

How Transportation and Community Partnerships Are Shaping America

Part II: Streets and Roads



Project for Public Spaces, Inc.



An advisory committee of citizens and city officials oversee the testing of an alternative design for Baxter Boulevard in Portland, Maine.

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Foreword

In May of 1998, chief executive officers, senior highway engineers, designers, and planners from 29 state departments of transportation, and stakeholders from government, the private sector, and citizens' organizations from 39 states met at the University of Maryland just outside the nation's capital. Their mission was to chart a course for promoting and advancing a new vision for highway design that seeks to address core environmental, historic, cultural, aesthetic, scenic and other community values through a collaborative, open, and interdisciplinary approach.

The case studies in this booklet offer a small sample of the ways in which highway projects can be designed with imagination, creativity, and collaboration to preserve and enhance the character and quality of a community without sacrificing transportation mobility and safety. While these few examples illustrate the art of the possible, throughout the country we see a new commitment to collaboration leading to more imaginatively designed facilities that enrich the communities in which they are located.

This new approach is nothing less than visionary and a transformation of the way state transportation agencies design their facilities and conduct their business, working with and for their customers. Throughout the country, no person serves as a better symbol for this movement than Clyde Pyers, Director of the Maryland State Highway Administration's Office of Highway Policy Assessment. His leadership both in demonstrating and promoting context-sensitive design sets a standard of excellence for his profession. For these reasons I dedicate this report to Clyde on behalf of his transportation family, his colleagues, and the citizens whose lives he has enriched.



Clyde Pyers



Sincerely yours,

Thomas R. Warne
Executive Director, Utah Department of Transportation
President, AASHTO

How Transportation and Community Partnerships are Shaping America

Part II: Streets and Roads

Project for Public Spaces, Inc.

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*Ocean Avenue,
Belmar, New Jersey*



Introduction

Transportation corridors, whether a main street or a scenic rural road, and transit facilities, whether a simple bus stop or a major train station, are natural focal points for communities. To view them as catalysts for strengthening community life necessitates a shift away from the way transportation has traditionally been conceived. In this more holistic approach, highway engineers, transit operators, traffic engineers, residents, merchants, property owners, city agencies, planners, architects, and developers, as well as community and faith-based organizations, can demonstrate that through partnerships, they can bring together the traditional safety and mobility goals of transportation agencies and the livability goals of communities.

Concerns about livability are shared by every type of community — whether a suburb, inner city neighborhood, small town, or rural area. This booklet explores how people in these communities are working in partnership with transportation agencies to create transportation systems that enhance places — socially, economically, and physically. The case studies emphasize the direct relationship between community reinvigoration and community-supportive streets and roads. This booklet is a companion to a publication devoted specifically to transit projects.

A New Era for Transportation: Partnerships Around Place

After more than a half century of transportation planning and policy-making geared largely to facilitating the safe and efficient movement of automobile traffic, a broader approach is taking hold and gaining momentum. This placemaking approach — sometimes called “context-sensitive design” — looks

at the role streets and roads can play in enhancing communities, rural areas, and scenic environments.

Rather than just designing roads to accommodate motor vehicles, placemaking aims to balance all the users of a street — pedestrians, transit riders, motorists, and bicyclists. The focus is not only upon the street or road itself, but also on how these streets and roads connect to the surrounding districts and public spaces and make these areas more economically stable, safe, and productive. The input of those who use and experience a place on a regular basis is essential to the process. Moreover, to address these broader “quality of life” goals, transportation agencies and communities must work together with an open mind, pool resources, and share responsibility for implementation.

The context-sensitive design

Context-sensitive design is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach, involving all stakeholders to ensure that transportation projects are in harmony with communities and preserve environmental, scenic, aesthetic, and historic resources while maintaining safety and mobility.

approach is gaining federal support and is being promoted by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and by an increasing number of state departments of transportation. Local and regional transportation agencies are also increasingly adopting a placemaking approach to street and road design.

The case studies included in this booklet provide tangible examples of how transportation partnerships are beginning to reshape America. For the state DOTs involved in

these projects, this approach reflects an evolution in the way these agencies operate. While safety is still the paramount concern, new flexibility in street design standards is emerging that allows the standard design to be adjusted to fit its context, while maintaining acceptable levels of service. No longer is a “one size fits all” approach the only option available.

As more and more projects of this type are implemented, more is being learned about what works and what obstacles need to be overcome. The case studies in this report have yielded a few important lessons:

Working Holistically

Place-sensitive design cannot be achieved by just adding a few pieces of street furniture to a sidewalk, but by addressing all aspects of how a place functions in an integrated way.

Working Collaboratively

The approach to planning should be collaborative: traffic engineers, design professionals, and city agencies must work together, with as much awareness of where and how their interests and goals intersect. While collaborative projects may take longer to plan, approvals are streamlined because the goals of the project are clearer, facilitating permitting and inspection processes, and communities see the benefit to their quality of life and can articulate their support for the project.

continued on next page

Project Partners

City of Lake Worth
City Commission
Florida Department of
Transportation
Treasure Coast Regional
Planning Council

*“Traffic moves slowly,
but hey, it’s a down-
town, not a highway.”*

Gene Nowak, City Planner,
Lake Worth, Florida

*Wider sidewalks allow room for
outdoor cafes, strolling, shopping,
and “schmoazing.”*

Lake Worth, Florida entered the 1990s with its downtown declining as badly as its traffic problems were growing. Commercial vacancies ran as high as 50%, and the few pedestrians who ventured there found a deteriorating no-place, bare of enhancements and amenities, where crossing the street safely was a major challenge. Traffic zipped by with ease on Lake Avenue heading east and Lucerne Avenue heading west, the downtown’s core streets. Speeds had reached 55 mph when a local teenager crashed into and totaled another car as it passed through an intersection.

In 1992, just when the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council wound up a Lake Worth downtown community planning charrette, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) initiated discussions with the city on the traffic safety issue. The charrette’s results showed public preference for more pedestrian space, reduced speeds, and more parking on both Lake and Lucerne Avenues,

results that were then incorporated in the Downtown Redevelopment and Revitalization Plan. FDOT, working with Lake Worth planner Gene Nowak and project manager Ray Smith, conducted an experiment. Using only paint, each street was significantly narrowed to two lanes with the third lane striped for parking. When accident rates fell by over 44% during the 1994/95 trial year, a heated discussion ensued — how would they allot the newly gained 12 feet of roadway? While the city of Lake Worth and the Treasure Coast Council opted for wide sidewalks, 10-foot lanes, and parking on both sides of the streets, FDOT emphasized bike lanes and keeping wider traffic lanes.

Working together for almost a year, the partners shaped a “win-win” compromise. Both Lake and Lucerne Avenues got narrower lanes, parallel parking, decorative light fixtures, planters, paver-block sidewalks and crosswalks, benches, trash



Photo: Gene Nowak/City of Lake Worth



Before: FDOT tested how two lanes would work by "striping out" the third one. Accident rates fell by over 44%.

containers, and other amenities in "you're in Lake Worth now" colors. Both streets also received 65-foot corner "bumpouts" that shorten street crossings for pedestrians and serve as convenient stops for the county bus and the "Lolly the Trolley" minibus. A westbound bike lane was added to Lucerne Avenue, and an eastbound lane was added on an adjacent street. Lake Avenue, Lake Worth's bonafide "Main Street," received widened sidewalks, including two blocks of 21-foot sidewalks at a point where a broader roadbed could be whittled down for more pedestrian space.

During construction, the city reached out to merchants to apprise them of progress and help them gain access to economic development grant funds. At the same time, to attract people to the new downtown, an "Evenings on the Avenues" festival was held the first and third Fridays every month downtown. Now a tradition, the events feature live music and sidewalk vendors, while many stores stay open late.

Once construction was completed in 1998, existing businesses began sprucing up, while new ones like restaurants, retailers, and art galleries moved in, and continue to do so. Vacancies now are practically nil, or as Gene Nowak puts it, "you'd be hard pressed to find 1,200 square feet in one place." Traffic rarely moves beyond 20 mph, and accidents have been cut in half. This attractive, bustling community place is filled with residents and visitors eating at the new outdoor cafes, shopping, "schmoozing," and strolling both day and night (since businesses stay open late). As an indication of the success of these changes, in a city of some 30,000, attendance at the annual downtown street

"We don't want our roadways to be scars in their communities. We want them to blend in with their surroundings and act as community members."

—Rick Chesser, Secretary, District 4
Florida Department of Transportation



Photo: Gene Nowak/City of Lake Worth

painting festival has exceeded 100,000 in the past two years. Downtown property values were up \$10 million in 1999, over 10% from the previous year.

The last phase of improvements, the reconstruction of State Road 5 and U.S. Highway 1, and construction of a roundabout that will serve as a traffic-calming gateway to Lake Worth's center, are now nearing completion. FDOT is already pointing to the completed improvements as an example of how transportation can help build livable communities. Rick Chesser, Secretary of FDOT District 4 and a staunch supporter of the Lake Worth project, talks about a new climate evolving at FDOT in which roadways don't always need to be "interstate designs." He's been giving presentations showing the importance of factoring communities into the state highway design process. "Finally there's recognition," he says "that FDOT standards have a range that can be adapted to community needs."

Paver block sidewalks and crosswalks, trash dispensers, trees, and other amenities have helped produce a place that welcomes people.

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Project Partners

Town of Springdale
National Park Service
Zion Natural History
Association
Utah DOT

Surrounded on three sides by Zion National Park, the town of Springdale, Utah has long served as the gateway community for the park's visitors. State Route 9, which links directly to the park, is Springdale's Main Street, and over 75% of the town's businesses provide services for park patrons such as lodging, restaurants, retail, and parking



Photo: Tom Haraden/ National Park Service

Shuttle buses equipped with front bicycle racks bring visitors to Zion National Park from parking lots in neighboring Springdale, Utah, and from the park's visitors center.

facilities. However, with almost three million visitors every year, by the early 1990's, traffic congestion and illegal parking were taking their toll on the park and its gateway town.

In 1993, the National Park Service recommended a mandatory shuttle system to transport visitors to Zion's inner canyon. They held public meetings in the surrounding communities. Springdale residents, led by Mayor Phillip Bimstein, suggested that the park extend the shuttle system into town. Park visitors could be encouraged to leave their cars in Springdale and take a free shuttle service to the park; reducing traffic and, at the same time, allowing visitors to explore the town.

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Zion National Park Superintendent Don Falvey was receptive to the idea and gathered together a ten-member Springdale-Zion Liaison Committee. The group partnered with the Zion Natural History Association and the Utah Department of Transportation, who together applied for federal highway funds.

The heart of the project is the free shuttle bus system that runs through town, picks-up and drops off passengers at parking facilities, hotels and major areas, and ends at a new visitor center located within Zion National Park. Visitors are directed to the clean, propane-powered shuttle service through posted signs in and around Springdale as well as through a special radio station with park information that is promoted to visitors along the roadways. Springdale supplies about 1,000 spaces in town for visitor parking.

Encouraged by UDOT's flexible, context sensitive design program, Route 9 was narrowed from 40' to 32' at four locations, where pedestrian crossings and bus shelters that match those in the park were installed. The roadbed, curbs, and sidewalks were colored red to minimize the visual impact on the natural landscape, and to create a seamless experience for visitors traveling through town into the park. "We are doing whatever we can to marry the park and town together," said Mayor Bimstein.

In the shuttle's first week of operation, residents of Springdale were seen using it for daily errands, to go to church, and, of course, to visit the park. The shuttle's bike racks are especially convenient for them, as they can ride the bus to the end of the line and bike home. Reports from the park are also encouraging. "The first night the road was closed to car traffic, we spotted a mountain lion," said Tom Haraden, Assistant Chief Naturalist, Zion National Park. "We haven't see mountain lions in this part of the canyon for years."

"The changes have improved the quality of life for the residents in town, and the experience for visitors."

—Phillip Bimstein, Mayor of Springdale

Urban Streets and Neighborhoods

Portland, Oregon

Urban streets, although they exist in a larger context, can also be Main Streets. In cities, they serve as neighborhood commercial districts, but when functioning correctly, they perform the same role as any other Main Street — as centers of community life, where local people come to shop, do errands, get together, and enjoy leisure time. And like other Main Streets, these urban cousins need to be geared to serve the business and residential needs of their communities: by accommodating traffic yet keeping it moving slowly enough to give pedestrians the comfort and safety that they need to get around; by providing adequate parking, but also offering other travel options; and by offering amenities and enhancements that make people feel “at home.”

Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut



Project Partners

Portland Office of
Transportation
ODOT
Portland Development
Commission
Metro
Tri-Met

"Now it will be much easier to do these types of projects — we can point to this. I think it greatly improved ODOT's reputation in the community."

—Dan Layden,
Oregon DOT

By the time Portland, Oregon's Union Avenue became Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in the late 1980s, it was in bad shape. Once a thriving hub of local business and community life, the street had been reconstructed in the early 1970s with no parking, a new 10-foot-wide median and four travel lanes, creating an expanse that encouraged high-speed traffic and scared away pedestrians. The median, with grand oak trees and abundant greenery, may have brightened up the surroundings, but locals complained that it blocked them from crossing the street and broke up the community. Along the 3.5 miles where the boulevard travels through the six adjacent neighborhoods of the inner city's Albina community — a racially mixed area, with a large African-American population, as well as Asians, Latinos, and Russians — a common perception was that the street had been rebuilt to rush white commuters through. What's more, without convenient parking or full pedestrian access, local business had begun to fade away.

When Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber appeared at a local event in 1996, community members captured his

attention and asked for help in restoring the street's neighborly, business-friendly, kind-to-pedestrians quality. The governor assigned his Community Solutions Team (leaders of several state agencies) to organize a demonstration project addressing both streetscape improvements and redevelopment. In turn, the team created a Martin Luther King Action Committee to oversee the development and testing of pilot improvements. Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) set up a five-block experiment, completely removing the heavily-planted median, adding parking on both sides of the street, and narrowing the travel lanes. This experiment became a point of reference for a visioning process, led by the Portland Office of Transportation in partnership with ODOT, the Portland Development Commission, and the Metro regional planning agency, to transform the boulevard into a street that truly supported the community.

Two committees were formed to help develop the vision. The Project Advisory Committee made up of neighborhood associations, businesses, and property owners; and a Technical Advisory Committee of representatives from the state and city DOTs, the transit agency, urban forestry, the planning department and other Portland bureaus. Public input was actively sought in through area tours, interviews, focus groups, open houses, workshops and even interactive display boards. The procedure revealed that in a study area of varying neighborhoods — residential, commercial, light industrial, affluent, modest, and multi-ethnic — one solution for the street would not fit all needs.

In response, the plan provided for several different options. The most extensive change bolstered commercial nodes by restoring on-street parking on both sides, narrowing traffic lanes down to ten feet, and building a "mini-median" whose four feet would provide refuge for pedestrians and space for plantings. A second option retains the wider medians with their mature trees and greenery in resi-



With on-street parking restored and the street accessible to walkers, new businesses, and neighbors, have been moving in.

Photo: Kristin Finnegan



The narrowed traffic lanes, mini-medians, curb extensions, ornamental light posts and extra trees ...

dential areas where most people preferred this enhancement. Since these same residents also wanted to cross the street more easily, the lengthy medians have been opened up at every traffic signal for safer pedestrian crossing. The original experimental area where the median was removed has been temporarily retained. "It was difficult to convince some ODOT engineers about these changes," says Matt Brown, of Portland's Office of Transportation, especially since ODOT's own design standards are stricter than the range of design guidelines in the AASHTO Greenbook, generally accepted as the "bible" of state highway engineers. However, Grace Crunican, the new state transportation director was, according to ODOT's Dan Layden, willing to use the minimum AASHTO guidelines instead of the stricter state standards, and sought and received a design exemption for the elements that needed it. "The governor's help was also invaluable in giving this project priority," added Layden.

The plan also called for other pedestrian and transit-friendly ways to shape the street, including widened sidewalks, curb extensions to shorten crossings, curbside bus stop sites, bus shelters, and concrete or striped crosswalks to alert drivers to pedestrian areas. In addition, ornamental lighting, decorative paving, and frequent street trees were included to add visual character to the residential and commercial areas along the way. As part of the effort, high school students designed special tree grates.

To date, a half-mile of improvements have been completed, and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is on its way to becoming a true credit to its namesake. Three commercial neighborhoods have been completely remodeled, and as the street has become more accessible to walkers, new businesses have opened up, and neighbors are returning to shop, stop for coffee, and meet and greet each other. Several new restaurants have moved in, and the area has become a popular place to dine, both for locals and other Portlanders.

Concurrent community development activities have produced hundreds of new housing units and rehabilitation of existing sites. Property values are up on what is now a much more locally-oriented street, where residents have helped plant some of the new trees, and banners fly during neighborhood events or special holidays. People say they are delighted that traffic is moving more slowly and that their area of the boulevard is acting much more like a main street and neighborhood again. A new light rail line is scheduled to open nearby in 2002.

"Originally there was fear of increased accidents, traffic congestion, and traffic diverting into the neighborhoods. It never happened."

— Andre Baugh,
Portland Office of Transportation

... all add up to a more pedestrian friendly environment.



Photo: Kristen Finnegan

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Somerville, Massachusetts

It's Hip To Be In Davis Square

Project Partners

Massachusetts Bay
Transportation Authority
City of Somerville
Davis Square Task Force
Massachusetts Highways
Department

Pedestrians and businesses have benefited most from the strong physical and visual connections that link transit facilities to the main shopping street and central square.



The heart of Davis Square has been restored, thanks to a community and transportation partnership with a long-term vision.



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Once a gritty, down-at-the-heels intersection, Davis Square is now a vibrant nightspot and popular shopping district. New restaurants and nightclubs attract a young crowd from all over the Boston area to what is billed as an alternative to Harvard Square in Cambridge. There are also many new professional offices and neighborhood-oriented services, and property values are climbing steadily. How did Davis Square undergo this radical transformation? By leveraging opportunities through transportation partnerships.

The heart of Davis Square is a complex six-point intersection through which several freight trains once ran each day, forcing traffic to back up for long periods of time. In 1976, to help resolve the safety and mobility issues at this intersection, the city converted streets to one-way, and simplified traffic signals. This led to five years of fast moving traffic, a dangerous environment for pedestrians, and an economically stagnant neighborhood.

In 1982, a partnership between the city, state, regional, and community planning groups used the construction of a

new subway stop in Davis Square as leverage to fix the traffic problems. The city changed the whole look of the square by constructing a series of pedestrian-oriented streetscape and landscape improvements, including new paving for crosswalks and sidewalks, pedestrian islands, and central islands, all of which

serve to channel and calm the movement of cars within intersections and enhance pedestrian capacity, circulation, and safety.

The city of Somerville redeveloped and landscaped the railroad right-of-way through Davis Square as a linear park and bicycle/pedestrian pathway that connects to the 13-mile Minuteman Trail. In 1994, the Massachusetts Highways Department redeveloped a portion of its right-of-way, as a bike path as well; Mass Highways upgraded this segment with new lighting to facilitate nighttime riding and friendlier fencing, with parcels along the bike path given to adjacent residents who have set up a series of community gardens along the route.

Impacts

- ★ Property development has rebounded, including a storefront and facade improvement grant program that is attracting new businesses, and the restoration of a historic theater;
- ★ A portion of the square was designated as an urban renewal district and has since been developed as a 100,000 square foot office and retail complex, including public open space and parking;
- ★ The former freight right-of-way has become a central square, used by residents, shoppers, exercisers, waiting bus passengers, and is the site for several annual community events.

Suburban Town Centers

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

*Laguna Beach, California, at intersection
of the Pacific Coast Highway*

Built largely around the automobile, suburbs represent a unique challenge for balancing traditional transportation goals with community values. One starting point has been to revive older town centers that still have their basic infrastructure in place that allows for planners to create a sense of place and community — when a better balance between pedestrians and vehicles is achieved.



Project Partners

- Maryland State Highway Administration's
 - Offices of Highway Development
 - Traffic Engineering Support Section
 - Systems Planning and Evaluation
 - Community Liaison Office
- Baltimore County Department of Public Works
- Towson Business Association

It was standing room only by the windows of Souris' Bar that chilly February morning in 1998 when the Maryland State Highway Administration (MSHA) unveiled its first urban roundabout in Towson, Maryland. As residents of Towson looked out of their store windows and homes that morning, police guided commuters around a neat line of cones, barrels, and "yield" signs that formed an oblong-shaped, temporary traffic circle where a bunch of signals and mind-numbing congestion had greeted them only days before. By the time the experiment was over, and construction was completed in October the same year, motorists and pedestrians had learned their way around, and merchants and shoppers had come to love the new traffic-calming feature.

In 1994, after a series of other design attempts had failed, the MSHA proposed installing a roundabout at the complex meeting point of five roads that forms the center of the historic county seat. Baltimore County officials liked the plan too, as they recognized the opportunity to continue their streetscape revitalization efforts in a town with a willing partner. However, the county

"When you have an unusual problem, you have to find an interesting solution, and I think that's what we have here."

—Ray Heil,
Baltimore County Department of Public Works

stipulated that the streetscape program would not go ahead unless at least two-thirds of local property owners agreed either to upgrade the facades of their buildings or pay an assessment. In the end both the roundabout and streetscape projects moved ahead and were built as one. "It was logical that things would come together in one physical location at the same point in time," commented Ray Heil, streetscape program manager for the Baltimore County Department of Public Works.

The project costs totaled \$4.25 million. Baltimore County has agreed to maintain both the streetscape enhancements and landscaping in the roundabout.

In terms of economic viability for surrounding businesses, "the roundabout is a lifesaver," says Susan DiLonardo, executive director of the Towson Business



Before the roundabout was built, the gateway to Towson was dominated by cars waiting in long lines at traffic lights.
Photo: Maryland State Highway Administration



Photo: Maryland State Highway Administration

Since the inception of the MSHA's roundabout program in the early 90s, close to 30 roundabouts have been installed throughout the state, though none in such a congested area as Towson. During peak periods, this urban roundabout handles nearly 4000 cars per hour.

Association. "The cars are not backed up in front of the businesses. It's cleaner and quieter." DiLonardo, who saw it as her role to ensure that business needs were continuously conveyed to MSHA during the building of the roundabout and other improvements, was indispensable to the project. As a result of her efforts, MSHA assigned a staff member to work on-site with merchants to solve problems during the entire process. MSHA and the Towson Business Association also conducted the public education component of the project — visiting senior centers, schools, and shopping malls, and running community meetings together.

Impacts

- ★ Traffic backups along York Road have disappeared, which has improved the environment for pedestrians and businesses. For example, businesses from other parts of Towson are relocating to the "downtown" around the roundabout because the foot traffic is better, even at the expense of dedicated on-site parking lots.
- ★ At the same time the roundabout was being planned, a developer finally purchased the long vacant Hutzler's department store, which occupies an entire quadrant adjacent to the roundabout and the entrance to the town center. "The streetscape and roundabout projects were critical to making this redevelopment happen," said developer David Rhodes, "and to attracting Barnes and Noble, who took the corner site that anchored the whole project for us."
- ★ There has been a considerable reduction in accident severity at the site,

"There's no question that this was a high risk, experimental project. We keep tweaking the roundabout — moving signs, checking it out every week to see how it's doing. We could have narrowed the lanes even more, but we're going to keep inventing new things."

— Robert Douglass
Deputy Chief Engineer, Highway Development, Maryland State Highway Administration



Baltimore County Public Works' streetscape plan extended the amenities and landscaping treatments from the roundabout westward into the center of town, where they slow the approach of traffic into the circle, while stimulating renewed foot traffic for local businesses.

since the roundabout lowers speed and most accidents are low damage, according to Bob Douglass, Deputy Chief Engineer, MSHA.

- ★ Although top speeds in the circle rarely exceed 22 mph (as reported by the police department), the roundabout is handling about 400 more cars per peak hour than it did before. In fact, traffic moves so smoothly that businesses are asking for added on street parking, and other ways to slow vehicles on their approach, now that it is faster to go through town than bypass it.

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Project Partners

Commonwealth of
Kentucky,
Transportation Cabinet
Bluegrass Tomorrow
Lexington-Fayette County
Urban County Government
City of Paris
Bourbon County
Federal Highway
Administration

Fears that a road widening would forever alter the beauty of Paris Pike stalled the project for almost 20 years.



Photo: Christine Areas

No ordinary two-lane highway, Paris Pike is the tree-lined “main street” of Kentucky’s bluegrass horse country. Flanked by pristine thoroughbred race horse farms with hand crafted stone walls and fences, and rolling fields, the pike, also known as the Lexington Road, is actually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. So in 1979, when plans were developed to widen a 12-mile stretch of the state road connecting Lexington and Paris, property owners and preservation advocates filed an injunction against its construction.

What began as a battle between the state DOT, property owners, and historic advocates has resulted — 20 years later — in a new Paris Pike that enhances the region while significantly improving safety and capacity. This was not an easy process, and it is remarkable to many of the key stakeholders that it has even happened. The legacy of the road can be seen in its innovative design but, more importantly, in a new community-oriented process that the Kentucky DOT — which is officially named the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet — is now utilizing on road projects elsewhere in the state.

Once a sleepy country road, Paris Pike had seen its traffic volumes steadily increase to about 12,000 cars per day. Its two lanes were picturesque but dangerous, and there were frequent accidents and fatalities on the

road. “Safety was the number one concern,” one resident active in the project reported. “It was the one thing everyone could agree on.” What stakeholders couldn’t agree on was what to do about it.

Lack of trust was an important hurdle to overcome. For example, opponents of the road widening did not believe the state’s traffic counts. “They just didn’t want the traffic to be there,” said Henry Alexander a resident who is sometimes called the “lord mayor of Paris Pike” and played a key role in the injunction and the ultimate settlement. It was Alexander who came up with an idea to break the stalemate: get the community to take the counts. For eight hours a day for six days, opponents and proponents sat side-by-side counting, and ultimately affirming the state’s numbers.

After a year long process, partners worked out a unique “Memorandum of Understanding” between all the parties that supported the road’s widening, but set forth ground rules for its basic design features, the public design process, and the role of the task force selected to guide the process. A landscape architect would develop the design with the assistance of an engineer experienced in scenic roads. The public was to be involved “to the maximum practical extent.” The settlement lifted the injunction, and its timeliness was reinforced the next day when there was another fatality on Paris Pike.

The design process, which began in 1994, involved an extensive analysis of the landscape and cultural resources along the road with an equally extensive public participation process, complete with meetings, newsletters, bus tours and even hay rides around farms so property owners and interested people could see for themselves the details of what needed

“The more time you spend in planning and people relationships, the less time it takes on the other end.”

— Jean Scott,
former director of Bluegrass Tomorrow

Partners

California Department of Transportation
 City of Calabasas Transportation Dept.
 Los Angeles MTA
 US Economic Development Administration

The city of Calabasas, a suburb of Los Angeles in the San Fernando Valley, needed to reduce the impact of traffic spillover from the often-congested Ventura Freeway upon the one-mile long Main Street of this historic "Old West" settlement town while improving pedestrian and bicycle safety, and transit service through the area. Through extensive community cooperation, the city developed and implemented the Old Town Calabasas Road Improvement Project, which included flexible design standards for improving capacity along the section of Calabasas Road that passes through Old Town.

The project included extensive tree planting to reach the maximum allowed in an urban thoroughfare, and preservation

Photo: Courtesy of City of Calabasas, CA



The landscaped medians are a refuge for pedestrians while the cobblestoned pedestrian crossings are just one element of the roadway design that physically reinforces the design speed of Calabasas Road — 25 mph.

Old Town Calabasas is a "picture postcard" example of what can be achieved by state highway officials, local traffic departments, and municipalities working in partnership to realize common goals.



Courtesy of City of Calabasas, CA

by property owners to the city of the additional right-of-way required. A seven-phased construction schedule minimized impact upon existing businesses and property owners.

Impacts

Completed in 1998, and funded by the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority, the state department of transportation (CALTRANS), and the US Economic Development Administration, the project has increased transit ridership due to improved schedule reliability, reduced traffic accidents, and enhanced pedestrian safety. The new street environment encourages shopping and tourism, while the trees provide shade, prevent soil erosion, and mitigate against noise and dust. Congestion caused by through traffic has been replaced by increased visits to local destinations, such as the farmers market, restaurants, and a quarterly Art Show, all of which have led to increased economic benefit and the attraction of new businesses to the area.

of existing oak trees; the incorporation of boardwalks, bollards, and lighting into the roadway design, and cobblestoned pedestrian crossings; bicycle lanes and bus turnout bays; free trolley service between the Old Town on off-site parking facilities to reduce shopping trips by car; and a 25 mph speed limitation. Road width increases to create two lanes for eastbound traffic was facilitated by the donation

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Scenic Roads

Sense of place is not confined to small towns and neighborhoods in urban areas. However rural areas, especially those with special scenic and historic qualities, face design issues that are very different from those of commercial and residential districts. A road that respects the contours and characteristics of the land, rather than an inflexible solution that bulldozes out uniqueness, supports both the natural and built-up areas that flank a road. In this way, a state road can enhance the experiences of driving and living along it, while preserving a sense of place. With careful attention to design, safety goals can be achieved without sacrificing a road's compatibility with the natural environment.

Paris Pike, Lexington, Kentucky

Photo: Kentucky Transportation Cabinet



Project Partners

Commonwealth of
Kentucky,
Transportation Cabinet
Bluegrass Tomorrow
Lexington-Fayette County
Urban County Government
City of Paris
Bourbon County
Federal Highway
Administration

Fears that a road widening would forever alter the beauty of Paris Pike stalled the project for almost 20 years.



Photo: Christine Amos

No ordinary two-lane highway, Paris Pike is the tree-lined “main street” of Kentucky’s bluegrass horse country. Flanked by pristine thoroughbred race horse farms with hand crafted stone walls and fences, and rolling fields, the pike, also known as the Lexington Road, is actually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. So in 1979, when plans were developed to widen a 12-mile stretch of the state road connecting Lexington and Paris, property owners and preservation advocates filed an injunction against its construction.

What began as a battle between the state DOT, property owners, and historic advocates has resulted — 20 years later — in a new Paris Pike that enhances the region while significantly improving safety and capacity. This was not an easy process, and it is remarkable to many of the key stakeholders that it has even happened. The legacy of the road can be seen in its innovative design but, more importantly, in a new community-oriented process that the Kentucky DOT — which is officially named the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet — is now utilizing on road projects elsewhere in the state.

Once a sleepy country road, Paris Pike had seen its traffic volumes steadily increase to about 12,000 cars per day. Its two lanes were picturesque but dangerous, and there were frequent accidents and fatalities on the

road. “Safety was the number one concern,” one resident active in the project reported. “It was the one thing everyone could agree on.” What stakeholders couldn’t agree on was what to do about it.

Lack of trust was an important hurdle to overcome. For example, opponents of the road widening did not believe the state’s traffic counts. “They just didn’t want the traffic to be there,” said Henry Alexander a resident who is sometimes called the “lord mayor of Paris Pike” and played a key role in the injunction and the ultimate settlement. It was Alexander who came up with an idea to break the stalemate: get the community to take the counts. For eight hours a day for six days, opponents and proponents sat side-by-side counting, and ultimately affirming the state’s numbers.

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— Jean Scott,
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Photo: Christine Amos

The two-lane Paris Pike before its widening.

to be preserved. "We literally walked the entire road," said landscape consultant Christine Amos. "If the road moves, it is moving in response to a cultural resource, a natural environmental or topographic feature or landscape. We wanted to take the task force and other parties out so that they could see what we saw," she described. Another innovation: electronic polling was used during property owner workshops to test design options. With each owner voting with a keypad, results were immediately displayed on a screen at the meeting. This settled a lot of discussion quickly, while identifying problems that truly needed more exploration.

The final design is a relatively simple one that meets the guidelines contained in the AASHTO Greenbook, and respects the local context. The existing road became half of the new road, but rather

Group tours with community members during the Paris Pike planning process helped determine the historic and landscape features that needed to be preserved during the road widening.



Photo: Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

"When we get through we will have a better road, a prettier road, one that flows with the landscape."

— Bob Wiseman, Office of the Mayor, City of Lexington



Photo: Christine Amos

A completed section of the road shows the newly built two lanes in the foreground. By constructing a variable width median, three trees (center of photo) and an adjacent historic house (shown in the right of the photo) were preserved. Wooden guardrails and grass shoulders integrate the road into its setting.

than just adding two more lanes, a variable width median was used — sometimes becoming so wide and following an entirely different contour that the new lanes are not even visible from the old road. In this way, the road detours around significant trees and landscape features, and follows the contours of the land — rather than the traditional extensive grading to make the land fit the road. Stonemasons were brought in from Scotland to train local artisans how to relocate and replace the dry-laid stone walls. Guardrails are made of wood, and new bridges are of stone, like the walls. Grass shoulders were selected over macadam, and median crossovers (wide enough to accommodate U-turns by horse vans) limit the need for intersections.

As phases are completed, Paris Pike is unfolding as a unique rural road — and will continue to reveal itself as the landscape matures. As Henry Alexander puts it, "The real impact of the road will be felt 15 years from now. Every aspect of the road is going to say that it was all worth it."



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Merritt Parkway, Connecticut

Historic Roadway Gets a Community-Backed Facelift

Project Partners

Connecticut Department of Transportation
Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation
Federal Highway Administration
Greater Bridgeport RPA
South Western RPA
Connecticut Society of Architects
Connecticut Historical Commission

Built in the late 1930s, the Merritt Parkway is a 38-mile parkway incorporating a series of historic Art Deco bridges and whitewashed service stations along its heavily wooded route. Though it was considered a national model for its time, by the late 1980s the parkway's bridges, signs, and other features were in need of restoration, usage was up to 60,000 cars a day, and traffic statistics reported an average of one accident every eight hours. To deal with the volume and safety issues, the Connecticut Department of Transportation proposed the addition of acceleration and deceleration lanes.

Spurred by public concern over the proposed changes, and by the parkway's subsequent listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991, then-Connecticut DOT Commissioner Emil Frankel convened a working group consisting of architects, preservationists, and his top management staff to develop roadway and landscape design guidelines to balance traffic safety, road maintenance

and restoration while preserving the road's historic character. The group commissioned a historic documentation study of the parkway, formulated guidelines for improvements, and commissioned a landscaping master plan and a bridge restoration study. The working group also designed a wood guardrail to replace the steel guardrail used on the parkway.

These efforts have guided parkway improvement. A maintenance, restoration, and preservation program divided the roadway into segments and phases for



Before improvements, steel guardrails predominated

restoration. Work has been completed on the gateway projects in Greenwich and Stratford, towns located at the parkway's opposite ends. An advisory committee of Connecticut DOT personnel and public and private interest groups reviews any parkway-related activities, including landscape character, bridges, medians, and the roadside. Community groups and individual property owners are engaged as the phased roadway segments come on line.

For safety considerations, acceleration and deceleration lanes were added, but the design attempted to use the minimum length suggested by the AASHTO Greenbook, making the interchanges more consistent with overall design of the road, according to ConnDOT Commissioner Jim Sullivan. The changes also reduced traffic congestion at parkway exits by 25%. A rock removal and landscape maintenance program was instituted to make room for larger eight-foot grass pull-off shoulders along the parkway.

Traffic accidents have been "significantly reduced," according to Jeff Scala, a senior engineer at Connecticut DOT. An effort is now underway to establish a Merritt Parkway Conservancy, a public-private partnership that would facilitate parkway projects and raise money for the long-term maintenance of improvements.

"The Merritt Parkway project taught us how to balance safety improvements with the community's expectations for preservation. It has changed our whole philosophy."

—Jim Sullivan, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Transportation



An advisory committee helped design a guardrail that was more appropriate to the parkway's historic context.

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State Transportation Initiatives: The Times Are Definitely Changing

As these case studies indicate, a new ethos is beginning to emerge that recognizes roads as a staging ground for improved community livability. Increasingly, state highway departments are looking at the multiple purposes a roadway can serve beyond just transporting someone or something safely from here to there. They are also seeing that road projects offer an opportunity to enhance a community's attractiveness, build its local economy, preserve its character, and provide for the comfort and safety of its inhabitants. Consequently, the importance of roads that are tailored to the environments they pass through is being emphasized. State DOTs are re-examining their design standards and learning that they have the flexibility that allows for this more community-responsive tucking and fitting. And as this new ethos begins to spread, new state DOT policies and programs are starting to spring up that encourage innovations like the ones in this book and allow for more ambitious new projects.

continued on next page

US1, Juno Beach, Florida now...



... and as envisioned by the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council.





Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida

“State DOTs... paving the way for people-friendly places.”

Florida

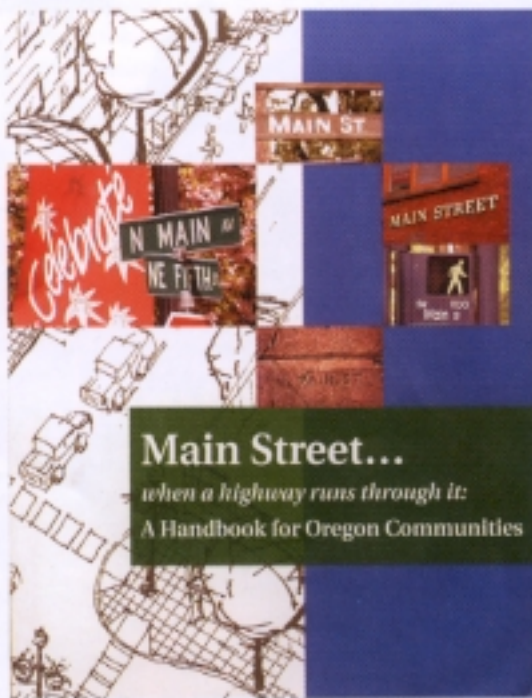
It's hard to believe that not too long ago the Florida Department of Transportation was reluctant to try angled parking on Tallahassee's Monroe Street, its main street. That same FDOT is now an excellent example of a state DOT that is committed to paving the way for people-friendly places with its new Transportation Design and Livable Communities policy. To carry out these principles, a new chapter is being prepared for FDOT's Plans Preparation Manual, with details on appropriate techniques and guidelines for their application, and on how existing guidelines can be adapted to accommodate community livability needs in different environments.

The department has also developed a Public Involvement Training Program and tool kit to help facilitate community input. A collaborative approach is encouraged, with diverse local and state agencies working together with citizens. A livable communities coordinator helps ensure that the word is getting out on these new transportation opportunities. This new sensitivity to community context has led to FDOT's partnering with entities like Florida's Departments of Community Affairs, State and Environmental Protection, the Florida League of Cities, and the Florida Main Street Program.

The Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council is working to revitalize the US 1 corridor in Palm Beach County. Once the major east coast access from north to south Florida, US 1 is an aging, deteriorated strip, still sized to “rush hour” capacity. Along a 15-mile expanse, seven cities and towns, most of whom never really had a main street, have joined in creating a comprehensive plan to transform each of their parts of US 1 into central places, and downsize the road accordingly. For more information, consult the council's web site at www.tcrpc.org. (See page 21)

Oregon

The State of Oregon is often viewed as an incubator for new planning practices, and its transportation department has increasingly followed suit. In fact, as a result of the collaborative efforts of Oregon DOT and the state's Department of Land Conservation and Development, Oregon's Transportation and Growth Management Program was established in 1993. The purpose of the program is to promote the integration of transportation and land use



planning to foster the development of compact communities that support walking, bicycling, and transit use. Through this program, ODOT helps local governments develop community-friendly transportation solutions by providing grants, "quick response" technical assistance teams, publications, and an outreach program that includes workshops, partnership development and training for practitioners. For more information, see the program website at www.lcd.state.or.us/issues/tgmweb.

A new handbook, Main Street... When A Highway Runs Through It is the Transportation and Growth Management Program's latest tool for communities, produced through the collaboration of ODOT with its Land Conservation and Development Department partner and the Oregon Downtown Development Association. Main Streets that are also state highways are prevalent in Oregon. The handbook's purpose shows how traffic can be accommodated on such central streets while preserving an attractive, safe, and economically healthy environment that welcomes pedestrians and encourages many activities that enhance the life of the community.

Maryland

Spurred by the success of its 1998 national conference, "Thinking Beyond the Pavement," the Maryland State Highway Administration is changing the way it does business. Since 1998, MSHA has embarked upon and completed about a dozen context-sensitive design projects, focusing on places where state highways serve as main streets, arterials, and scenic byways; 22 more projects are currently underway, as are staff training efforts, agency-wide. Maryland is one of five states that are implementing model context sensitive design programs.



NJ Transit's Woodbridge Train Station is one of many new stations now serving as a focal point for community life in New Jersey.

Governor Parris Glendening sees context sensitive road design as integral to the state's far-reaching "smart growth" policy because it focuses renewed attention on strengthening existing centers of development. The new policy has tripled funds for community enhancement projects—from \$8 million to \$24 million, through the Neighborhood Enhancement Program and the Maryland State Highway Administration. While greater awareness of community-sensitive design strategies are currently incorporated into all projects as much as possible, it is anticipated that by the fall of 2001, context-sensitive design strategies will be a formal part of all aspects of the agency's work. For more information, and for materials related to the "Thinking Beyond the Pavement" conference, see the department's web site at www.sha.state.md.us.

New Jersey

As the most densely settled state in the nation, New Jersey is leading the way back from highway-driven sprawl and congestion with state-wide transportation initiatives in both traffic engineering and transit. The New Jersey Department of Transportation has initiated context-sensitive design training, not only

for its own staff, but also for engineering consultants, county engineers, community activists, and mayors throughout the state. They have also commissioned the creation of a flexible design standards manual for highway design.

From a transit perspective, much has recently been accomplished. In the last 15 years, over \$7.5 billion has been spent to repair, rehabilitate, expand, and connect all of the state's passenger rail lines — built in the late 1800's by competing rail companies — into one seamless transit system. Together, these connections, upgrades and two new light rail lines will result in an interconnected rail network with over 170 stations serving the majority of state residents. This huge investment, which has begun to overcome years of neglect of transit in favor of the highway network, has led the way for a new program — "Transit Friendly Communities" — to partner with local communities to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to train stations, and make them focal points for new development and community revitalization. A model stations and shelters program is in the process of upgrading 50 train stations and providing innovative bus shelters statewide.

Getting the Show on the Road



1. **Get out "on the street."** Take a walk around the community. Observe what kinds of activities are occurring along the street and roadway - in downtown, in residential areas, around parks, and other public spaces, in historic and natural scenic areas. Are people comfortable crossing the street? How fast is traffic moving? Are there many people around? What valued historic, cultural, or environmental resources exist? Talk to people, and ask them what

Here are some ways to set in motion a placemaking program that will also help create transportation and community partnerships:

- works and what doesn't work about the place. Listen to their suggestions. Through this process, you will develop a better understanding about how a place operates and how it can be improved.
2. **Seek out partners.** Transportation agencies, community organizations, business owners, local officials, and other public agencies should work together to develop and elicit their ideas collectively, and provide mutual support. Invite members of each of these constituencies for a tour or site visit of an existing or proposed project. Discuss ways of working together to plan, design, and implement a project. Reach out to other members of the community and your political representatives to get them on board and draw upon their skills and financial resources.
3. **Develop a shared vision for the project.** Address the future needs of the community and of the transportation agency by working together from the start. Specify short- and longer-term goals, immediate actions steps, and additional partners. Seek ways to solve problems, overcome obstacles, and identify a range of funding sources that may be available to the community, to the transportation agency, or to other public partners. Set up a structure for reviewing and giving feedback on the project as it progresses.
4. **Get the word out.** Before even the smallest activity takes place, let the community know what's about to happen. Tell the press, send out newsletters, hold meetings, and even set up a web site. Establish a community liaison to reach out to business owners and others to keep them abreast of what's happening, help them

Thinking Beyond the Pavement

"Thinking Beyond the Pavement," a national conference held in Maryland in 1998 (see page 23), reached consensus about how to best integrate transportation facilities with communities.

A project that achieves excellence in transportation design:

- satisfies the purpose and need.
- is a safe facility.
- is in harmony with the community and preserves environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic, and natural resource values of the area.
- involves efficient and effective use of resources.

- is built with minimal disruption to the community.
- is seen as having added lasting value to the community.
- exceeds the expectations of designers and stakeholders.

Excellence comes from a planning and design process that:

- establishes a multi-disciplinary team.
- seeks to understand the landscape, community, and valued resources.

- involves stakeholders in developing the scope of work.
- tailors the process to the circumstances.
- secures commitment from top agency officials and local leaders.
- makes communication open, honest, early, and continuous.
- tailors the public involvement process to the specific project.
- uses a full range of tools to communicate alternatives.

adjust their activities accordingly, and better understand the ultimate benefits of the project. Make sure this is done on a continuous basis and encourage involvement.

5. **Be flexible.** Be open to new ideas and never forget that each environment has its own specific conditions that need to be addressed. Remember the AASHTO Greenbook allows for different approaches to a project and its standards are flexible enough to meet many different circumstances. You can always make revisions later if you begin the effort with a small demonstration project.
6. **Get started.** Implement some short-term projects by experimenting with low-cost improvements, like angled parking, striping, bollards, planters or other simple physical improvements to streets and the areas adjacent to them. Collaboratively plan special events, cleanups, and beautification projects. Invite the public to help.
7. **Evaluate, refine, and phase-in construction.** Test out the short-term improvements and observe how they are working. Ask drivers, pedestrians, and local merchants whether the improvements work for them and for suggestions on how to improve them. Based on the input and observed conditions, make modifications and phase in construction to ensure continuing community access and convenience.
8. **Keep the big picture in mind.** Make more major changes using short-term projects as stepping-stones. Use the partnership as a mechanism for addressing the broader livability and environmental concerns of the community.



The Route 66 Festival in San Bernardino, California takes advantage of new angled parking downtown.

For More Information

About Project for Public Spaces, Inc.

Project for Public Spaces, Inc. (PPS) is a nonprofit corporation specializing in the planning, design, and management of public spaces. Founded in 1975, PPS has completed projects in over 850 communities throughout the United States and abroad and has become widely known for its innovative approach to public space planning and community revitalization that focuses on the behavior, expressed needs, and collaborative envisioning of community members.

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About AASHTO

Founded in 1914, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) is a nonprofit organization that represents state-level public agencies concerned with highway and transportation in the fifty States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Its mission is a transportation system for the nation that balances mobility, economic prosperity, safety, and the environment.

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“The simple needs of automobiles are more easily understood and satisfied than the complex needs of cities, and a growing number of planners and designers have come to believe that if they can only solve the problems of traffic, they will thereby have solved the major problem of cities. Cities have much more intricate economic and social concerns than automobile traffic. How can you know what to try with traffic until you know how the city itself works, and what else it needs to do with its streets? You can’t.”

— Jane Jacobs

*“The Death and Life of Great American Cities”
Vintage, 1961*

