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The First State: Delaware Passes Innovative “Complete Communities” Bill

Posted 05/16/16 by [Andrew Dupuy](#) in [Policy](#), [Success Stories](#)



Riverwalk in Wilmington, Delaware | Photo courtesy [mwm1916](#) | CC by 2.0

Exciting news from Delaware. The “First State” in the Union just achieved another first—and this one has important implications for the biking and walking movement. Delaware recently passed an innovative policy tool that [will enable communities to become more biking and walking friendly](http://www.wmdt.com/news/more-local-news/Delaware-house-passes-transit-friendly-bill/39363166) (<http://www.wmdt.com/news/more-local-news/Delaware-house-passes-transit-friendly-bill/39363166>).

On May 5, while attending the Walkable Bikeable Delaware Summit, Gov. Jack Markell signed the “Complete Communities” bill, Senate Bill (SB) 130.



Delaware's Complete Communities bill will help local governments create more safe active-transportation routes like this one in Charlotte, North Carolina. | Photo by Nancy Pierce

This bill sets up a simple framework for local governments and the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) to work together to build bikeable, walkable communities around transit. In exchange for permitting development at a density high enough to increase transit ridership, DelDOT must provide local governments with funding to overcome the most significant barriers to walking and cycling. In addition, DelDOT may not approve funding to increase road capacity in these neighborhoods unless it also determines that these projects will have no negative effect on transit access, pedestrian safety or percentage of trips that can be made by bicycle under low-stress conditions.

Although this innovative approach to transportation planning is something new in the country, the idea recalls an old-fashioned model—the walkable communities that existed before the car culture of the 1950s. In most places in the U.S., local governments who want to undertake this kind of development control their own zoning and planning decisions but may face a state transportation department with different priorities. By aligning the priorities of local and state government, "Complete Communities" planning and investment can re-establish the types of neighborhoods that existed before people exclusively relied on cars.

The Complete Communities partnership between local and state government has the potential to revolutionize the way that communities are developed in Delaware—and could serve as an effective model for other states. Local governments are likely to designate neighborhoods as Complete Community Enterprise Districts for several reasons (<http://www.bikede.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Bikes-and-Transit.pdf>): to reduce the money residents spend on transportation, to promote the development of new businesses, and to promote health by encouraging people to get out of their cars and be more physically active. SB 130 will also make public transportation viable by making it more convenient, easy to use and self-sustainable in the long term. If more people live and work in places where public transportation is accessible, fare box revenue will increase. Public transit agencies can then use that revenue to increase their capacity.

RELATED: [Transportation for People or Cars? USDOT's New Rule Focuses Only on Highways.](#) (<http://trailblog/2016/may/06/transportation-for-people-or-cars-usdot-s-new-rule-focuses-only-on-highways/>)

Bike Delaware led the strong coalition effort to [help pass the bill](http://www.bikede.org/2016/04/14/bikes-and-transit-bill-advances/) (<http://www.bikede.org/2016/04/14/bikes-and-transit-bill-advances/>), with support from a variety of local, state and national organizations, including RTC. Key leadership came from Nemours, a prominent Delaware children's hospital, as well as the American Heart Association and the League of Women Voters of Delaware.

Support was also provided by the Delaware Association of Realtors and Delaware State Chamber of Commerce, who embrace the model as the future of sensible development, and AARP Delaware, who backed the bill due to the benefits it could provide seniors, making communities more accessible through different modes of transportation.

RTC is excited to see how these new communities develop and whether other states might also be able to replicate this model. The "First State" could be on the forefront of a new model for sensible, walkable, bikeable and transit-rich communities all over the country.

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