

Washington County, MN Educates Drivers Through Roundabout U

Location

Washington County, Minnesota
(Central United States)

Implementation Stage

- ✓ Planning
- ✓ Design
- ✓ Construction
- ✓ Launch
- ✓ Post-Implementation

Roundabout Type/Setting

Single- and Multi-lane
Roundabouts in Urban and Rural
Settings

Target Audience

- ✓ General Public
- ✓ Elected Officials/Managers

Strategies Employed

- ✓ Logo use across all materials
- ✓ Educational website
- ✓ Brochures (benefits of roundabouts, how to drive roundabouts, roundabout “rules of the road”)
- ✓ Public meetings (including Open Houses, Booths and Grocery Stores, and County Fairs)
- ✓ Promotional items (balloons, stickers, food, etc.)
- ✓ Mock-walkable roundabout
- ✓ Advertisements in newspapers



Background

In 2007, Washington County, Minnesota, began the process of planning for the widening of a two-lane, all-way, stop-controlled intersection in a residential area to accommodate growth in volume. The County Public Works Department considered implementing a four- or six-lane signal-controlled intersection configuration, but the analysis showed that the expected signalized system would require much more land than county residents and elected officials would approve for construction.

The jurisdiction decided a multi-lane roundabout was the best solution for enhancing safety while efficiently accommodating projected traffic volumes and maintaining a pedestrian-friendly intersection.

However, during the planning stage, Washington County staff attended several public meetings where concerned citizens repeatedly asked the same kinds of questions, such as “How do you drive through a roundabout?” and “Will a roundabout be safe?”

Approach

Washington County staff recognized a need to raise broad awareness about the benefits of modern roundabouts. They developed an online “Roundabout University” – “Roundabout U” – encompassing a wide variety of public outreach techniques designed to increase knowledge about, and equip people to help raise awareness and support for, roundabouts. The program started with a website, and has grown to include a range of products over time. To tie all of the products together, staff developed a logo for use on all materials. The original Roundabout U website presented the benefits of roundabouts, how to successfully navigate a roundabout, what proposed roundabouts would look like, and project updates.

The website has since expanded to include a range of general roundabout public outreach products that are easily adaptable for specific projects and needs across the County. The current website contains, in addition to the original material developed, a section on common misconceptions of roundabouts, and a list of roundabouts implemented across the County. Supplemental Roundabout U products include:

- A Step-by-Step Guide to Driving a Multi-Lane Roundabout brochure, providing a seven-step guide to successfully navigating a multi-lane roundabout
- A series of flyers that police officers provide to the public to help explain laws regarding yielding in a roundabout and proper lane use
- Promotional materials and advertisements in newspapers that raise awareness about educational roundabout-related events
- Public engagement events at local grocery stores, county fairs, and open houses - At each of these events, staff provide a variety of products, including food, balloons, and stickers to encourage families with small children to approach the booth and learn about



Figure 1: The Roundabout U Logo used in Washington County, Minnesota for all roundabout-related outreach materials.

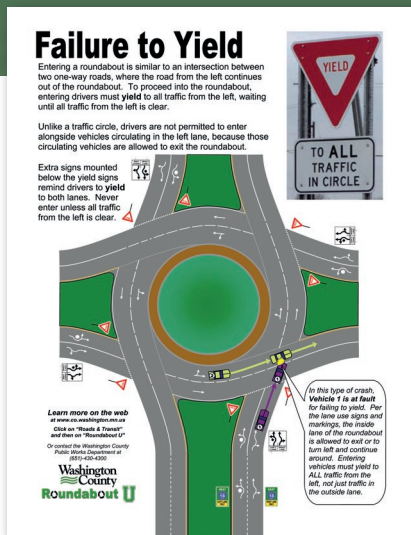


Figure 3: Police Officers distribute handouts like this to citizens pulled over for traffic violations in roundabouts. These flyers provide officers with a quick and effective way to communicate roundabout laws to people.

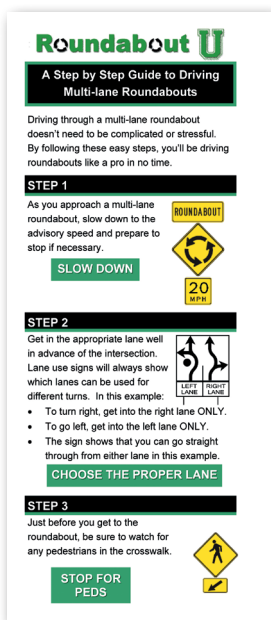


Figure 2: Brochure describing, in a visually appealing manner, how to successfully navigate a multi-lane roundabout.

Learn More

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roundabouts. Staff discuss how to safely drive a roundabout and how to cross a roundabout as a pedestrian. They also provide project updates and answer citizens' questions about roundabouts.

Results

Anecdotal responses from citizens, elected officials, and internal staff have affirmed the success of the program.

According to staff, the outreach has been so successful that other jurisdictions across

Minnesota have asked to borrow outreach materials and bring in Washington County Public Works Department staff as experts-on-hand to help sway public perception of proposed roundabouts. The products are designed to be adaptable and customizable, making it easy for other agencies to apply what Washington County has developed to their own roundabouts.

Lessons Learned

- Use a consistent message across all outreach products.
- Use several outreach products to get the message across. This jurisdiction won an uphill battle in explaining the difference between traffic circles and roundabouts to persons from other parts of the country who were familiar with traffic circles.
- Early communication is key when engaging with the public.
- Work with your local law enforcement early and often to ensure everyone is on the same page with regard to roundabout laws.
- Look closely at your jurisdiction to develop targeted outreach materials for specific population segments that may otherwise be overlooked (e.g., younger drivers, out-of-state drivers, and older drivers).

Outreach Investment

Washington County Public Works believes that their Roundabout U program is a relatively low-cost investment, as compared with the construction of a comparable signalized intersection. All products were developed in-house initially, and updates to materials to customize them for specific audiences/roundabout projects take no more than a few hours. Ads in the newspapers reached a broader audience, but were quite expensive to produce relative to their benefit.

Related Products

General Information Website

Washington County's Roundabout U Website

<https://www.co.washington.mn.us/490/Roundabout-U>

Video

How About a Roundabout? The Minnesota Experience

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuvqCIEjPxQ>

Brochure

Roundabout U: A Step-by-Step Guide to Driving a Multi-Lane Roundabout

<https://www.co.washington.mn.us/DocumentCenter/View/6395/Roundabout-U-Brochure-Oct2014?bidId=>

Potential Outreach Idea:

Use a walkable mock roundabout or toy car-sized roundabout at your next public outreach event to provide a hands-on way to learn about roundabouts.