

Implementation Report

Information/Educational Synthesis on Roundabouts

<http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/traffic/roundabouts.shtml>

Introduction and Purpose

Roundabouts are a form of at-grade traffic control that have seen increased application across the United States in and are one of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) nine proven countermeasures for improving highway safety. In Montana, there has been strong public opposition to some of the roundabout projects proposed by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). While MDT staff members have presented facts and figures to the public on the effectiveness of roundabouts to generate support for these projects, the public has remained skeptical about their benefits. Montana's experience regarding public apprehension of roundabouts is not unique. Other states have encountered the same lack of public support for roundabout projects. The reasons for the lack of public acceptance vary, but typically include driver apprehension and cost concerns (roundabouts being more costly than most alternatives). As a result, many prospective roundabout projects are never built due to public opposition.

It is generally recognized that public acceptance and buy-in of roundabouts is essential to moving their use forward. MDT determined it was necessary to identify other effective and efficient strategies to use in public meetings and other venues. Many states and locales have developed successful approaches to be used in this regard. These experiences and information can provide MDT with additional tools and approaches that can be used to educate the public on roundabouts, and in the process, engender support for these projects in the future.

Implementation Summary

Useable elements from this work include various approaches for MDT to consider for roundabout education and outreach to stakeholders and the public. The approaches have been summarized in a manner such that MDT can readily identify applicable strategies for consideration and use based on the needs of a particular roundabout project. No implementation time line or plan has resulted from

the work as the information being synthesized is for MDT's consideration in addressing specific education/information needs of a particular roundabout project. No barriers to implementation are expected at this time, although the cost and/or level of effort required for different potential approaches might be a barrier in some cases.

Implementation Recommendations

It is recognized that a different approach should be taken in educating the public on roundabouts. This effort must receive consideration both on a statewide level without relation to a specific project, as well as during all phases of a specific roundabout project. Many of the recommendations developed as part of this project are inter-related in this respect.

Recommendation 1: When considering roundabouts in general a statewide educational campaign could be considered, although no such effort has been pursued elsewhere. Many states interviewed indicated that they did not pursue such an approach; rather, education and outreach for roundabouts was often

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approached on a project by project basis. However, given MDT's experience with resistance, an aggressive approach employing direct television and/or radio education on roundabouts might still be considered. Direct promotion of roundabouts would essentially be a "first" in the United States, as no other agencies were identified that presented the concept to the public in such a manner. If such an approach is pursued, it should consider employing information on the successful sites that are already built in the state.

MDT Response: This recommendation should proceed and investment should be made in education and promotion of roundabouts at the statewide level. This would be done in a manner that was not specific to a project. Instead, the intent would be to educate the public on roundabouts in such a way that, when they attend public meetings for projects that may incorporate one, members of the public can better articulate why they may or may not be in favor of a roundabout. Various materials/toolbox would need to be developed to address different audiences such as older and young drivers and be public friendly.

Recommendation 2: When roundabouts are new to an area, it may be a good idea to air Public Service Announcements (PSA) that discuss how to use them. These PSAs could air on television and the radio, and may be developed for a specific site or be a general video/audio script developed for statewide use. The use of newspaper and print media (pamphlets/brochures) should also be pursued as these can provide more details than short video and audio announcements. Regardless, the focus of PSAs should be on education

and the benefits of roundabouts rather than promoting them in a manner that comes across as a sales pitch.

MDT Response: This recommendation ties in with Recommendation 1, although it would be implemented after a roundabout project has proceeded to construction. It should be considered for implementation in the future on a project-specific basis.

Recommendation 3: It would be beneficial to develop a longer video(s) that can be placed on the internet, either on a dedicated roundabout website for the state or on a YouTube-type of site. A longer video can provide more detail on different aspects of roundabouts (a series of videos could also be produced to discuss individual topics in more detail) and allow viewers to learn about the subject at their convenience. Creativity should be incorporated into roundabout videos as much as possible, although most current roundabout videos that were reviewed were basic and to the point. Whenever possible, local scenes from roundabouts throughout the state should be employed in the video footage, along with testimonials from local residents and officials.

MDT Response: This is another recommendation that is a direct offshoot of Recommendation 1. In the process of implementing, MDT would have more video material available beyond that required for producing a brief television commercial with which to develop such online materials.

Recommendation 4: Supplemental approaches to roundabout education and outreach should be considered for use when appropriate. For

example, if a roundabout is being proposed or constructed in a local community, posters, direct mailings and/or restaurant advertising (place mats and coasters) might be considered. Other efforts, such as local kiosk displays at shopping malls or booths at public events such as county fairs are other ideas that might be employed on a case-by-case basis.

MDT Response: This recommendation is also related to Recommendation 1, although it can also incorporate different mediums, such as print.

Recommendation 5: Before proposing a roundabout, care should be taken to establish that it is the right solution for a site and that it will be successful. Building a roundabout where it will work correctly and succeed goes a long way toward developing public acceptance and support. The success of such roundabouts can then be highlighted when proposing their use in other locations.

MDT Response: MDT already does this and will continue.

Recommendation 6: When considering roundabouts for a specific project, an initial meeting with local government officials is advisable. Many agencies have found that meeting with local officials and establishing their support before public meetings helps to increase public support for the project.

MDT Response: MDT already does this and in some cases it is local government officials that approach MDT with the request for a roundabout.

Recommendation 7: At public meetings, the materials and

discussion points should be tailored for the audience (e.g., local residents, businesses, etc.). In presenting roundabouts, information should be kept basic and non-technical. When engaging the public (e.g. taking questions) a dialogue or two way conversation should be pursued, as opposed to trying to explain a question away with facts. This creates an atmosphere where the public feels that their thoughts and opinions are being heard, rather than the perception that their thoughts and views have been dismissed.

MDT Response: Materials should be kept non-technical for public meetings. This has been MDT’s approach to presenting roundabout information at meetings and will remain so. To some extent, two way conversational techniques are also being employed. The challenge is the absence of a toolbox for the public on what MDT has been doing with roundabouts, such as videos, brochures, and so forth. This will be partly addressed through the implementation of earlier recommendations, namely Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 8: Visual aids for meetings and other roundabout materials are essential in helping to explain how the alternative will operate and why it is preferred. Such visual aids can include conceptual images, scale models of roundabouts, and simulation videos. When a

large parking lot is available, it might also be advantageous to conduct a full-size roundabout demonstration in conjunction with a project to allow the public to understand the dimensions and layout for the proposed design. In line with visual aids, printed materials, specifically pamphlets and handbills should also be employed. These materials should incorporate imagery from roundabouts that have been constructed and are successfully operating in the state.

MDT Response: This recommendation should be implemented in different ways depending on the specific project. In addition, it should include providing explanations/instruction at public meetings on how to use/drive a roundabout, which is not an aspect that is presently being discussed.

Recommendation 9: MDT’s dedicated roundabout web pages should be expanded. A web presence allows anyone who is interested in roundabouts to review information at their convenience. The roundabout website also offers a good opportunity to highlight successful projects and provide longer duration video footage. Many websites have provided maps and images of the different roundabout sites that have been constructed throughout the state, and this is another idea that should be considered.

MDT Response: MDT is in the process of expanding its roundabout web page.

Recommendation 10: Outreach to local television, radio and newspaper media outlets should be employed during all phases of a proposed project incorporating roundabouts. It should be viewed as an opportunity to explain why a roundabout has been considered, what its benefits would be and other background information. The intent should be to explain why it is a preferable option and how it can be a positive feature if/when constructed.

MDT Response: MDT does this on a project by project basis.

Recommendation 11: Publicizing the benefits of roundabouts is an important part of outreach and education activities. It might be a good idea to quantify some of the benefits of roundabouts that have been installed in different locations in Montana. For example, a before and after study of intersection crashes at different sites would quantify how roundabouts have reduced crashes following installation. Similar work could quantify the operational and environmental (reduced emissions) benefits as well.

MDT Response: MDT agrees with implementing this recommendation for future projects, and it is already being done for existing roundabout installations, although the results have not been compiled to date.

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