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FOUNDATION

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## Testimony House Transportation Committee Complete Streets – HB 6151 and HB 6152

June 24, 2010

Good morning Chairperson Byrnes and committee members. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Complete Streets. I am Mike Maisner, Vice President of Operations for the Michigan Fitness Foundation. Our mission is to create a physically educated population with the knowledge and skills to enjoy a healthy, vigorous, and safe lifestyle *in communities designed to support physical activity*. With that mission statement, I'm sure you won't be surprised to hear me say that the Michigan Fitness Foundation would like to go on record in support of House Bills 6151 and 6152.

As an organization, we strongly support transportation planning that leads to the development of active infrastructure across the community. First of all, it is important to realize that nearly 1/3 of Michigan residents do not drive because they are too young, too old or have a disability. Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders. Transportation agencies with Complete Streets policies routinely design and operate the entire right of way to ensure their streets and roads work for drivers, transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists, as well as for the aging population, children, and people with disabilities. There is no one prescription for a Complete Street. A Complete Street in a rural setting would typically look a lot different than a Complete Street in an urban center. A common feature in a rural setting might be wide shoulders, while typical features in an urban area could include sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, bus shelters, and refuge medians. Some features, such as medians, improve safety for all users. They enable pedestrians to cross busy roads in two stages, reduce left-turning motorist crashes to zero, and improve bicycle safety. Complete Streets play an important role in livable communities, where all people – regardless of age, ability or mode of transportation – feel safe and welcome on the roadways. A safe walking and bicycling environment is an essential part of improving public transportation and creating friendly, walkable communities.

While there are many benefits associated with Complete Streets, one key attribute is the positive impact on public health. We are facing an obesity epidemic across this country and especially here in Michigan. Over the past 30 years, obesity rates have continued to increase rapidly across all age groups. Among children ages 6-11, the national rate of childhood obesity has quadrupled. The harsh reality is that for the first time in history, we have a whole generation of children that have a shorter life expectancy than their parents (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). Childhood obesity has been linked to changing land use patterns and lifestyle choices which

decrease physical activity opportunities. Many children and their families struggle with integrating physical activity into their daily routines. This has become such a significant problem that the National Institute of Medicine recommends fighting childhood obesity by establishing ordinances to encourage construction of sidewalks, bikeways, and other places for physical activity. A recent study funded by the National Institutes of Health found those who lived in walkable neighborhoods got 30 to 45 minutes more exercise each week than those living in low-walkable areas. Residents of walkable communities were also less likely to be overweight or obese. Sedentary lifestyles are strongly associated with leading causes of early death and disability and a community's transportation network either facilitates or discourages physical activity.

Complete Streets are part of the solution as they spur physical activity and healthier lifestyles. Much of our work at the Michigan Fitness Foundation is focused on positive behavior change for improved health. The built environment has a huge impact on the ability to change behaviors. We are proud to work in partnership with the Michigan Department of Transportation in administering the Safe Routes to School program in Michigan. Complete Streets will clearly help us in creating safer routes to school for our children. In 1969, approximately 50 percent of children in the United States got to school by walking or biking, but in 2001 only 15 percent of students walked or bicycled to school. When routes are safe, walking and biking are easy ways to ease traffic jams, improve air quality around schools, and give students the regular physical activity they need for good health and optimal school performance. Schools with non-motorized access routes can see a 15% increase in the number of students who walk or bike to school. This can add up to 24 minutes of physical activity a day for children (Active Living Research 2007). Complete Streets help create more walkable and bikeable communities and children who walk or bicycle to school show up energized and ready to learn.

Too often, the built environment has made it difficult to integrate physical activity into daily routines. In March, federal Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood declared "the end of favoring motorized transportation at the expense of non-motorized" and urged state and local planners to better accommodate and track pedestrians and riders. First Lady Michelle Obama's recently released Let's Move campaign specifically recommends Complete Streets as part of the action plan to end childhood obesity in a generation. Complete Streets principles are also gaining momentum across the nation as more than 130 jurisdictions, including 24 states, have adopted some sort of Complete Streets policy. It's not surprising when you consider that Complete Streets help create livable communities, spark economic revitalization, provide children, older adults and persons with disabilities with safe mobility options, create connected transportation networks, and make public transit safe and convenient. There are many benefits associated with Complete Streets, but a short list might include:

- Increased economic growth, including higher property values and business activity in Complete Street corridors.
- Improved air and water quality from reduced vehicle emissions.
- Enhanced public health as more people incorporate physical activity into their daily routines.
- Greater social equity, as Complete Streets guarantee more access and mobility choices for all people.

- Increased safety and security as an increase in pedestrian traffic is directly linked to a marked decrease in crime.

Supporting Complete Streets is a long-term investment in a stronger and healthier Michigan. Implementing a proactive planning process and policies allows for many projects to be accomplished with little or no extra cost.

Complete Streets help create a sense of place. When you think about communities that are thriving across the nation and here in Michigan, most are pedestrian and bicycle friendly. Think about Portland, Oregon, Seattle, Washington, and Boulder, Colorado. Here in Michigan, how about Traverse City, Grand Rapids, and Ann Arbor. All of these cities have “created community” and a “sense of place”, at least in part, through street design. Young adults aged 18-35 in Michigan, rank “safe Streets” and “walkable streets” in the top three attributes when considering a place to live and work. We know from experience that our young people will vote with their feet when it comes to selecting a place to live and work.

As communities design to be more walkable and bikeable, they will prosper. When communities prosper, so does the whole state of Michigan. In Michigan, we need to create vibrant communities where the best and brightest want to live and therefore businesses want to locate. Complete Streets is an important part of the equation when it comes to creating vibrant communities.

Thank you.

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