

Case Study: Carson City, Nevada's Multi-faceted Approach to Complete Streets

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By committing to long-term goals for increasing multimodal access and user safety, the City of Carson City, Nevada, and the Carson Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) developed a robust Complete Streets program within its downtown corridor. This began with the [2026 Carson City Master Plan](#), adopted in 2006, demonstrating Carson City's early vision to improve the conditions of roadways and increase safety and connectivity for all travelers within its transportation network. Since then, the City has established policies, secured funding streams, and conducted community engagement to bring Complete Streets to the Carson City region.

The Complete Streets initiative began when the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) proposed the construction a new freeway, which would result in a drop in traffic through Carson City's downtown core. The City used travel demand modeling to support Complete Streets improvements to enhance the quality of life for all travelers using the transportation network.

In 2014, the City enacted a [Complete Streets policy](#) and passed a one-eighth percent sales tax increase to fund such developments. An estimated \$11 million, or 61% of total funds raised, goes to downtown corridor improvements. The City used these funds, and other local funding sources, to support the successful application for two Federal grants, a TIGER grant in 2018 for \$7.5 million, and a RAISE grant in 2021 for \$9.3 million. These funds allowed the city to redevelop corridor safety, multimodal, roadway, and urban beautification improvements. The city optimizes its Complete Streets efforts by intentionally pairing infrastructure improvements with Complete

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 2026 Master Plan laid the foundation for Complete Streets projects with an emphasis on safety, equity, and connectivity.
- The 2014 Complete Streets policy codified Carson City's priority to incorporate Complete Streets design concepts into its transportation network.
- The city recently received two Federal grants to support the Complete Streets corridor redevelopment:
 - A TIGER grant in 2018 for \$7.5 million and,
 - A RAISE grant in 2021 for \$9.3 million.

IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2014, Carson City passed a one-eighth percent sales tax increase to fund Complete Streets projects and initiatives.
- Carson City developed the [Complete Streets Performance Monitoring Program](#) to measure the effectiveness of its Complete Streets projects.

Streets projects to induce additional funding support by leveraging shared institutional resources and consolidating construction costs.

Background and Demographics

Located near the Sierra Nevada mountains, Carson City, Nevada, has a population of approximately 59,000 individuals. It serves as the state capital of Nevada and is close to Lake Tahoe, a popular tourist destination for residents of Nevada and California. The local governing body consists of a five-member board of supervisors, including a mayor, all of whom are elected by and accountable to the voters.¹

The City's Public Works Department oversees capital and transportation planning projects for the city. The Planning Division coordinates land development, current and long-range plans, zoning matters, environmental and historic preservation, and other special projects.² Currently, there are three key corridors within the city developed with Complete Streets practices, the [Downtown Corridor](#), [South Carson Street](#), and [Curry Street](#), with plans in progress for two additional corridors, [Colorado Street](#) and [East William Street](#). Uniquely, the MPO is embedded within the City's Public Works department, streamlining Complete Streets project development, and enabling efficient and uniform planning and project implementation between the two agencies.

The Road to Complete Streets

Carson City Comprehensive Master Plan

Carson City's most recent [Comprehensive Master Plan](#), adopted in 2006, laid the foundation for its Complete Streets program. The Master Plan outlines five key guiding principles, one of which is "A Connected City."³ This principle outlines Carson City's intent to "promote a sense of community by linking its many neighborhoods, employment areas, activity centers, parks, recreational amenities and schools with an extensive system of interconnected roadways, multi-use pathways, bicycle facilities and sidewalks."⁴ This aligns with Complete Streets priorities, emphasizing mobility for all users of the road, whether they are drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, transit riders, or micromobility users.

Complete Streets Policy

Building on achievements of the Master Plan, the City adopted a Complete Streets Policy in 2014. The [Policy](#) clarifies the vision and strengthens the intent to create a safe and connected transportation network for all users to travel comfortably within the transportation mode(s) of its choice.⁵ The policy directed the City and private development to incorporate Complete Streets design elements into project plans and to evaluate performance using specific metrics, including number of new or repainted sidewalks, efficiency of transit vehicles on routes, and incorporation of public art projects. In January 2022, an amended version of the policy was enacted, reaffirming Carson City's commitment to Complete Streets priorities.

¹ Carson City. "OUR CITY | Carson City." [Our City](#)

² Carson City. "Planning Division | Carson City." [Planning Division](#)

³ Carson City. "Carson City Master Plan." [Carson City Master Plan](#)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Carson City. 2014 "Carson City Complete Streets Policy." [Carson City Complete Streets Policy](#)

Complete Streets Project Funding

Funding for Carson City's Complete Streets projects comes from a variety of sources, including a voluntary fee residents can opt in for when completing or renewing its vehicle registration. In 2014, the Carson City Board of Supervisors enacted a one-eighth percent sales tax increase to help fund improvements to major commercial corridors, such as the [Downtown Corridor](#). The expenditure plan for this tax specifically directs revenue to fund projects focused on connectivity, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and accessibility. This funding stream enabled the City to take advantage of low interest rates and issue \$13.6 million in bonds backed by the enhanced sales tax stream to pay for the downtown corridor, which included Complete Streets design elements. Additionally, the city captured value from its tourism industry, which accounts for up to 40% of sales tax revenue as of 2018, paid primarily by non-Carson City residents.⁶

Carson City was awarded a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant of \$7.5 million in March 2018, as well as a \$9.3 million Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation in 2021. By connecting sources of funding and implementing Complete Streets policies across a variety of projects, Carson City has been able to advance these practices in its jurisdiction through projects like the [South Carson Street Project](#).

Complete Streets Performance Monitoring Program

In addition to creating policy and implementing projects, Carson City developed the [Complete Streets Performance Monitoring Program](#) to measure the impacts of its Complete Streets projects.⁷ The program started as a way to document new projects, demonstrate the value of Complete Streets to encourage future development and funding opportunities, and demonstrate improvements to transportation efficiencies.

The program instituted a methodology for the collection of pre- and post-project pedestrian and bicycle data. By monitoring these counts, city staff establish baseline information about the activity on various streets and evaluate the performance of the Complete Streets measures. The collection methodology consists of rotating four electronic pedestrian counters and two electronic bicycle counters on a weekly to monthly basis between various locations in the city, which have been targeted for Complete Streets interventions. Moving forward Carson City aims to expand its monitoring capabilities and strategies for communicating project progress performance to the public.

Advancing Complete Streets Practices

Targeted Complete Streets Projects

Carson City targeted several key corridors for redevelopment, incorporating Complete Streets principles into the overall project plans. The first project, the [Carson Street Downtown Corridor](#), renovated an overbuilt, retired State highway with a new travel lane configuration, bike lanes, and pedestrian

⁶ Carson Proud. "Downtown Corridor." [Downtown Corridor](#)

⁷ Carson Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. "Complete Streets Performance Monitoring Program." [Carson City Complete Streets Performance Monitoring Program](#)

walkways. Originally, the project design included no space for parking and 65-foot roads curbs to curb. Compromises to accommodate a variety of uses altered the final project configuration to include 40-foot curb to curb roads and a handful of small parking areas. The next project, Curry Street, which broke ground in 2016, included replacement of aging water, sewer, and storm drain infrastructure; wider sidewalks; energy-efficient LED streetlights for enhanced safety; landscaping; urban street furnishings; and other streetscape amenities. By incorporating Complete Streets elements with infrastructure improvements, the city garnered greater support with a dig once approach.

In 2020, the city broke ground on the [South Carson Complete Streets Project](#). The project includes a road diet that reduced travel lanes, provided dedicated bicycle facilities, a shared-use path for pedestrians and bicyclists, a multi-lane roundabout, upgraded utilities, landscape and aesthetic improvements, and enhanced business access along South Carson Street. Planners and engineers from the City's Public Works Department and Metropolitan Planning Organization engaged the residents of neighborhoods adjacent to the South Carson Street corridor and talked directly to business owners about the project's benefits. Information on, safety, pavement conditions, and the efficient use of funds were shared.

Carson City has also constructed non-motorized multi-use paths along the Carson City Freeway. In 2011, the city worked with a consultant and conducted public engagement efforts to determine the best approaches to aligning the mobility and accessibility benefits along proposed paths. These bike and pedestrian routes along the Freeway linked to both the South Carson Street corridor and the East William Street corridor projects. The network of multi-use paths along the freeway continues to grow. The [CAMPO 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program](#) includes the construction of a 2.3-mile freeway multi-use path that run from Colorado Street to the Edmonds Sports Complex (currently under development).

Safe Routes to School

In 2020, Carson City in partnership with the Metropolitan Planning Organization implemented a Safe Routes to School Master Plan adopted by the Carson City Regional Transportation Commission and incorporated into CAMPO's 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The plan guides development of safe facilities for students, families, and school officials travelling in the one-mile radius around the city's six elementary schools and two middle schools. Activities in the plan include hosting educational workshops, establishing law enforcement and crossing guard programs, developing a champions program and network, and generating community travel safety plans. Carson City leveraged its involvement in the master plan to demonstrate a regional need for Safe Routes to School programming to have sufficient funding and resources. The City has secured Federal [Surface Transportation Block Grant](#) (STBG) funding and Congressionally Directed Spending through NDOT to help fund the region's Safe Routes to School efforts. The Colorado Street Complete Street Project used the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan and the Safe Routes to School Plan to demonstrate need and public support.

Prioritizing User Safety

Carson City prioritizes users in their projects. By design, all street corridor improvements include five key elements: safe and efficient business access, lighting and pavement improvements, pedestrian access

and connectivity, bike lanes installation, and aesthetics enhancements through parkway landscaping.⁸ By improving roadway lighting, creating bike facilities, and improving pedestrian infrastructure, the Carson City Complete Streets projects address the Safe Road element of the [Safe Systems Approach](#), a paradigm shift in the way we address roadway safety which sets an ethical imperative that no one should die or be seriously injured while using the street network.

Public Participation and Stakeholder Outreach

To elicit community feedback, Carson City created several ways for people to engage including a website, surveys, contact via telephone or email, and informational newsletters. In October 2020, when planning the [Colorado Street Rehabilitation Project](#), Carson City Public Works distributed a Needs Assessment Survey to residents in the vicinity of Colorado Street. The survey included a description of the project itself and eight questions for respondents to indicate safety and operational issues they experience traveling along the corridor and their vision for an improved corridor. The first round of the survey garnered 67 completed online surveys and 47 mail-in public comment forms. In January 2021, Carson City Public Works distributed a follow-up survey to populations living and working near the corridor to introduce and collect comments on proposed corridor improvements developed based on feedback from the first survey. This direct community engagement aligns with the Federal Highway Administration's Complete Streets equity strategy, which aims to leverage benefits for communities previously excluded by "engaging with communities and ensuring that project prioritization considers existing disparities."⁹ Near the completion of the South Carson Complete Streets Project, Public Works through the Utility Billing Division, sent out educational pamphlets on multi-lane roundabouts with the monthly utility billing statements to help educate Carson City residents on how to safely drive, walk, run, cycle through a multi-lane roundabout. This was a creative and effective way to reach nearly all of the 59,000 residents and ultimately target the future users of the roundabout.

Like other places implementing Complete Streets projects, Carson City contends with differing definitions of a Complete Street corridor. Planners incorporate education to public project meetings to reinforce the idea that the transportation improvements are meant to benefit all modes of travel, not just private vehicles. Additionally, planners and engineers incorporated additional infrastructure elements, such as landscaping and water and sewer system upgrades, to garner support for the City's Complete Streets investments. The population exhibits a heavy preference toward vehicle travel and a robust multi-modal community – by having projects that address both types of users, public meetings were successful. Currently, the MPO is updating its public participation plan, which emphasizes public involvement strategies that center on equity.

Next Steps

With funding streams currently in place to support upcoming Complete Streets projects, the Carson City Public Works and MPO planning team work to keep project development on time, on budget, and to

⁸ Carson City, Nevada. "South Carson Street Neighborhood Improvement District." [South Carson Street Neighborhood Improvement District](#)

⁹ *Complete Streets in FHWA*. (n.d.). US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. Retrieved July 14, 2022, from <https://highways.dot.gov/complete-streets/complete-streets-fhwa>

communicate progress to stakeholders and the public. The city plans to continue to advance Complete Streets practices with two additional community improvement projects in the near future, [East William Street](#) and the Colorado Street Rehabilitation Project. Both projects incorporate safety enhancements and Complete Streets transportation improvements such as bike lanes, as well as other upgrades to roadway utility infrastructure. Adapting existing street designs to accommodate multiple users and modes of travel requires cultural change, and it will be important for the city and MPO to maintain communication and collaboration across different teams and departments in the city and state. Ultimately, Carson City looks to establish a Complete Streets network with good holistic “dig once” investments in the community.

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Resources

[Carson City Complete Streets Policy](#)

[Carson City Master Plan](#)

[Carson City Complete Streets Performance Monitoring Program](#)

[Colorado Street Rehabilitation Project](#)

[Complete Streets in FHWA](#)

[Curry Street](#)

[Downtown Corridor](#)

[East William Street](#)

[FHWA Safe System Approach](#)

[South Carson Street](#)

[South Carson Street Neighborhood Improvement District](#)

[Transportation Improvement Program](#)