**Date:** September 14, 2021  

**Date of Meeting:** September 3, 2021  

**Meeting Location:** Video conference  

**Work Order Number:** 32189-005  

**Project:** Howard County Complete Streets  

**Meeting Description:** Complete Streets Implementation Team Meeting #21 (Part 2)  

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Introduction

The purpose of the Complete Streets Implementation Team (CSIT) meeting was to review outstanding comments on Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 and discuss the schedule.

Jeff Riegner welcomed all attendees and reviewed the agenda, and then led the group through the materials attached to these minutes.

Review of comments received on Chapter 2 (street design)

Jeff provided an overview of traffic calming measures included in the Chapter 2 draft. Jeff noted that the goal is to agree on a suite of appropriate traffic calming measures to make Howard County streets safer for people walking and bicycling. Detailed information is provided in the attached meeting materials. Questions and comments from members of the CSIT are included in these minutes.

Raised Center Median Island

Jeff introduced the raised center median island treatment. The sizing of a median can vary. When the center island acts as a pedestrian refuge it should be wider. However, there are circumstances where a median island as narrow as two feet is sufficient to create narrow lanes and slow traffic.

Christiana Rigby that “guidance on how to accommodate bicyclists,” could relate to bicyclists crossing the street using the island as a refuge or bicyclists traveling along the roadway past a center median island. Jeff replied that guidance will be provided to address both circumstances. He shared the center median island diagram that illustrates how islands can be used as a refuge for pedestrians and bicyclists. A design detail for center median islands that serve as a bicyclist and pedestrian refuge will be provided in Volume IV of the Design Manual. The cross walk is flush with the pavement and has detectable warning surfaces, and the island is raised above the pavement level.

Jennifer White asked whether the intent of this conversation is to create a set of recommended traffic calming measures that all members of CSIT agree on, or whether the goal is to give the latitude to use a variety of measures dependent upon the context. She noted that although there may be disagreements on an individual measure, that same measure may work very well in a specific context. She added that the County should not limit the types of measures available since it is impossible to foresee all future circumstances.

Jeff replied that the intent is to develop a tool box with all of the traffic calming measures that are appropriate for Howard County. Most jurisdictions have a lot of different options, and some are used frequently and some are used rarely. If there is a street with a very large volume of cyclists, the raised center median island may not be the best treatment. The idea is to provide sufficient guidance for whoever is completing the design to select the right measure and design it appropriately. Jennifer replied the selection of an appropriate traffic calming measure is often done by the Designer, but the Design Manual should emphasize that innovative approaches are important.

Jeff explained that when someone in the Department of Public Works (DPW) is designing a capital project, it is important to provide flexibility. However, those reviewing development project submittals want to have some degree of specificity so that if the developer’s traffic engineer proposes something non-standard or not desirable, there is sufficient guidance to request modifications.

Jessica asked how long the center median island should be if the intent is to slow traffic. She observed that planted center medians that run down the length of a road serve purposes other than traffic calming. She noted that if the goal is that center median islands used for traffic calming are short, there should be further guidance on where they are used and when they are appropriate. Currently, there is contradictory guidance between median refuge islands and raised center median islands intended for traffic calming.
Jeff replied that traffic calming islands do not need to be short, they just need to provide appropriate horizontal deflection in order to achieve the desired speed reduction effect. He noted that more specificity could be provided, and that guidance from the FHWA Traffic Calming Primer will clarify where specific treatments are appropriate and how they should be designed.

Larry observed that the purpose of a raised center median island is to narrow the travel lane to slow traffic and asked how narrow the travel lane would be. Jeff replied that the suggestion is to narrow the lane to 12 feet from curb face to curb face. Deflecting the path of travel slows driver speed, not just narrowing the lane. Chris noted that there is also a calming effect caused by having curbs on both sides of the lane, and that a 12-foot lane with curbs on each side is different than a 12-foot lane with paint on each side. Larry replied that he would appreciate some additional information on how this treatment would work in situations where there are on-road bike lanes.

Leah Kacanda showed a diagram of Martin Road from the Hickory Ridge Bicycle Corridor Study which showed one way to handle on-road bike lanes approaching raised center median islands and chicanes. A ramp is provided before the traffic calming measure to allow the bicyclist to leave the on-road bike lane and travel outside the curb on a short shared use path around the traffic calming measures. Another ramp allows the bicyclist to transition back down to the on-street bike lane. This ensures that the bicyclist is not caught in between a passing motor vehicle and the traffic calming element. Kris shared that Great Star Drive features a chicane that allows the on-road bike lane to travel behind the chicane inside the curb line safely. The CSIT agreed that both approaches are good examples of how to safely route on-road bike facilities through or around horizontal traffic calming measures.

**Curb Extensions/Street Narrowing**

Jeff moved on to explain the use of curb extensions or street narrowing for traffic calming. He showed an example from Brandons Way, which is a neighborhood street with street narrowing that only allows one car to go through at a time at several locations along the length of the roadway. He noted this treatment makes sense on Neighborhood Yield Streets, since it functions to slow traffic the same way a parked car would, but it can be used in locations where there is no on-street parking present.

Christiana asked how a bicyclist would navigate the street narrowing treatment on Brandons Way. She noted that the pinch point would push the bicyclist into vehicular traffic. She asked why there are not cut throughs that allow bicyclists to stay out of the path of vehicles where the street narrows. Jeff replied that streets with higher volume should use cut throughs for bikes like those found on Great Start Drive or Martin Road. Brandons Way is a lower-speed, lower-volume roadway where the likelihood of a car and bicycle arriving at the narrowing at the same time is much lower. Chris added that Brandons Way is a neighborhood street with a cul-de-sac. This type of street would function as a shared roadway instead of having standalone bike infrastructure. The bicyclist would already be in the travel lane and would continue through the narrowed portion of the street. The added benefit is that cars will be traveling even slower because the narrowed areas calm traffic. Ideally the speeds on this road would be 15-20 mph.

Jessica noted that guidance should be provided for getting bikes around the narrow section of street if there is an existing marked bike lane. Jeff replied that better guidance will be provided in the next draft. Raised center median islands can also be used in conjunction with curb extensions to create chicanes. FHWA guidance on appropriate median dimensions and spacing will be provided. It may be useful to lay out the alignment of traffic calming measures using cones or ropes to see how it functions before the measure is permanently installed. A pilot process allows for reasonable complaints to be accommodated before a permanent measure is constructed.

Christiana shared that Kris and Jenn Biddle piloted some projects in the County, and thanked DPW for their willingness to try out different solutions.
Neighborhood Traffic Circle

Jeff explained that a neighborhood traffic circle is a raised circular island at the center of an intersection that is intended to prevent a driver from passing through the intersection at speed. They are only appropriate in circumstances where lanes are shared between cars and bicyclists. When installing a neighborhood traffic circle it is important to avoid creating conflict zones between different modes. If volumes support bike lanes, the neighborhood traffic circle is not the appropriate type of treatment because volumes and/or speeds are too high. A request was made to provide better size and applicable use guidance. Another request was made to change the neighborhood traffic circle to a mini-roundabout.

Larry brought up the traffic circle at Stevens Forest Road and Farewell Road. He noted that for cyclists riding uphill, the roundabout creates conflict between cars and cyclists as cyclists are not moving fast enough to merge with traffic. There is a bike lane on the approach to the traffic circle, but bikes are forced to share the lane through the roundabout. Jeff replied that if volumes are higher on this roadway, it is likely a mini-roundabout, not a neighborhood traffic circle which are only appropriate on lower volume streets. Chris agreed that this is a newer traffic circle but was unsure of its classification.

Kris replied that Stevens Forrest Road has a mini-roundabout. There is a similar situation on Shaker Drive which has mini-roundabouts with shoulders on the approaches. Bicyclists are forced to merge with vehicular traffic at the roundabout. Trucks passing through the area may need to ride over the island, but passenger cars can go around. Certain conditions can accommodate a bike slip ramp at the roundabout to allow bicyclists up on the sidewalk. The bicyclist would then use the cross walk before re-joining the bike lane on the other side of the roundabout via another slip ramp. This treatment is intended to accommodate bicyclists who do not feel comfortable riding with traffic. Operating speeds within the roundabout should not be greater than 15-20 mph.

Jeff added that one significant difference between neighborhood traffic circles and mini roundabouts is how trucks negotiate the intersections. When neighborhood traffic circles are provided at smaller intersections, trucks are allowed to make a left turn in front of the island rather than having to travel around the island. For this reason, neighborhood traffic circles are only appropriate in places where truck movements are uncommon. Mini-roundabouts are designed to have all vehicles travel counter clockwise.

Chris shared the roundabout design at Columbia Road and Kingscup Court, which is a roundabout with bike ramps up to the sidewalk and pedestrian crossings. This treatment is preferred over requiring the cyclist to travel with vehicular traffic through the roundabout. Kris noted that providing bike ramps can be a challenge in retrofit situations where existing right of way does not accommodate the treatment; this was a challenge at Stevens Forest Road.

Christiana observed that signage would be helpful in conjunction with bicycle ramps. If the goal is to shift bicyclists up to the sidewalk they need help identifying the preferred path because it is currently not a typical treatment. She asked whether the new sidewalk policy helps the county handle this type of issue. Kris replied that part of the issue at Stevens Forrest Road is that there is a driveway very close to the intersection. In addition, the grades are very steep, and widening the sidewalk would have had driveway, garden, and mature tree impacts. Christiana noted the roundabout has been helpful for drivers, but the grade is very steep, and better signage could help bicyclists. Kris noted that there is signage noting the start of bike lanes and shared lane markings.

Christiana replied that sharrows provide guidance but they should only be used as a last resort since they do not offer any protection. She pointed out that all County Council members agree on the issue of Complete Streets. It is important to build in enough guidance that future County staff are designing streets appropriately.

Chris summarized the conversation saying that providing bike ramps to allow bicyclists to circumvent the roundabout is preferred. Kris agreed, and added it is also important to maintain space between curb extensions to allow bikes traveling through.
Christiana asked how future staff will be able to make the right decisions without prescriptive guidance in the Design Manual. Kris replied that County staff will adjust to the new standards. He noted one upcoming discussion point that is not addressed in the Design Manual is autonomous vehicles. The Design Manual is an evolving document that will be revised to capture the latest best practices.

Jessica asked if there is any updated guidance on how to maintain ADA compliance with bicycle ramps. There had been a concern about ramps causing visually impaired people to walk into the street because they would not be able to tell the ramp does not lead to an intersection crossing. Jeff replied that there has been a lot of recent discussion among transportation professionals about this issue. Bikes ramps should be differentiated from ADA ramps in two ways: the ramp should be steeper for cyclists since they can climb a 20%-25% slope, and detectable warnings are not provided at bike ramps whereas they are at intersections.

Jessica noted that neighborhood traffic circles and mini-roundabouts are designed to solve motor vehicle conflict at an intersection where there are not sufficient volumes to justify a full stop, but neighborhood traffic circles are also a traffic calming measure. She asked whether the Design Manual could provide more problem based guidance, so that if X problem is happening, Y and Z are potential approaches or tools, and here are the potential design issues. Tom explained that for capital projects, consultants use their judgement during feasibility studies to develop and evaluate alternatives.

Larry observed that there was agreement over providing a bike ramp at roundabout locations, and asked if it would be appropriate to say that roundabouts are not recommended in situations where a bike ramp cannot be provided.

Jeff replied that there is a volume threshold between neighborhood traffic circles with no bike facilities and mini-roundabouts with bike lanes and ramps. Jeff shared an image of a neighborhood traffic circle from Seattle which features narrow streets where bicyclists share the lane with vehicles. He clarified a neighborhood traffic circle is an appropriate treatment without ramps since it is designed to accommodate people cycling in the travel lane. The examples from Howard County are higher speed and higher volume streets bike lanes and mini-roundabouts.

Kris asked whether the neighborhood traffic circle example from Seattle is stop controlled or yield controlled, noting that there are no obvious traffic control signs. Jeff replied that the intersection can be stop or yield controlled which is consistent with provided guidance. Kris replied that the County has installed yield controlled neighborhood traffic circles with no bike facilities and that it presented liability issues, because people often make a left turn in front of the circle. Drivers should travel around the circle instead of in front if it. Jeff asked if there were any documented crashes. Kris replied that there was a question related to a crash and how the County signs the intersections, and the County eventually removed the circles. Kris noted that traffic circles on West Running Brook Road were removed, and speed humps were constructed along the road; the road functions well now.

Larry followed up his previous comment stating that if there is an on-road bicycle facility and the installation of a neighborhood traffic circle requires downgrading the facility, it may not be the correct treatment. Jeff replied that if a road has enough volume to require a bike lane, a neighborhood traffic circle is not appropriate, but a mini-roundabout might be. Larry replied that the Design Manual should not allow bicycle facilities to end even if it is to accomplish an admirable goal such as the installation of a traffic calming measure.

Jeff replied that when there is a complete network of bicycle facilities in Howard County, not ending a bicycle facility is an appropriate goal, but for the foreseeable future there will be places where bike lanes end in Howard County. It is impossible to retrofit the entire roadway network for many decades. Larry replied that if a traffic calming measure requires the abrupt end of a bicycle facility, the designer should pursue another solution. Chris noted that interruption may be a more accurate word to use. Installing a traffic calming measure that interrupts a bicycle facility should not be Howard County’s practice.
Bryan noted that roundabout design does not allow provision of separate bike lanes adjacent to the travel lane because it would require a wider circulatory road, which reduces the roundabouts speed reduction benefits as drivers would not adhere to the bike lane markings. There are two strategies for bikes to navigate a roundabout. One is to join the flow of traffic which is feasible because there is a convergence of speed as cars are forced to slow entering the roundabout. The second is a series of ramps and paths along the outside of the roundabout as previously discussed. Kris noted that the width of the roundabout travel lane is 18 feet, which is required to have a passenger vehicle maneuver. An 8-10 foot truck apron is provided to accommodate larger vehicles. Roundabout footprints are roughly 120 feet from edge to edge. Christiana asked how school buses navigate roundabouts. Tom noted that turning templates are used to design for larger vehicles, but the 8-10 foot truck apron accommodates buses. Jeff added that passenger cars move through the asphalt portion of the roadway, and the radii entering and exiting the roadway are tight enough to get the desired speed reduction effect. The truck apron allows larger vehicles to traverse the circle. Large trucks swing as far right as possible entering the roundabout and the back part of a larger vehicle typically uses the truck apron.

**Truck Aprons**

Jeff introduced the section on truck aprons as traffic calming measures. He noted there was a suggestion to add the section on truck aprons to the curb extension section, however, truck aprons are used in many circumstances that are not curb extensions. The center of a roundabout is just one example. Sometimes truck aprons are the extension of the curb. Kris asked where at truck apron would be used outside a curb extension other than a roundabout. Jeff replied that the primary function of an apron is not to shorten crossing distance, which is the primary use of curb extensions, but to tighten up the turning radius where curb extensions are not used. There may be some subtlety required in how this section is worded. The goal of curb extensions is to narrow lanes and reduce crossing distance. The goal of truck aprons is to reduce the effective turning radius of passenger cars. It may be useful to group the two sections together.

**Speed Humps**

Jeff introduced speed humps as a traffic calming device. He noted that Howard County uses a flat topped speed hump as opposed to a parabolic speed hump. In other jurisdictions, the flat topped speed hump may be called a speed table, but for the purposes of this manual it will be called a speed hump. A suggestion was made to show how speed humps can better accommodate bicyclists. Jeff shared an example from Pittsburgh where there is a gap in the speed hump to allow bike lanes to pass through at grade. The gap created by the bike lanes is not wide enough for a car to navigate. He asked whether Howard County has any bike friendly speed humps.

Kris replied that there were none that he knew of, and although someone could drive half of their wheels through the gap that would still require the driver to slow down. Larry noted that Howard Community College has speed humps that stop short of the gutter pan. Christiana asked why speed humps are a challenge for people bicycling. Larry replied that when going downhill on a bike without shock absorbers it can be uncomfortable. Chris noted they also can be an issue if there are children in a bike trailer.

Kris asked whether County speed humps bother bikes, noting that the speed humps have six feet of gradual taper to a ten-foot wide flat top, followed by a transition back to the roadway. Jessica shared that her main bike route to work is along Shaker Drive where the bike humps were recently installed. She noted she is not an experienced or skilled cyclist although she is willing to ride in the roadway. The Shaker Drive bike lanes are not that wide and there is often on-street parking, resulting in passing over the speed humps at an angle. It would be helpful to end the humps further from the gutter pan. As a novice cyclist the speed humps make her feel less safe on the safest route available to her.

Jenn Biddle expressed concern about drivers swerving to keep two wheels in the flat area. Jeff asked whether it is more important to have a flat space for cyclists or keep drivers in their lane. Larry mentioned that the Dutch use posts in conjunction with their speed humps. Christiana noted that posts would present an issue for snow plows. Jessica replied that the most difficult issue is when the speed humps ends in the middle of the bike lane. Either the
hump should end before the bike lane or continue further across the bike lane. It is most difficult the cyclist is forced to traverse a cross slope as well as up and over the speed hump.

Kris noted that this is also a question of constructability. He offered to have a conversation with the contractors to see if it is possible to install a different transition where the bike lane is to give an illusion of a speed hump even if it extends across the full lane.

**Speed Cushion**

Jeff introduced speed cushions as a traffic calming measure. Speed cushions are prefabricated speed humps that can be affixed to the asphalt with hardware. The point of a speed cushion is to provide gaps to allow emergency responders to travel more quickly past the device, while passenger cars have to travel over the speed cushion. There was a suggestion to remove this section since speed humps work well for all users. Carl Gutschick asked whether the group is sure that the Fire Department does not have any issues with speed humps. Kris replied that DPW shares plans for speed humps with the Fire Department. They check the plans and make sure that their trucks can still navigate the area and provide DPW with feedback before installation. There have not been any issues with the Fire Department to date.

The CSIT was comfortable removing speed cushions from the draft Design Manual.

**Raised Crosswalks**

Jeff introduced speed tables/raised crosswalks as a traffic calming measure. He noted there may not be a need for a section on speed tables since Howard County speed humps have flat tops, although there could be a benefit to explaining that crosswalks could be provided across flat top speed humps.

Kris replied that there should not be a speed hump at the entrance to an intersection because it may present drainage issues and the speed reduction benefit is on the departure from the speed hump.

Christiana asked whether raised crosswalks might help with pedestrian visibility since the pedestrian is higher up. Jeff replied that raised crosswalks does not address the increased hood height of cars and trucks. One thing useful for making pedestrians more visible to drivers is curb extensions and daylighting. Ideally a pedestrian should be as close as possible to the driver’s line of sight while still behind a curb.

Kris noted that technology in automobiles is rapidly improving, and things like backup cameras can automatically detect pedestrians. Eventually that technology will translate to regular passenger vehicles being sold.

Jennifer highlighted that combinations of vertical and horizontal traffic calming measures are critical to lowering speeds. She noted that there is value in using speed tables or raised crosswalks. Although they may not be appropriate Countywide, it does not make sense to eliminate the option. The Design Manual should identify the appropriate context for each treatment type. The County should use all possible measures to protect pedestrians and bicyclists.

Chris agreed that the County should not rule out raised crosswalks at intersections because they can be a valuable tool in certain circumstances. One such location is where shared use paths cross over side streets or commercial driveways. By keeping crossings at the same elevation as the pathway, drivers are forced to pass over a small vertical change that will slow the driver down.

**Raised Intersections**

Jeff introduced raised intersections as a traffic calming measure. He noted raised intersections are somewhat related to raised crosswalks, but in this instance the entire intersection is raised. This is often accomplished by raising the center of the intersection and keeping the flow lines as they are. Grates are often added to help with drainage. This section could cite FHWA guidance on what types of roadways these treatments make the most sense on.
Kris noted that raised intersections present a lot of challenges because the ground is not flat. Grading issues are a concern, especially when the crosswalk cross slope must be kept below 2%. He asked for additional guidance as to where raised intersections are appropriate. A raised crosswalk may be appropriate mid-block but not at an intersection. Instead of providing a raised crosswalk at an intersection, the entire intersection should be raised. He concluded that this treatment may be appropriate on some residential roadways.

Bryan noted that there are intersection speed tables on Savage – Guilford Road that have been effective at curtailing speeds.

Chad asked if any of these treatments would be applied to new development streets. This was attempted in 2000 and it did not go well. Christiana asked what issues were encountered. Chad replied that there were resident complaints, driveway issues, and fire access issues.

Christiana shared that when she voted on the Complete Streets policy she thought that it would apply to new roads as well as retrofits. She noted that the County does not have a Vision Zero policy, but they are in place in many jurisdictions because streets are unsafe. If a homeowner is traveling the speed limit, traffic calming measures should not be an issue for them.

Chris noted that traffic calming measures would be primarily for retrofits since the new Street Types would be used in new developments.

Larry noted that some traffic calming measures were included in the redesign of Wilde Lake Village Center. Jessica confirmed that raised crosswalks will be included in some new developments. Some of the traffic calming measures are applicable to new development and others are more appropriate for retrofits.

Chad replied if these measures are going to be used by developers, there needs to be a section that establishes placement details. Kris noted that the design of Brandons Way, which features road narrowing, was completed in the 2000 time frame using the old standards.

**Schedule**

Jeff noted that only half of the agenda for the meeting was covered, and it is clear that more meetings are needed. The next CSIT meetings are scheduled for October 6 and 8, five weeks from now. Considerable work remains to be done on Chapter 2 and 5. The goal is to approve a draft at the October 8 meeting. A more detailed schedule is under development.

Chris noted that weekly meetings or a similar level of commitment will be needed to meet the deadline. A suggestion was made to meet on Friday, September 10, 17, and 24 to advance work on Chapters 2 and 5. There were no objections to the proposed Friday meetings. Christiana agreed that 1:00-3:00 pm works better than 3:00-5:00 pm. Larry shared that he will be on vacation at the end of September. Jenn Biddle shared that she would not be able to participate the next two Fridays.

Christiana agreed with Jessica’s earlier suggestion that the group focuses on areas where there is disagreement.

Amah Binde asked when the detailed schedule would be available. Leah shared that it would be distributed early next week once the new meeting dates are incorporated. Amah asked whether a response would be provided to each comment in the Comment Log. Leah replied that it is the team’s intent to provide a response, and that the comment will be either resolved or parked until the subdivision regulations are updated.

Jeff noted that he would be cancelling his calendar invitations, and that CSIT members should look for a new set of invitations from Leah.
Next Steps

Action items from this meeting include:

- Distribute an updated schedule (WRA)
- Distribute updated calendar invites (WRA)

The next CSIT meeting is scheduled for Friday, September 10 at 1:00 pm.

Leah Kacanda, AICP