

Hosting General Information Briefings to Promote Roundabouts

Location Austin, Texas

Roundabout Selling Points for Elected Officials, Real Estate Industry, and the Public

- ✓ "Green Solution"
 - Less pollution
 - Less noise
- ✓ Reduced roadway congestion
- ✓ Improved traffic safety
- ✓ Neighborhood centerpiece
- ✓ Contributes to a sense of place

Strategies Employed

- ✓ Conducted a technical briefing for elected officials, decision-makers, and other professionals (e.g., real estate industry with a vested interest in local property values).
- ✓ Scheduled the event in coordination with a technical training course to include experienced roundabout consultants as presenters.
- ✓ Emphasized the benefits that officials and their constituents would realize as a result of installing roundabouts.
- ✓ Built personal relationships with key representatives from multiple agencies.



Introduction

After experiencing the safety and operational benefits of roundabouts in their city, Austin Transportation Department (ATD) staff decided to undertake an effort to promote their wider use in Texas. The ATD hosted an informational briefing in an effort to encourage other agencies in the State to begin using roundabouts—a proven strategy for improving safety, operations, and quality of life in local communities. They invited people from fellow public agencies, industry groups, and other stakeholders to learn about Austin's positive experiences with roundabouts. In addition to describing the general benefits of roundabouts at the briefing, they advised attendees how to explore the use of roundabouts in their own cities.

Background

The City of Austin experienced rapid growth and faced a number of transportation-related challenges over the last 20 years. That resulted in increased traffic and more congestion, and more people regularly walking and biking throughout the city. Consequently, the Austin Transportation Department (ATD) went looking for creative solutions to address multimodal safety, mobility, and capacity issues – and found roundabouts as one of the solutions.

Realizing that many other cities and local agencies in Texas would benefit from their experience and expertise with roundabouts, ATD decided to share that knowledge with elected officials and professionals in other jurisdictions using an informational briefing as a way to educate and inspire others across the Lone Star state.

Approach

As the state capitol, the City of Austin has the opportunity for regular interaction with elected officials throughout the State. ATD staff also maintains regular communication with peers from other cities and public agencies and professionals in related fields such as emergency response, freight transportation, and consultant services. Over the course of regular discussions with these individuals, ATD determined that roundabouts were an important topic that would benefit from a more formal and detailed discussion tailored to the needs and interests of all stakeholders. Working with supportive state and local elected officials, ATD staff conducted an informational briefing entitled "Enhancing Quality of Life with Roundabouts," at the Texas State Capitol Building. ATD staff led the briefing with roundabout consultants providing much of the

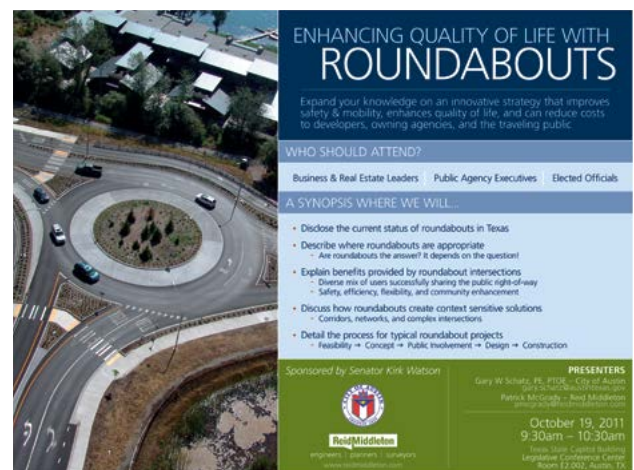


Figure 1: Announcement for the Roundabout Informational Briefing

Lessons Learned

- Define the differences between roundabouts and traffic circles clearly. There are still common misperceptions about roundabouts.
- Tailor the benefits of roundabouts to the audience. For example, if the audience includes developers, discuss how roundabouts can help them save money on some capital improvements.
- Peer involvement is critical. Consultants can provide technical expertise, but elected officials and decision-makers can be more open to conversation with another public agency.
- Identify and invite roundabout champions. Reach out to agencies and stakeholders to find those who are favorable to roundabouts.
- Conduct continuous outreach. After initial contact, champions must maintain relationships with colleagues and stakeholders to facilitate long-term partnerships.
- Identify stakeholders of varying interests that can help provide support to a common goal (i.e., pedestrian groups, bicycle advocates, developers, elected officials, municipalities or public works, etc.). Remember, there is no single target audience.

Learn More

Gary W. Schatz, P.E., PTOE

Assistant Director - Transportation Management
Austin Transportation Department
City of Austin, Texas

512.974.1150

gary.schatz@austintexas.gov

Jeffrey Shaw

Intersections Program Manager
FHWA Office of Safety

708.283.3524

jeffrey.shaw@dot.gov

technical presentation. Organizers scheduled the briefing to coincide with a two-day workshop on roundabouts for fellow transportation professionals to make the entire effort even more valuable for all parties involved.

Before the briefing, ATD staff provided handouts and other materials to attendees to supplement the formal presentation. As attendees arrived, consultants played a video that highlighted geometric and operational characteristics of roundabouts, comparisons to traffic circles, and methods for all road users to traverse a roundabout. The video and handouts introduced attendees to the basics of well-designed modern roundabouts and their benefits before the actual briefing began.



Figure 2: Roundabout at Auditorium Shores, Austin, TX
Source: Google Earth Pro

- Facilitate a continuous flow of traffic, thereby reducing congestion.
- Reduce the likelihood and severity of crashes due to lower speeds (15-20 mph).
- Accommodate more vehicles than other traffic control or intersection designs when located and designed appropriately.
- Accommodate emergency vehicles, school buses, and other heavy vehicles.
- Contribute to a more friendly setting for pedestrians and bicyclists, including school-age children, due to lower vehicle speeds.
- Reduce congestion and delay, which leads to environmental benefits such as lower fuel consumption, less pollution, and less noise.
- Contribute to a sense of place as community gateways or neighborhood centerpieces.

Results

The briefing brought together a variety of elected officials, decision-makers, and stakeholders with different levels of understanding of the definition and purpose of roundabouts. In addition to addressing questions and concerns, the session provided an opportunity to establish contacts, providing a network resource for stakeholders to continue the discussion in the future. It also allowed public sector and industry peers to meet in a common setting while subject matter experts provided information tailored to their needs and interests. Attendees left the briefing with a better understanding of the characteristics and benefits of modern roundabouts, and the knowledge of how to use roundabouts to improve traffic safety and operations in their communities.

More Information

Austin Transportation Department: <http://austintexas.gov/department/transportation>
Mobility 35: <http://www.mobility35.org/solutions/travis.aspx>

“These roundabouts would not have been possible a few years ago, but working with TxDOT and other regional leaders to better understand how these innovative intersections work have opened up new horizons.”

Gary Schatz

Assistant Director - Transportation Management
Austin Transportation Department