

Washington State Focuses on Outreach, Illustrates How to Drive a Roundabout

Location

State of Washington
(Pacific Northwest United States)

Implementation Stage

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

Roundabout Type/Setting

Multi-lane and single-lane roundabouts in urban, suburban, and rural settings

Target Audience

- ✓ General Public
- ✓ Elected Officials

Strategies Employed

- ✓ Educational website
- ✓ Brochures
- ✓ Educational videos demonstrating how to drive a roundabout
- ✓ Mock walkable roundabout
- ✓ Driveable mock roundabout (roundabout rodeo)

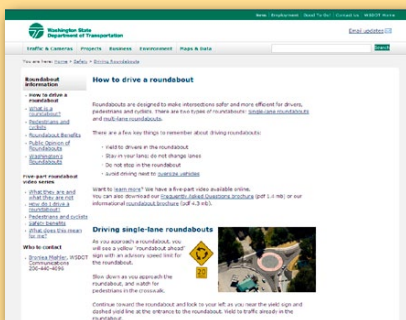


Figure 1: WSDOT's how to drive a roundabout web site.

Background

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) faced resistance planning its first roundabouts in 1997 because the concept of “round” intersections was new and unknown to the general public. Aware of the compelling benefits that properly designed modern roundabout intersections offer compared with traditional intersections, the agency hoped to build many of them to increase safety and ease congestion across the State highway network. Through a concerted outreach campaign using public meetings, traffic safety design courses with local municipalities, and print/web outreach, the agency successfully overcame initial resistance to roundabouts. WSDOT has since built more than 200 roundabouts and plans several more as part of the State’s continued focus on road user safety and congestion reduction. The agency attributes its success with roundabouts in part to the proactive and effective public outreach program that informed the public of the benefits of these designs, helped build support for them, and taught people how to navigate roundabouts safely and successfully.

Approach

WSDOT realized that it would need an effective outreach program targeting the public and businesses, as well as elected officials, in order to gain acceptance and buy-in during the planning/ design process on its early roundabout implementations. When WSDOT first started its to push for the construction of roundabouts across the State, it focused on educating the general public about engineering safety aspects of roundabouts (e.g., slower intersection speeds, reduction in intersection conflict points). WSDOT typically begins with internal outreach efforts aimed at DOT decision makers. Once agency support has been obtained, WSDOT approaches local elected officials to obtain their support for proposed roundabouts. They have found that this approach allows for a more cohesive message to be presented to the public.

“Roundabout intersection discussions are becoming more prevalent in transportation circles as their benefits are obvious to any community where they are built. Outreach and education ... should be on the same solid footing as ... traffic safety and design pieces.”

– Brian Walsh, WSDOT

Launched in 2005, WSDOT’s “How to Drive a Roundabout” website was designed to present educational information to the public about the value and benefits of roundabouts as well as guidance on how to navigate single- and multi-lane roundabouts successfully. The site also provides printable brochures that correct common misconceptions about roundabouts. WSDOT also developed guidelines for pedestrians and cyclists on how to use roundabouts and a five-part video, accessible on YouTube and the WSDOT website. The video explains how to navigate a modern

Related Products

General Information Website

"How to Drive a Roundabout,"
<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/safety/roundabouts>

Five-Part Video Series

Part 1: Roundabouts: What they are and what they are not

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsCol7IERGE>

Part 2: How do I drive a roundabout?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MywmtskFiil>

Part 3: Pedestrians and cyclists

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y05qGz5B1Wg>

Part 4: Safety benefits

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnT1HXo7p_4

Part 5: What does this mean for me?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NO1bi6inF60>

Brochures

Roundabouts – Frequently Asked Questions

http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/09CE6ADF-92CD-4A04-8F82-453B314819C6/0/Roundabout_brochure_80910.pdf

Rules of the Roundabout

http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/148B48A1-8B26-4DDA-8BB7-90C811993176/0/Roudabout_folio_80910.pdf

Learn More

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roundabout as a motorist, pedestrian, and cyclist, and why roundabouts are so much safer than traditional signalized and stop-controlled intersections. DVDs of the video and hard copies of the brochure are available in all county libraries and have also been distributed to driver training programs across the State. The brochures are also available online for download and are distributed at WSDOT open-house events.



Figure 2: WSDOT sets up a mock driveable roundabout to help drivers learn how to navigate the design.

WSDOT also hosts a variety of public engagement events to help educate citizens about how to drive a roundabout. The agency has hosted "roundabout rodeos," where people are invited to bring their largest vehicles and drive through a full-size mock roundabout. WSDOT also developed a portable, vinyl mock walkable roundabout to provide hands-on roundabout education indoors or in other environments where the full "rodeo" is not practical.

Results

With over 200 roundabouts in Washington State and more planned, WSDOT's public outreach efforts have paid off. A recent study showed that at nine of the State's intersections that were converted from a stop-controlled intersection to a roundabout configuration, fatal and serious injury crashes decreased 80 percent under the new configuration. The early and sustained public outreach investments helped to allay public concern with the new intersection designs by not only making the public aware of the benefits of roundabouts but also familiarizing the public with the design through the combination of video, print, and "experiential" outreach through mock roundabouts and roundabout rodeos. Experiencing the roundabouts in safe, non-threatening environments helped make road users feel comfortable with the design, which contributed to successful rollouts of these new intersections. As with most roundabouts, once the public tried them, they wanted more.

Outreach Investment

The outreach investment for this type of initiative is the hours staff spent developing each product, plus costs to print brochures and DVDs. All written materials and graphic design were developed and approved in-house by a group of 10 staff members, some working full-time and others contributing or providing creative direction for specific products. The products were also developed with the oversight/input of engineering staff to ensure that the appropriate message was being conveyed to the public. Ninety percent of the video was done in house over the course of 3 months using video editing software that the agency owned.

Lessons Learned

- Supplement any project-specific roundabout public outreach with comprehensive general outreach about roundabouts.
- Shorter videos are better. WSDOT split its 10 minute video into 5 segments, enhancing viewability.
- Secure the support of internal agency managers and local elected officials on roundabout projects before initiating public outreach.