

Montpelier, Vermont, Constructs Roundabout Thanks to Local Roundabouts Steering Committee

Location

Montpelier, Vermont (North-Eastern United States)

Implementation Stage

All phases of roundabout construction, including:

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

Roundabout Type/Setting

Single-lane roundabouts in a suburban location

Target Audience

- ✓ General public
- ✓ Elected Officials
- Engineers/Managers

Strategies Employed

- ✓ Presentations
- ✓ Public Meetings
- ✓ Flyers
- ✓ Brochures

Background

In the 1980s, a regional transportation plan for Montpelier, Vermont, identified the intersection of Main and Spring Streets as deficient. The three-way "T" intersection lacked pedestrian facilities and created a confusing traffic pattern for the public due to a triangular central island and a commercial driveway. To complicate matters further, a middle school was located nearby, which meant a number of children traversed this intersection to get to and from school.

Although the City planned to install a signal, a group of citizens approached the City Council about constructing a roundabout at the location instead. They successfully lobbied the Council to create a steering committee to investigate the feasibility of a roundabout at the intersection of Main and Spring Streets.

Because there were no roundabouts in the region at this time, and because this was several years before roundabouts were embraced by FHWA, the community as well as the Montpelier Department of Public Works were concerned about the validity of the design. With the assistance of a consultant experienced in constructing roundabouts in Florida, the City completed the design.

Approach

The Roundabouts Steering Committee actively lobbied the City Council and worked with the media to tout the benefits of roundabouts and dispel common myths. While the Roundabout Steering Committee engaged the media to gain public support, they also prepared informational pamphlets for distribution to drivers' education programs at the local schools. The group also worked closely with the Montpelier

"There was... skepticism in house. We were inventing the wheel here, so to speak."

— Thomas J. McArdle
Assistant Director of Public Works
Montpelier, Vermont

Department of Public Works and the Vermont Agency of Transportation (AOT), which performed a pre- and post-construction traffic study. Once the roundabout was opened, the committee placed a flyer in the local newspaper with instructions on how to drive the new roundabout to assist citizens in navigating this new type of intersection.

Results

Engaging the public and elected officials through the Roundabouts Steering Committee gave Montpelier, Vermont the distinction of constructing one of the first modern roundabouts in the northeast, and one of the earliest in the entire United States as well. A follow-up survey conducted one year after the project's completion showed that 85 percent of the respondents had a favorable or neutral opinion of the roundabout.





Figure 1: Overhead photo of the second roundabout completed in Montpelier.

In addition, this roundabout has improved safety, reducing speeds at the intersection of Main and Spring Streets, and providing more favorable crossing conditions for pedestrians. Officials at the middle school affected by the roundabout have said that the intersection is much safer after the construction. Prior to construction, a limited number of pedestrians traversed the intersection, but after the roundabout construction, a large number of students use the route on their way to and from school (30-50 in the mornings and 150 in the afternoons).

Montpelier's pioneering effort with Vermont's first roundabout has been followed by successful installations of roundabout intersections in Brattleboro and Manchester, and a second roundabout recently has been completed in Montpelier.

Lessons Learned

• Public outreach is a critical step in the planning process. It's important to engage the local emergency service agencies, schools, stakeholders, and residents in an intersection design alternative review process.

Outreach Investment

There were costs associated with the printing of flyers but much of the public relations work was completed gratis for the Montpelier Department of Public Works by a volunteer and staunch roundabout advocate.

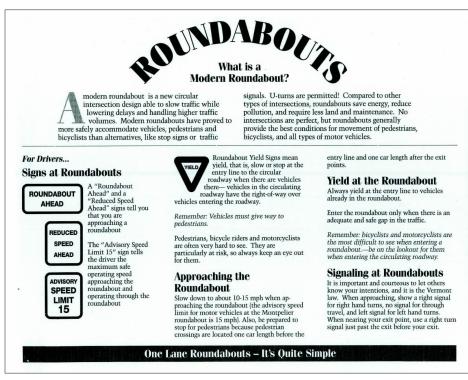


Figure 2: A flier developed to outline roundabout features.

Learn More

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