

Using a Multi-Tiered Approach Can Help Convert Citizen Controversy to Applause in Roundabout Design and Approvals

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A sure way to make a municipal meeting lively is to propose a roundabout for a key intersection. Few things seem to raise the hackles on local citizens more than this design solution. It's the perfect storm for a municipal engineer, or engineering firm of record, to weather. Having been through the maelstrom to a positive outcome, for both the municipality and its citizens, we thought we would share some of the tactics that have helped us calm citizen concerns and turn naysayers to supporters.

A Bit of History

Roundabouts first appeared in Pennsylvania approximately 15 years ago and PennDOT has made it clear that they should be considered as a solution for applicable intersections. Currently, there are 32 completed in the state with 10 more slated to be built within the next two years. The design is starting to become more mainstream, but is still foreign enough to raise grave concerns in a community.

In addition to being unfamiliar with the modern roundabout in general, many people, especially in Pennsylvania also have only one kind of circular road in mind when you say a roundabout. Jersey. Nightmares of traversing Jersey Circles on the way to the shore permeate many minds. And frankly we can't really blame them.

And even if a person has seen, or driven around, a modern roundabout somewhere in the state, they will likely still believe those circumstances were different and it wouldn't work in their unique situation. Not with their amount of traffic, or elderly population, or the business make-up of their town.

These concerns, and the resulting protests, can be enough to scuttle the best roundabout project.



A Case in Point – The Swarthmore Roundy

Beginning in 2014, our team faced extreme opposition to a proposed roundabout on Chester Road (S.R. 320) in Chester County, PA. Local citizens were very vocal and well-organized so we knew we had to help Swarthmore College, our client, and Swarthmore Borough with a very hands-on, multi-tiered approach to citizen education and outreach.

Roundabout Specific Brochures

A project specific brochure was prepared to educate the community on navigating the roundabout as a motorist, a pedestrian, and a bicyclist. It also included information on how large trucks will navigate through the roundabout utilizing the truck apron, and how motorists should react to emergency vehicles entering the intersection. The brochure provided the College and the Borough with an educational tool that could be provided electronically and in hard-copy form to business owners, residents, and commuters traveling through the area.

Numerous Public Outreach Meetings

Several public outreach meetings were conducted throughout the project approval process. The local community was generally unfamiliar with modern roundabouts, and therefore, several meetings were specifically focused on the roundabout traffic operations and design.



Modeling 3-D Real World Moving Visualizations

In order to properly show all of the unique elements at this location, we completed detailed traffic modeling that accounted all modes of travel including pedestrian traffic. Swarthmore College wanted to go one step

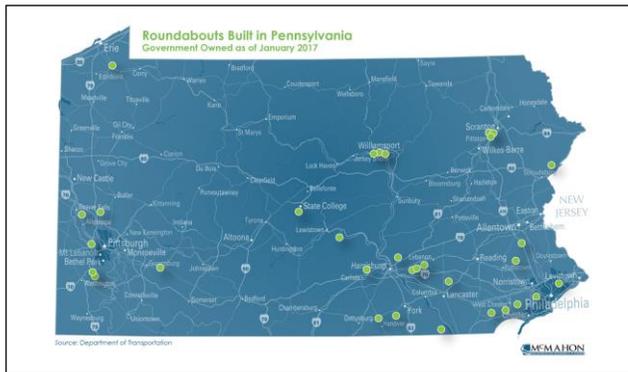
further so we also used a graphic software package to combine the traffic modeling and

architectural renderings to generate a three-dimensional, real-world, moving visualization. The resulting videos were shown to the public and they helped citizens see what the finished intersection would look like, and how it would function.

Using these tools we won over the vocal naysayers, and have turned many of them into enthusiastic supporters of the project. We developed a video chronicling the project from start to finish and we are proud to have a full [Swarthmore Roundabout video](#) featured on PennDOT's roundabout site. This video provides a view to addressing citizen concerns, actual footage of the roundabout in action with various vehicle types, as well as testimonials from the College, township management, SEPTA and local citizens on the new roundabout. Spoiler Alert - They love it!

[PennDOT Outreach and Roundabout Resources](#)

PennDOT has been very aggressive in expanding their education resources on roundabouts for drivers. A new [webpage](#) and [video](#) developed by PennDOT addresses safety and navigation of roundabouts and provides a much needed resource for engineers to use when addressing citizen concerns. Also, if you are interested in seeing the locations of all of PennDOT's completed roundabouts in Pennsylvania click the image below!



Future of Roundabouts

As time goes on, this type of traffic design will become more comfortable for everyone. And at the end of the day nothing convinces people that something was a good idea more than it working exactly like you had predicted.