

June 10, 2010

Michigan House of Representatives
Michigan House Transportation Committee
State of Michigan
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

RE: COMPLETE STREETS, H.B. 6151 and 6152

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Lyndon Babcock, and I live in Lansing. Much appreciated is the opportunity to provide my observations and opinions about Complete Streets.

Based on a lifetime of pedal cycling, adult driving, and professional experience, I am convinced that the Complete Streets concept can benefit travel for both non-motorized and motorized modes.

Complete Streets are especially welcomed by older individuals with or without disabilities, people who presently hesitate or are unable to walk or pedal along incomplete Michigan streets and roads.

My age is 76, and during my lifetime of bicycling, I have seen many changes in our streets and roads as well as changes in me. My symptoms that became apparent in 1980 were eventually diagnosed as multiple sclerosis (MS).

My first significant pedaling began in 1944, at age 10. With older carriers going to war, I used my one-speed bicycle to pick up and deliver the *Detroit News*. Things were different then. Neither my parents nor I seemed particularly worried as I bicycled on Detroit's busy streets. Bicycles were common sights as they shared the roads with motor vehicles. Wartime gas rationing and 35 mph speed limits probably helped make bicycling less risky. Whatever the reason, "road rage" was not in our vocabulary 65 years ago.

The war ended and accommodation of bicycling began to decrease. Even so, my teenage and adult bicycling during subsequent decades was mostly pleasant.

As an adult, I enjoyed long-distance recreational rides, a few races, and was a bicycle commuter in Chicago as well as in Mexico City. I didn't consider motor vehicles to be a problem. The still valid basic principle seemed sufficient: Same roads, same rights, same rules! The first striped bicycle lane in Chicago didn't appear until 1990, and I rarely used it.

As years passed, I have been slowing down, while the MS progressed. I have become much more appreciative of striped lanes and lower-traffic streets that go where I want to go.

By 2000, I was having increased difficulty with walking, balance, and getting on and off a two-wheeler.

Succumbing to family pressure, in 2007 I switched to a recumbent tricycle. It features two flags and a milk crate. Not as fast as a two wheeler, but three and four-wheeled pedal cycles are a wonderful option to encourage elderly and partially disabled to exercise and travel on Complete Streets.

Sort of embarrassing for a dedicated bicyclist to regress to three wheels, but remarks such as "That's cool" help offset profanities from misinformed car drivers. Better yet is the occasional question: "Where can I buy one?"

I prefer to pedal, but today I arrive at this hearing by public transit, another vital component of Complete Streets.

For me with MS, pedaling is much easier than walking. Unaided, I can't lift my right foot off the ground. With assistance from two bungee cords I can lift my foot enough to enable me to take steps. My tricycle remarkably increases my travel radius.

At this point, some readers might conclude that my cycling experience supports the contention that Complete Streets are not needed. Wrong! Complete Streets will enable me and countless others to be mobile longer and safer.

Mobility should be a right rather than a privilege restricted to those with access to motor vehicles.

What about people who do not have access to walking, cycling, or a motor vehicle?. My Lansing neighborhood includes two public housing projects where many families do not have access to cars. The most frightening part of my non-motorized travel is to observe neighbors walking along the only route to the nearest store almost one-mile distant. They use an arterial street without sidewalks, with only a striped shoulder, too rough and too narrow to be used by wheelchairs, or for pushing a stroller with one hand and holding the hand of a walking child with the other. At times, speeding cars seem to pass within inches of walking families.

Note that Complete Streets require more than asphalt and concrete. Motorists must share streets, and cyclists must obey traffic regulations. Despite too-frequently-yelled advice, cyclists, do not belong on sidewalks. User education is a vital component of Complete Streets..

What about the health benefits? Walking or cycling while getting where one wants to go on Complete Streets provides an ideal combination of healthy exercise and travel.

My neurologist holds out little hope for an early cure of my MS. However she marvels at the slow progression of my affliction. I think that that means I am supposed to be in a wheelchair by age 76.

She says to KEEP MOVING, and I certainly agree. On Complete Streets, it's healthy and fun, and it might keep me and others out of wheel chairs—or much worse.

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May 25, 2010

