

Completing the streets of Buffalo for cyclists and pedestrians

The City of Buffalo may have found a way to solve safety conditions on the road, decrease the population's obesity rate and play a role in saving the environment, all by completing the streets.

The City of Buffalo filed the Complete the Street Resolution, which, if passed, would improve roads and sidewalks to accommodate all types of transportation through road networks. The networks would include bicycle lanes, sidewalks, crosswalks, benches, street trees and public transit shelters.

"We currently have a bill in the Senate and we expect a bill to be introduced in the House soon," said Lisa Jacobson, fellow of Smart Growth America for the National Complete the Streets Coalition, the organization that would oversee the project.

The project is based on the belief that city streets should be for every type of commuter, according to the Complete the Streets Web site.

"I think one of the most important benefits is that nobody is left out. Oftentimes, people that don't own a car or don't drive are limited. Complete streets create a network where anyone old or young, disabled, blind, anyone, can get around because the design elements are there," Jacobson said.

Now, city streets across the US, including those in Buffalo, are designed solely for car traffic, but the project looks to change that precedent.

"Complete streets promotes best and latest street design practices to get everyone around safely and efficiently, and allows travelers to get where they want to go with whatever mode they choose," Jacobson said.

According to a poll by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board (BPAB), a large percentage of Americans want to bike and walk more, and drive less.

Americans' deteriorating health is an issue the campaign would tackle, according to the Complete the Streets Web site. In Western New York, three out of every five people are overweight or obese, which makes up over 60 percent of the population, according to the UB Regional Institute statistics. Complete the Street would attempt to combat this ever-growing statistic.

The project also aims to make the city streets safer, according to the BPAB Web site. The Board predicts that with an increased number of people biking or walking, deaths and injuries would decline.

In New York State, there were over 15,000 car accidents involving pedestrians in 2005, according to the

Center for Disease Control Web site. Six thousand crashes involved bicyclists and motor vehicles.

Under New York State laws, cyclists follow the same laws as motorists, have the same responsibilities and at many times they have to share the road, as opposed to having separate roadways for cyclists deemed safer by nysdot.gov.

Currently, there aren't alternatives that are equal to the option of riding in the city streets for bicyclists in Buffalo. Although sidewalks sometimes present an alternative, they don't provide the same convenience and speed of transportation since it is illegal to ride bicycles on the sidewalks in most locations, according to nysdot.gov.

Buffalo's poor economy could also benefit from Complete the Streets because making the streets safe and accessible for all types of transportation leads to more people traveling to more places, according to Jacobson.

"When a street is designed from the beginning, or during a retrofit, new construction or repaving, for example, there isn't necessarily an added cost [to implement complete streets]," Jacobson said.

Complete the Streets advocates also think the program would be beneficial for the environment, hopefully decreasing the number of cars on the road. If a community of 100,000 people walked somewhere instead of driving once in a month, it would cut carbon dioxide emissions by 3,764 tons per year, according to the Complete the Streets Web site.

The Buffalo Complete Streets Proposal could be passed if enough people contact their local legislators to show their support, according to the BPAB.

