



TECHSUMMARY June 2023

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Evaluate the Impacts of Complete Streets Policy in Louisiana

INTRODUCTION

Complete Streets are streets for everyone (including freight shipping); no matter who they are (regardless of age, ability, race, or income level); or how they travel (whether driving, taking transit, cycling, or walking). The purpose is to provide all users safe, convenient, and comfortable access through their transportation system. Over 1,500 agencies at the local, regional, and state levels have adopted Complete Streets policies in the U.S. in the last 10 years. However, we know relatively little about how successfully these policies have been implemented and whether DOTD has achieved the policy goals. Evaluating the effects of Complete Streets policy on agency processes and built environment outcomes is needed. The evaluation results will help DOTD identify implementation challenges and potential improvements. Though this study was conducted for Louisiana specifically, the evaluation procedure, data sources, methodologies, and recommendations are expected to be applicable to other states and government agencies facing challenges in implementing Complete Streets policy.

OBJECTIVE

The focus of this research project was to evaluate the impacts of the Complete Streets policy in Louisiana. The objectives of this research project included: (1) evaluating policy impacts to project scoping and delivery; (2) summarizing and evaluating what changes the agency has made in terms of documents, policies, staffing, training, etc. to advance implementation of the Complete Streets policy; (3) evaluating policy impacts at a disaggregate level; and (4) understanding the contribution of outputs to outcomes in different contexts.

SCOPE

The current study evaluated the components and extent of Complete Streets policy implementation for a state agency, DOTD. The spatial scope of the evaluation covers all the Louisiana parishes (or DOTD districts). The temporal scope of this evaluation is the 10-year period between 1/1/2011 and 12/31/2020.

The scope of the agency document review included all DOTD documents pertaining to the planning, design, construction, and operation of non-access controlled roadways, including documents identified in the 2018 Complete Streets Legislative Update and others identified by the Project Review Committee and/or research team, but excluding long-range or programmatic plans. This study focused on pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Transit accommodations and freight are not addressed in the Complete Streets Minimum Design Guidelines and are thus excluded from this analysis.

In reviewing DOTD-funded projects, the research team focused on whether a project considered the Complete Streets Policy and whether sidewalks, bike lanes, or multi-use paths were built to meet the Complete Streets Minimum Design Guidelines. Conflict treatments (e.g., intersection treatments) were not evaluated due to the lack of available data. Similarly, road users like freight vehicles and transit riders were not evaluated, as these are not referenced within the Complete Streets Minimum Design Guidelines.

METHODOLOGY

The research team started by reviewing DOTD's policies, guidelines, and manuals to summarize whether and how these documents were updated in the last 10 years to accommodate the Policy. This evaluation highlights the extent to which the Policy has been operationalized throughout the agency, as well as gaps and points of conflict, which may inhibit or complicate effective implementation.

Then the research team reviewed construction projects funded by DOTD between 1/1/2011 and 12/31/2020 to find out how policy, guideline, and manual updates were reflected in practice. The following tasks were undertaken: (1) investigate how many projects received exemptions from Complete Streets accommodations and (2) understand the reasons why pedestrian and bicycle components were exempted. This review informs

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our understanding of the extent to which the Policy has impacted project scoping as well as any persistent barriers to implementation that may limit its efficacy.

The research team developed a survey questionnaire and interview questions to collect stakeholders' responses to the policy implementation, including assessment of policy comprehension and interpretation, perceptions of efficacy, and reflections on a decade of practice from a variety of viewpoints. Stakeholders' involvement (e.g., their attitude toward and awareness of the implemented policy) is of vital significance to successful policy implementation. In addition, continuously engaging stakeholders in policy implementation evaluation is a key to applying evaluation results successfully in practice.

Finally, the research team collected active transportation infrastructure data and data from emerging data sources to conduct longitudinal project outcome evaluations in different contexts (i.e., urban/rural and facility type). Complete Streets projects (e.g., building sidewalks and bike lanes) can bring multifaceted benefits to their surroundings in addition to improving safety. However, before-and-after analysis regarding project outcomes (i.e., mobility and accessibility) is historically quite limited in practice. This study offered a solution to quantify longitudinal project outcomes from multiple perspectives to support future project selection, prioritization, and evaluation.

Based on information acquired from the above-mentioned work, the research team reviewed best practices from other state DOTs in solving the identified challenging issues for DOTD's consideration. In particular, the research team conducted an in-depth review of state DOTs' practices in integrating the concepts of Complete Streets into Preservation, Rehabilitation, and Replacement (PRR) projects.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the agency document review, the following policy implementation processes take significant time: (1) updating policies, guidelines, and manuals; (2) having updates reflected in daily practice (such as updating project forms); and (3) having new projects adopt the most up-to-date version of forms. The process is iterative: updates to one document may reveal new changes necessary elsewhere. Overall, culture change from focusing on auto-mobility to balancing accommodations for all modes is a long-term challenge.

Based on the survey/interview responses, several stakeholders reported substantial progress over the last 10 years and major shifts in the degree to which active transportation is considered, discussed, and advanced, but stakeholders still report a perception of a slow pace

of change. Gaps in policy awareness and diffusion are also apparent, highlighting a need for ongoing outreach and sustained leadership to encourage broad institutional support for Policy implementation. The stakeholder surveys and interviews highlighted the need for continued development of design guidance to fit a variety of contexts, more training to diffuse policy expertise throughout the agency (and its contractors), and development of enhanced input datasets and tools to aid planners and designers in decision-makings. Responses also highlighted opportunities for DOTD to exhibit leadership and be an exemplary partner to local agencies, while taking opportunities to identify and promote previous success.

Based on the project review, additional efforts are needed to facilitate more frequent project reviews and performance tracking, such as upgrading the existing project management system. In addition, more attention should be given to Preservation, Rehabilitation, and Replacement (PRR) projects to make more significant progress on influencing the built environment. Similarly, opportunities for concept integration also exist in other DOTD programs, such as Operation Program and Local Road Safety Program (LRSP). Lastly, this study only considered longitudinal treatments as emphasized in the Policy. Opportunities exist in addressing conflict treatments at intersections and their integrations into various DOTD programs.

Based on project outcome evaluations, data and measurement gaps exist. First, statewide active transportation infrastructure data (including spatial presence and facility attributes) needs to be collected and updated routinely. Second, data source and outcome evaluation measure challenges exist and need future improvements. Third, rural areas may need more attention regarding data availability (e.g., traffic volume), speeding concerns, and work zone safety matters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study resulted in 15 distinct recommendations outlining 75 specific potential action steps across three key areas: updating and improving data systems; expanding the specificity of guidance and supporting innovative design; and emphasizing outreach and education. DOTD's Complete Streets Steering Group should reconvene to review and discuss the "Recommendations" section of the final report and identify action steps, responsible leads, and timelines.