

## The Case for “Complete Bridges”

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In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we need a new view on bridges. Bridges are among the most important means of connectivity in our transportation system. While streets can be easily paved over land just about anywhere, the placement of bridges becomes much more strategic. We can only have so many of them. Bridges are big and expensive. What is clear is that to ensure robust redundancy in our transportation network, and to accommodate an ever-growing population, **we need more bridges**. More than that, we need to **repair, restore, and frankly, modernize the bridges that we already have**.

As we build new bridges and restore/modernize existing ones, how about we conceptualize this as a “Complete Bridges” project. **Complete Bridges**:

1. Meet rigorous stress-test standards to ensure **structural safety**
2. Provide **safe crossing for trucks and vehicles** with wide enough lanes and safety barriers
3. Provide the type of traffic flow that can accommodate **free-flowing traffic** and accommodate growth in future traffic
4. Safe and generous accommodation of **bicyclists and pedestrians** in both directions
5. Provide **adaptability in cases where other modes of transport** could now, or in the future, utilize the same crossing. For example, easily being able to add space for a light rail line as part of the design features.
6. A **context-sensitive solution** in which the bridge is designed and built in a manner that **enhances the natural environment** and blending in with local surroundings; and resourcefully built.

This is the future of bridges. And we need to update a lot of them. We have a dangerously large number of bridges that simply are not safe enough for the amounts and types of traffic that use them. Moreover, all of us will benefit from new bridges that increase access and safety.

Ultimately, funding these new bridges is the question. It is a frank and simple reality that **the best funding source to get new complete bridges is the drivers that use them**—both truckers and private citizens. A portion of gas tax payments could easily and quickly be set aside for “complete bridges” (both for new bridges as well as modernizing and restoring old bridges). These new bridges can be much safer, faster, nicer to look at, and much better accommodating to the needs of non-motorists, the bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit. And it takes sacrifice from everyone so that all will benefit. Gone should be the days of lawsuits and fighting between modes. Since the drivers pay point #2 and point #3 above are essential among the 6 priorities. And with it, we can **plant a few trees** along the wide pedestrian and bike lanes (**aka the High Line**) on the new complete bridge? The type of spirited effort needed to rebuild our bridges is captured in PIRG’s recent [research report](#) and this one-page here simply offers a vision for the renewal. Former USDOT Secretary Norman Mineta used to say “there are no Democratic bridges or Republican highways”. We need to think together on transportation. One day, will we all strategically support all modes and freedoms? Complete Bridges are a step there.