

Regional Sidewalk Policy

Prepared by:

TOLEDO METROPOLITAN AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



January 2012

The Pedestrian and Bikeways Committee of TMACOG has determined that the following **Regional Sidewalk Policy** is appropriate for consideration of and usage by local jurisdictions within the TMACOG Transportation Planning region. This policy is not meant to be a legal authority nor an all inclusive set of standards for the construction and maintenance of sidewalks, but rather a general guideline of “best practices” for use by communities in the establishment of local policies and ordinances covering the sidewalks.

While it is recognized that each community and each potential location for sidewalks has its own set of unique circumstances that can and will affect the determination and provision of standards for the construction and maintenance of sidewalks, it is recommended that the following factors be considered:

- **CHARACTER OF NEIGHBORHOODS** – The type of neighborhood (i.e. residential, commercial, industrial, urban, suburban, rural, etc.) should be considered in determining the practicality and desirability of mandatory sidewalk construction.
- **NEW DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT** – All development proposals, whether new or redevelopment, shall consider the provision of sidewalks and or other improvements to accommodate pedestrian access.
- **ECONOMIC IMPACT ON NEIGHBORHOODS** – The potential usage of sidewalks by the citizenry should be considered. Certain areas may be dependent for their viability on the provision and maintenance of sidewalks while in other areas sidewalks might conceivably not perform a useful purpose.

- **LOCAL SCHOOL LOCATIONS** – With the increasing reliance of school systems on self transportation by students and parents to area schools, the provision of sidewalks to provide access to schools has become increasingly important. The guidelines of the Safe Routes to Schools Program have emphasized the need for the construction of sidewalks on school walking routes.
- **COMPLETE STREETS** – The concepts of a Complete Street program incorporate the usage of the roadway network for all potential users, not just motor vehicular traffic. In accommodating the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit users, those with disabilities, and other segments of the traveling public, the provision of sidewalks is one essential part of the construction of the transportation system.
- **PEDESTRIANS** – As the primary users of sidewalks it is important to consider the expectations and needs of pedestrians in the design and construction of sidewalks. Sidewalks should provide a consistent and anticipated travel route and should not unexpectedly leave pedestrians with undesirable options for continuation for their travel.
- **ALL USERS** – In the design and installation of all sidewalks, consideration needs to be given to the impacts upon all potential user groups. These should include, but not be limited to those potential users who have sight or other sensory limitations and ambulatory challenges as well as other factors which may not be shared by all users.
- **TREE CANOPY** – Through years of experience it has been realized that not all trees can coexist well in an environment adjacent to streets and sidewalks. Proper choice of tree species, planting and maintenance practices, and appropriate removal where necessary are all factors in the ongoing construction and maintenance of an effective sidewalk system.
- **UTILITIES** – Utilities, both underground and overhead, often provide challenges to the construction and maintenance of the sidewalk system. Through proper planning of new facilities and/or modification of existing, it is desirable to minimize the intrusion of such factors as manhole covers and structures, underground utility chambers and covers, utility poles and guy wires, traffic sign and signal poles, fire hydrants, water and gas shut-off boxes, and the like within the path of sidewalks.

- **BICYCLES** – In certain areas or districts bicycles are permitted to utilize sidewalks whereas in others they are strictly prohibited from traveling on the sidewalks. In design and maintenance of sidewalks it is important to recognize the potential for usage by bicycles and incorporate appropriate standards to accommodate the potential conflict with pedestrians and other users.
- **AESTHETICS** – Consideration should be given to the appearance of new sidewalks so that to the degree that is practical newly installed walks fit in with the appearance and character of existing walks, structures, and improvements in existing neighborhoods.
- **SNOW REMOVAL** – The provision for removal of snow should be considered within the context of the adjacent property owner’s responsibility for the sidewalks. In certain circumstances where the sidewalk facility is designed to be greater in scope than that of a typical sidewalk, consideration might be given by the local jurisdiction to the potential and/or desirability for the sharing or provision of snow removal responsibilities with the adjacent property owner. All snow should be removed from public sidewalks including walks and ramps leading to a crosswalk; and all snow should be removed from the entire constructed width of the sidewalk.
- **RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTENANCE** – The Ohio Revised Code places the liability and the responsibility for maintenance of sidewalks on the adjacent property owner. When the provision of sidewalks are required, particularly when said construction may result in a facility that is greater in scope than that of a typical sidewalk, consideration might be given by the local jurisdiction to the potential and/or desirability for the sharing of maintenance costs with the property owner.

In further guidance of the implementation of this Regional Sidewalk Policy, TMACOG is providing the attached **Sidewalk Design General Guidelines** for consideration by local communities and jurisdictions.

Sidewalk Design General Guidelines

Prepared by:

TOLEDO METROPOLITAN AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



**Subject to Final Approval
January 2012**

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The contents of this report reflect the view of the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, which is responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not reflect the official views or policies of the Ohio Department of Transportation or the U.S. Department of Transportation. This report does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.

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A. Introduction

The Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, through its Pedestrian and Bikeways Committee, has established these general guidelines to provide communities with a reference of best practices in relation to sidewalk standards.

These suggested guidelines are not meant to supersede local, state, or federal policies and regulations, but rather serve as reference material for those communities wishing to establish a sidewalk policy and/or regulations governing the construction of sidewalks or for those jurisdictions that would like to revise or enhance their current policies and regulations. These guidelines are not inclusive of full sidewalk design, construction, or maintenance standards but were created to provide guidance on standards that are considered regionally important by the TMACOG Pedestrian and Bikeways Committee. This document does not provide the legal language of codified sidewalk regulations but can be used in conjunction with appropriate codes to establish same.

B. Policy Guidance Overview

B.1 Sidewalks, shared use paths, street crossings, pedestrian signals, signs, and all connecting pathways should be constructed and maintained so that all pedestrians, including people with disabilities, can travel safely.

B.2 Where law prohibits pedestrians from using the roadway, an effort should be made to accommodate pedestrians elsewhere within the same transportation corridor. Additionally, the concepts of complete streets should be considered during roadway design. Complete streets are those streets designed and operated to take into consideration the safe access of all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities must be able to safely move along and across a complete street.

B.3 Sidewalks should comply with additional design requirements that may be included in neighborhood plans, designated school route plans and other city plans. Sidewalk construction must comply with all applicable local ordinances and state and federal requirements.

B.4 If possible, the design for construction of transportation facilities should include anticipation of future demand for pedestrian facilities. As an example, a project may not currently justify sidewalks; but design can allow for utilities or landscaping to be located so as to have minimal impact upon a future addition of sidewalks, should surrounding land use or corridor designation change.

B.5 Design of intersections and crosswalks should incorporate features to allow pedestrians to cross in a safe and convenient manner as possible.

B.6 When a sidewalk project is initiated, the project limits should be established to carry pedestrian facilities to logical termini such as intersecting roadways. Avoid sidewalks ending mid block.

B.7 Provisions should always be made to include some type of walking facility as part of a vehicular bridge or underpass, if only as an emergency exit path. If possible, sidewalk widths across bridges and through underpasses should be the same as the width of the existing connecting sidewalks and must meet applicable standards including those of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

B.8 Aesthetic consideration should be given to the appearance of new sidewalks. To the degree that is practical newly installed walks should be designed to fit in with the appearance and character of existing walks, structures, and improvements in existing neighborhoods. These considerations should include coloration, materials, and general appearance of new walks without compromising safety and usability.

B.9 All potential user groups should be considered in the design and installation of all sidewalks. These should include, but not be limited to those potential users who have sight or other sensory limitations and ambulatory challenges as well as other factors which may not be shared by all users.

C. Suggested Standards for Sidewalks

The following suggested standards in Section C of this document are based upon the standards currently in place at the time of adoption of the Sidewalk Policy and Design General Guidelines. Jurisdictions adopting standards for sidewalk design, construction and maintenance should reference within their regulations that the current version of the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Location and Design (L&D) Manual, Section 306, Pedestrian Facilities shall be utilized for appropriate standards.

C.1 In order to accommodate users, both ambulatory and non-ambulatory, sidewalks should be a minimum recommended width of five feet. Under certain limited conditions a four foot sidewalk width can be tolerated, although this width does not provide adequate clearance room or mobility for pedestrians passing in opposite directions. A four foot width can be provided if there are 5 foot wide passing sections at least every 200 feet. Also, additional width may be required based on matching adjoining sidewalk widths, anticipated pedestrian use, and character of the area.

C.2 Sidewalk surfaces should be smooth, stable, firm, slip resistant, not exceed standards for cross slope, and be free of surface gaps greater than 0.5 inch in width.

C.3 Sidewalks may be constructed of concrete or asphalt. Concrete walks should normally be 4 inches thick. The exception is at driveway locations where the thickness is increased to 6 inches, or drive thickness, whichever is greater. Asphalt walks should be constructed of 2 inches of asphalt and 5 inches of compacted aggregate base or greater if dictated by local conditions or regulations. Increased thicknesses may be needed if maintenance or emergency vehicles routinely use paths.

C.3 Sidewalks should be kept free from fixed or portable obstacles (fire hydrants, mailboxes, signs, parking meters, street lights, and utility poles). If unable to avoid keeping objects out of this space, then certain dimensional requirements must be maintained. See FHWA's Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access, Part 2, Best Practices Design Guide, Section 4.1.3, for information.

C.4 Sidewalks should be kept free from overhead hanging obstacles (such as vegetation, overhead awnings, signs) to provide a minimum of seven feet of clear head room.

C.5 Placement of utility manhole covers, gratings and other underground chamber covers should be off of the sidewalk to the maximum extent feasible so as to have the least impact to pedestrians as possible.

C.6 Sidewalks at a street intersection must meet the level of the street or have a ramp in place. Curb ramps must be ADA compliant. It is desirable to provide a continuous path for persons with disabilities; therefore, a companion curb ramp should be implemented on the opposite side of the street. A crosswalk must be accessible via curb ramps from both ends, not one end only. For curb ramp design, refer to ODOT's Location and Design Manual Section 306.3.

C.8 Buffer widths should be provided when feasible. A buffer width is the distance between the sidewalk and the adjacent roadway and can improve pedestrian safety. For design recommendations on buffer widths refer to ODOT's Location and Design Manual, Section 306.2.4

C.9 Landscaping along sidewalks should be pedestrian friendly. Eliminate landscaping that can cause tripping hazards or puncture wounds such as vines or barbed wire. Avoid usage of trees of species such that will result in upheavals of sidewalks because of their ultimate size or from the growth of roots parallel to the ground.

C.10 Sidewalk longitudinal grades ideally should not exceed 5% and the most gradual possible slope should be used at all times. When the topography leaves no other choice than to use a steeper grade, refer to design recommendations provided in Section 306.2.5 of ODOT's Location and Design Manual and provide the accommodations required by the ADA.

C.11 Sidewalks should be constructed with a maximum cross slope of 2 percent. Cross slope is the slope that is measured perpendicular to the direction of travel.

C.12 Drainage for walks should be provided by grading between walk and curb or ditch to prevent water from being retained on the sidewalk.

C.13 Regular maintenance should occur to maintain good and sufficient sidewalks. Maintenance should include (but not be limited to) addressing changes in level or slope, surface degradation and cracking, trimming of tree branches/shrubbery, snow removal, and salt or sand treatment for slippery sidewalks during winter conditions.

D. Summary

As previously mentioned, the above standards are only suggested standards that have been deemed as regionally significant by the TMACOG Pedestrian and Bikeways Committee. Sidewalks should comply with additional design requirements that may be included in neighborhood plans, designated school route plans, other city plans or ordinances, or state and federal requirements.

The design of pedestrian facilities should follow the best current standards. For additional specific design requirement standards the following references provide state and nationally accepted standards for pedestrian facilities.

- *The Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities; (ADAAG)*
- *Ohio Department of Transportation Location and Design Manual, Section 306, Pedestrian Facilities*
- *FHWA Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access, Part 2, Best Practices Design Guide*
- *Ohio Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (OMUTCD).*
- *AASHTO Guide for the Planning, Design and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities.*
- *AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities.*
- *AASHTO, A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets (Green Book).*