterate. • Include emergency workers in meetings and as members of the Complete Streets Advisory Council. This was done successfully in Red Bank, where the inclusion of emergency workers actually reduced opposition because they were involved in discussions of the benefits and trade-offs involved in Complete Streets proposals before. The one drawback is that there was some pushback from traffic safety because of opposition to bicycle lanes. • Depending on the design, bike lanes may also offer space for emergency service vehicles to get by. It is important to note that Red Bank did not experience a notable increase in traffic delay after the installation of traffic calming. In general, bike lanes are a proven safety countermeasure (FHWA) and they improve safety for *all road users,* not just bicyclists. Red Bank experienced lower motor vehicle speeds after the installation of bike lanes, which eased concerns from residents about speeding. **Key takeaway: There must be good faith commitments to ensure that municipalities prioritize safety for all road users for each project and road on a case-by-case basis.**

Common Local Concerns

Concern	Strategy/Response
Reducing parking on a shopping street will hurt our businesses.	**While a valid concern, many projects have found that reducing on-street or curb parking does not negatively impact businesses. In fact, reducing parking is likely to benefit them.** One example comes from the Red Bank Open Streets project, during which the city removed 25 parking spaces while closing the streets from traffic. According to cell phone data records, there were over 270,000 cell impressions on the Open Street, demonstrating that the initiative was actually beneficial to local businesses. This is often the case across the state. There is a common conflation of parking and foot traffic, but better parking management and increasing turnover can improve the business benefits of the existing parking spaces while balancing the space allocation for other road users. In addition, local studies have identified a trend that some prime parking spaces are occupied all day by employees, meaning that the spot sees no turnover during business hours. Charging for curb parking and setting time limits encourages shoppers and discourages long-term parking.

Common Local Concerns

Concern	Strategy/Response
We can't afford to build complete streets.	• It is important when building community support to focus on the costs of inaction. Incomplete streets have their own costs, such as higher personal and healthcare costs due to injury and loss-of-life. • Nearby universities can be helpful since they may have sidewalk inventory data from relevant research observations, and they may have access to resources and new technologies to provide inventories and other datasets as part of research or pedagogy. • Towns can use pre-existing data from Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) to identify gaps in sidewalk maintenance to understand which areas need more attention. LiDAR data may already exist from university studies or other projects, so this could be useful to save money and lower costs. • Municipalities should emphasize the equity and safety benefits of Complete Streets when applying for competitive grant funding.

Common Local Concerns

Concern	Strategy/Response
Property owners don't want sidewalks because of the maintenance expense and liability.	• Revisit who should hold responsibility for sidewalk maintenance, and any exceptions: • Most towns require property owners to repair damaged sidewalks; very few towns help pay for sidewalk repair. • Some towns will coordinate individual property owner sidewalk repair under a single large contract. • Some towns will repair sidewalks damaged by street tree roots or replace sidewalks as part of a larger road reconstruction project. • Some other areas of North America make sidewalk snow removal a municipal responsibility on critical routes. • Some towns have given service hours to high schoolers to help maintain sidewalk shoveling during winter. • Sidewalks are important for accessibility and equity; they are a need for people with disabilities. Expressing this to stakeholders or property owners may help build support. • Maintain consistency: inconsistency in sidewalk maintenance responsibility can lead to inconsistency in sidewalk quality.

Green Infrastructure

Facilitator(s): Anne Heasly, Sustainable Jersey
Lindsey Massih, New Jersey Future

How can we get local authorities to prioritize green infrastructure during transportation projects such as repaving or resurfacing streets?

One way to encourage green infrastructure prioritization is to ensure that authorities are made aware of the NJDEP MS4 permit requirement, and specifically Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP) requirements. To implement WIPs, municipalities are required to identify water quality improvement and flood mitigation projects. Green streets can help municipalities meet that requirement and implement WIP plans. Some communities have also used their municipal aid dedicated to environmental improvement projects to create green streets. Municipalities could also use funding from the water bank to support green streets projects.

How can green infrastructure contribute to Watershed Improvement Plans (WIPs)?

Green infrastructure can help cities manage stormwater, reduce local flooding and improve water quality. This can happen when green infrastructure elements such as stormwater retention systems are incorporated during repaving and resurfacing projects. Expressing this may lead to increased support from local authorities. Green infrastructure also has the potential to reduce flooding particularly in areas with high impervious surfaces, as has been seen in Madison, NJ.

More information on municipal aid for environmental improvement projects can be found at https://njdotlocalaidrc.com/state-funded-programs/municipal-aid.

Green Infrastructure

Resources for Implementing Green Infrastructure

National Green Streets Resources

- Learn About Green Streets (US EPA)
- Green Streets Handbook (US EPA, 2021)
- About Green Streets (Portland, OR)
- Green Streets: A Conceptual Guide to Effect Green Streets Design Solutions Residential Streets, Commercial Streets, Arterial Streets, Alleys (US EPA, 2009)
- Managing Wet Weather with Green Infrastructure Municipal Handbook (US EPA, 2008)

New Jersey Green Streets Resources

- Passaic County Plan: Green Infrastructure Element
- Jersey Water Works Green Streets Resources
  - Funding Green Streets (Jersey Water Works, 2021)
  - Planning for Green Streets (Jersey Water Works, 2021)
  - Case Studies (Jersey Water Works, 2020)
- Tier A MS4 Stormwater Permit Information (NJDEP)
- Understanding the New MS4 Permit (New Jersey Future, 2023)
- New Jersey Green Infrastructure Municipal Toolkit (New Jersey Future)
- New Jersey Inland Flood Protection Rule (NJDEP)

Green Infrastructure

What funding opportunities are available for green infrastructure in transportation projects?

- The funding for green infrastructure projects mainly comes from Department of Transportation funds for environmental enhancements and programs from their Local Aid Resource Center, and grants from the Department of Environmental Protection's New Jersey Water Bank (NJWB) program.

- Additional funding may be obtained from the Department of Transportation PROTECT Federal Discretionary Grant Program.

- Small Scale demonstration projects may be able to use existing materials to reduce costs and their need for funding. For example, towns have used straw bales to surround storm drains in order to illustrate green infrastructure benefits as a temporary pilot project.

- Local Engineers can help identify and address run-off and flood prone areas in order to tailor green infrastructure design to problem areas. This could reduce costs by allowing projects to be implemented where they are most needed.

- It may also be helpful to implement volunteering programs for high school students who want to engage on climate initiatives, such as the New Jersey Student Climate Challenge. This can provide educational opportunities while reducing costs.

Funding for Implementation

Funding Resources:

- Local Aid Resource Center
    - Transportation Alternatives (TA Set Aside)
    - Safe Routes to School
    - Municipal Aid
    - Bikeways Grant Program
    - Safe Streets to Transit
    - Transit Village Program
- Grants & Funding: NJDOT Safe Routes to School Resource Center
- New Jersey Infrastructure Investment Tracker
- USDOT Discretionary Grants Dashboard
    - Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A)
    - Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP)
    - Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and cost-saving Transportation Program (PROTECT)
    - Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program
    - Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)

Policy Nuts and Bolts

Do Complete Streets projects need to be part of a master plan, or can they be adopted via ordinance?

Complete Streets can be adopted via ordinance and does not have to be part of a master plan for a municipality. Adopting projects via ordinance or into a comprehensive plan may actually be more effective overall.

New Jersey Complete Streets Policy Best Practices and Guides:

- NJDOT Complete & Green Streets for All Model Policy & Guide (NJDOT, 2019)
- Sustainable Jersey's Tier 3 requirements for a Complete and Green Streets for All Policy
- Making Complete Streets A Reality: A Guide to Policy Development (NJDOT, 2012)
- Examples of communities that have adopted the NJDOT model policy include:
  - Borough of Eatontown (March 2019 - full policy by ordinance)
  - Township of Scotch Plains (January 2018 - full policy with checklists)
  - Borough of Bernardsville (June 2020 - includes elements of the model policy but not the full policy)
  - Borough of Rocky Hill (November 2019 - did not adopt checklists)
  - City of Bordentown (September 2019 - includes elements of the model policy but not the full policy)
  - Upper Township (August 2019)
- All current adopted Complete Streets policies in NJ (NJDOT Bicycle & Pedestrian Resource Center)
- Truck size and curb management FAQ Truck Routing, Multimodal/Freight

Working with County and State Agencies

A county is running into difficulty lowering the speed limit on their county road for a traffic study because of the 85th percentile rule. What is the best way to approach this issue?

The county could ask the applicable transportation engineers for flexibility. Engineers may or may not allow it. If not, you would have to petition the appropriate county authorities.

Can volunteer groups have any impact on getting county road speed limits reduced, or can speed reductions only happen with support from the county commissioner and engineer?

Community support definitely helps in obtaining backing from authorities, and some counties have volunteer transportation councils that can help push for speed reductions and other changes.

Resource: Red Bank has an ordinance codifying their Complete and Green Streets Advisory Committee (ordinance below):
https://njbikeped.org/wp-content/uploads/17220088742279-2.pdf

Working with County and State Agencies

Facilitator(s): Andras Holzmann, Passaic County
Elise Bremer-Nei, NJDOT Bureau of Safety, Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs

Some counties have used influxes of federal money to fix roads, but these efforts often include no improvements that address safety. How can locals express comments or concerns regarding these projects?

Grant-funded transportation projects require public meetings, while general paving projects with county funds do not. At those public meetings, locals are typically given the chance to pose questions or leave comments.

Some Complete Streets policies may also require an advisory committee to be organized to ensure that changes are made in accordance with the program's safety plan. The advisory committee is meant to hold the city or county accountable to make sure that they are implementing road repairs that prioritize safety improvements. This could mean suggesting that the county include safety design measures such as striping, bike lanes, or wider shoulders, all of which are outlined in the Complete Streets checklist. The committee should also hold regular meetings to welcome discussion and comments that can be relayed to the city or county that the committee reports to.

Passaic County has gained strong support from County Commissioners for implementing safety measures, which has made it easier to ensure that safety is a priority in road projects.

NJTPA is working with Middlesex County to conduct a safety audit for their county roads. NJTPA has also established a demonstration library that is available to municipalities with useful project materials.

Working with County and State Agencies

Facilitator(s): Andras Holzmann, Passaic County
Elise Bremer-Nei, NJDOT Bureau of Safety, Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs

How can we ensure that improvements are made to prevent fatalities, rather than waiting until after a fatality occurs?

Cities can use a Safe System Approach, which is **proactive,** rather than traditional, **reactive** approaches. Safe System Approaches focus on the root causes of crashes, analyze the design of the crash location, and use findings to make design improvements to prevent future crashes.

It can also be beneficial to count near-misses when observing traffic to understand where future crashes could happen, and make design changes accordingly. It is important not to minimize the importance of near-misses, since they can lead to real crashes. These events may be able to be captured using LiDAR technology.

Working with County and State Agencies

Facilitator(s): Andras Holzmann, Passaic County
Elise Bremer-Nei, NJDOT Bureau of Safety, Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs

What is the process for implementing new roadway signage? How can we know the best locations for new signs?

- Requests for new signage should be made to the country engineering office or the state DOT.

- Engineers often do in-house studies to determine the best locations for new signs.

- It is often useful to place new signage in heavily-used bicycle corridors.

- In Pennsylvania, a new signage program has been implemented on roads with high rates of traffic crashes and fatalities. The signs notified users that they will be charged extra fines for traffic violations. A similar project, the Safe Corridor Program, was implemented in New Jersey, but has expired due to a lack of funding.

- Community engagement is important for gaining support from county stakeholders that can help implement these projects.

Redevelopment

What is most important when conducting redevelopment for Complete Streets?

- Ensure that Complete Streets checklists for safety measures apply to redevelopment as well as greenfield projects.

- Treat redevelopment plans as opportunities to ensure that Complete Streets principles are taken into account in projects and road changes.

- Know that redevelopment serves as an opportunity for Complete Streets to improve safety on internal roadways, as well as in larger projects.

- Review recent Department of Environmental Protection rules regarding stormwater management for large redevelopment projects.

- Consider implementing school climate projects to promote green infrastructure implementation.