



# COMPLETE STREETS POLICY STUDY

March 2016







### **Iowa State University Community Design Lab**

2321 North Loop Dr., Suite 121, Ames, IA 50010

515.294.2213

[isucdl@iastate.edu](mailto:isucdl@iastate.edu)

website: [research.design.iastate.edu/communitydesignlab/](http://research.design.iastate.edu/communitydesignlab/)

Director: Carl Rogers, Assoc. Professor

Design Fellow: Chad Hunter

Research Assistants: Tim Buescher and Morgan Van Denack

### **IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Extension and Outreach**

Community and Economic Development

### **Iowa State University Community Design Lab**

2321 North Loop Dr., Suite 121, Ames, IA 50010

515.509.0651

[cjseeger@iastate.edu](mailto:cjseeger@iastate.edu)

website: [extension.iastate.edu/communities](http://extension.iastate.edu/communities)

Extension Specialist: Christopher J. Seeger, Assoc. Professor

Graduate Assistant: Austin Dunn



### **Iowa Department of Public Health**

Lucas State Office Bldg., 321 E 12th St. Des Moines, IA 50319

515.242.6709

[sarah.taylorwatts@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:sarah.taylorwatts@idph.iowa.gov)

website: [idph.iowa.gov/nutrition-physical-activity](http://idph.iowa.gov/nutrition-physical-activity)

Sarah Taylor Watts, MPA, PAPHS

Physical Activity Coordinator





# PROJECT OVERVIEW

Cindy Kendall, *Extension Specialist Office of State and Local Government Programs / Iowa League of Cities*, provided contact information for communities throughout the state of Iowa. On behalf of the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development office and the Iowa Department of Public Health, this information was used to collect data related to the community's complete street policies and transportation plans. For this study, the search was limited to the Iowa towns with populations over 7000 residents. Of Iowa's 947 incorporated cities, 58 of them have populations over 7000.

The project goals were to determine the following:

- Communities that currently have a complete streets policy and/or complete streets language within current or planned transportation plans,
- The community's type of policy or plan,
- To what degree the policy or plan has been implemented.

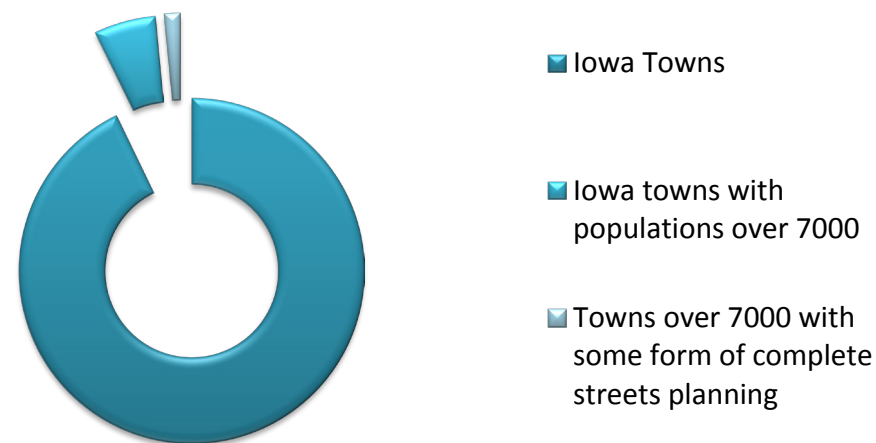
According to Smart Growth America, "Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities." ([smartgrowthamerica.org](http://smartgrowthamerica.org)). Most policies identify additional categories of importance with regards to complete streets, such as creating equity, improved environmental conditions and economic benefits for residents, business owners and the city. The design of a complete street aims to eliminate the demand for personal vehicles and encourage alternative forms of transportation. Complete streets may also include green infrastructure design features that can have many positive environmental effects. Complete streets are context-sensitive, place-based design strategies that meet the specific needs of all potential users.

Communities were contacted via email with follow up phone calls when needed. The following questions along with the previous complete streets overview were utilized to determine each community's current complete streets status.

- Are you aware if your town has created or drafted policies or documents that support complete streets?
- Does your transportation plan utilize complete streets standards or guidelines or utilize language similar in them for determining project goals and assessments?

Supplementary questions included:

- When was your policy/document approved?
- Is your policy/document currently utilized in the transportation planning policy?
- Are there complete streets currently implemented in your town?



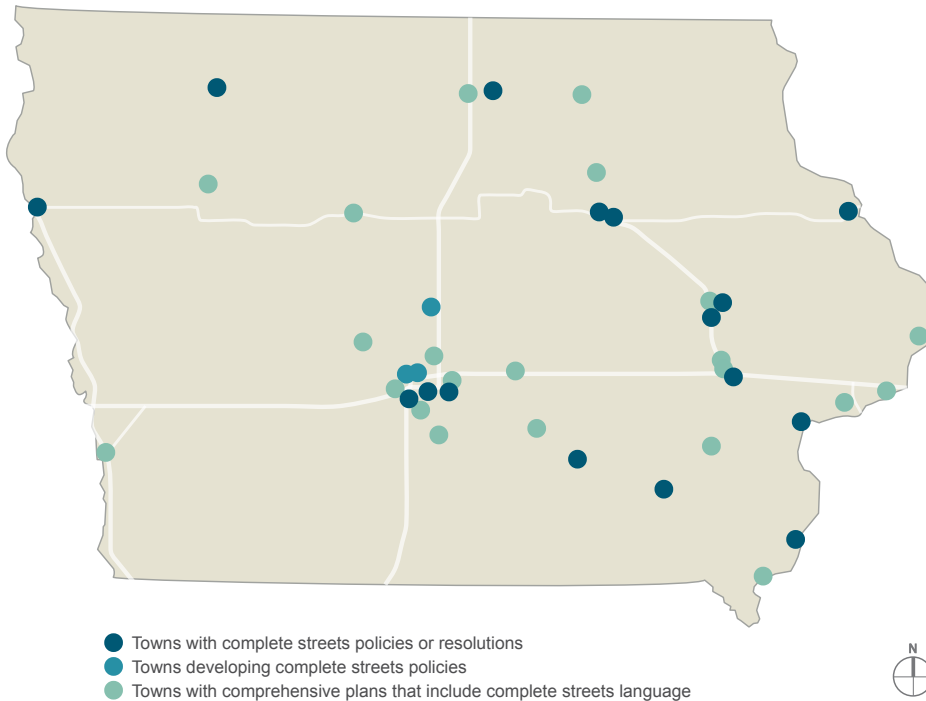
Of the 58 towns that were investigated, 16 of them had adopted a complete streets policy or resolution. Another three towns are currently working toward developing policies.



# PROJECT STUDY FINDINGS

Complete streets plans and policies can take on many forms including, but not limited to:

- Complete streets policy/plan reports
- Complete streets resolutions
- Mayor's proclamations to work toward complete streets
- Transportation or comprehensive plans based on or utilizing complete streets guidelines, standards or language



Among the 58 towns that were investigated:

- 16 towns have complete streets policies or resolutions
- 3 towns have policies in development or mayor's proclamations to work toward complete streets policies
- 22 towns have comprehensive or transportation plans that reference complete streets

## Towns with Complete Streets Policies or Resolutions

Approximately 1/4 of the towns that were investigated did have some form of a complete streets policy. The length and depth to these policies varied from multi-page reports to single one and two page resolutions that set a framework to help guide transportation and land-use decisions within their comprehensive or transportation plans. Most of these policies were adopted within the past few years. Towns that currently have adopted complete streets policies include:

- |                      |                         |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| • Burlington; 2015   | • Mason City; 2013      |
| • Cedar Falls; 2013  | • Muscatine; 2013       |
| • Cedar Rapids; 2014 | • Oskaloosa; 2016       |
| • Des Moines; 2008   | • Pleasant Hill; 2016   |
| • Dubuque; 2011      | • Sioux City; 2014      |
| • Fairfield; 2014    | • Spencer; 2013         |
| • Iowa City; 2015    | • Waterloo; 2013        |
| • Marion; 2016       | • West Des Moines; 2015 |

There are also complete streets plans and policies developed at a regional scale by metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) which help to direct local transportation decisions within its member communities. This is the case for the Ames Area MPO, the MPO of Johnson County which includes the Iowa City area, the Bi-State Regional Commission of the Quad Cities, and Corridor (MPO) which is focused on the Cedar Rapids region.



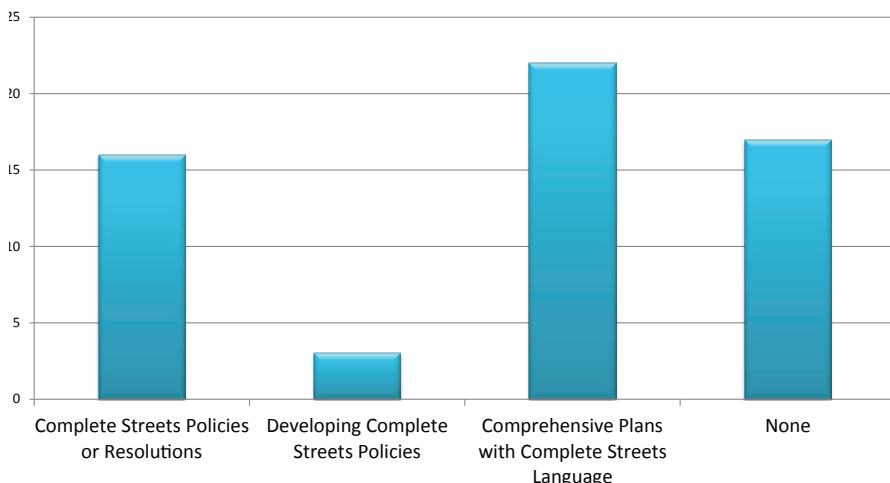
# PROJECT STUDY FINDINGS

## Towns Developing Complete Streets Policies

Three towns in the study were currently in the process of developing a complete streets policy. This development can range from a mayor's proclamation that states a communities initiative in pursuing the development of complete streets and complete streets policy, to nearly realized drafts of policies and plans. The towns which are currently developing policies include:

- Ames
- Grimes
- Johnston

The Des Moines Area MPO is currently advocating for complete streets within it member communities and is in the process of developing a complete streets policy template for its member governments to utilize. These efforts along with funding initiatives to support policy development could establish complete streets within many of the other communities included in this study that do not currently have a policy or comprehensive plan guided by complete streets standards.



## Towns with Comprehensive Plans that Include Complete Streets Language

Twenty-two towns have not developed complete streets initiatives as independent policies, but have considered them within comprehensive plans and long-range transportation plans. Within these planning documents the reference or guiding principles of complete streets varies widely. Some of the planning documents that were explored mentioned complete streets briefly as a strategy to consider, while others utilized the language and standards of complete streets to more directly guide transportation and land-use strategies laid out within the plans. Towns which have current comprehensive plans that reference complete streets include:

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| • Altoona        | • Hiawatha      |
| • Ankeny         | • Indianola     |
| • Bettendorf     | • Newton        |
| • Charles City   | • North Liberty |
| • Clear Lake     | • Norwalk       |
| • Clinton        | • Pella         |
| • Coralville     | • Perry         |
| • Council Bluffs | • Storm Lake    |
| • Davenport      | • Washington    |
| • Fort Dodge     | • Waukee        |
| • Fort Madison   | • Waverly       |

Towns which currently have or are developing complete streets policies will most likely also have comprehensive plans that include complete streets language.



# SUMMARY & FURTHER STUDY

This study investigated the development of complete streets policies and planning efforts of 58 towns within the state of Iowa. Information was gathered through survey questions with follow up phone calls as well as looking through planning documents provided by city officials or found within city web pages. Beyond the results provided on the previous pages, talking with city officials provided additional information regarding the intentions and progress of individual communities.

Our inquiries yielded FIVE types of results:

- Towns with complete streets policies and/or complete streets guided transportation plans
- Towns that do not have complete streets due to funding or a lack of interest in converting to complete streets standards
- Towns looking into complete streets, but are unsure about how expanding will change their identity as a small town
- Towns that don't have complete streets but are making huge improvements elsewhere (i.e. regional trail connections)
- Towns that were not looking into complete streets

The majority of the towns that had adopted complete streets or were developing complete streets policies were located in and around Iowa's metropolitan regions such as Des Moines, the Quad Cities, and Iowa City. Outside of the Des Moines Area, the eastern side of the state is much more populated with towns that have adopted complete streets plans or are utilizing similar language and standards within the comprehensive planning efforts.

Our initial contacts for most of the towns was the City Clerk. In some cases, we were able to gather the necessary information from this office; however, we found that the Public Works directors, city planners and city engineers were often more aware of complete streets and any current plans and policies the town may have related to complete streets. This experience illustrates a possible need to develop programs for further education and awareness of complete streets, especially within the communities where they exist, even within the city governments themselves.

Finding appropriate and accurate data can be a challenge due to the lack of awareness about complete streets. Even data gathered through community websites and plans led to some misinformation about the degree to which communities had adopted complete streets policies and what was being considered a complete streets policy or plan.

The lack of awareness regarding complete streets created a greater challenge in gathering data related to the utilization of complete streets policy standards in project selection, design and implementation. In some instances the contact did not have knowledge of complete streets planning within their town, yet we would find the language guiding areas of their comprehensive plans. The limited information gathered regarding implementation during this study does not provide adequate data for comparison or analysis. Further studies could gather additional data about a town's process and progress with complete streets and do on-site investigations of implemented projects.

Future studies may also analyze the varying length and depth of existing policies and resolutions and the degree to which complete streets language and standards are guiding planning strategies within comprehensive and transportation plans.



