Howard County Complete Streets Design Manual Workshop #2
Virtual Meeting held October 21, 2021, 2:00-3:30pm
Question & Answer Session

The following questions from the public were received via WebEx chat and answered by panelists during the Question and Answer portion of the workshop. Questions and responses have been edited for clarity.

Are there requirements for sidewalks to traverse a traffic circle?

Sidewalks and crosswalks in areas that have existing or planned pedestrian facilities are included on new traffic roundabouts. In retrofit situations, the situation may be different. NCHRP Report 672 (Roundabouts: An Informational Guide) provides guidance on providing pedestrian crossings through roundabouts. Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) also has guidance.

In rural areas that do not have existing, connected walking facilities, sidewalks and crosswalks will have to be evaluated in accordance to planned networks on a case by case basis.

Can any consideration for tree health be given such as curving the sidewalk away from the trunk, tree wells under the sidewalk, or permeable pavement? This will also reduce root damage to the sidewalk and roads.

Tree health is important to the County. Healthy trees will be maintained wherever possible. Curving the sidewalk can be a good option for preserving trees for a retrofit project. Most sidewalks will have buffered grass areas between the roadway and the sidewalk which can provide space for existing or new trees.

Designers must be mindful of the types of trees that are being proposed for the space available. There can also be the opportunity to provide a root barrier along sidewalk or curb to direct roots in the correct direction.

Will developer projects with Preliminary Plan Approval be grandfathered and reviewed under the current Design Manual? When does new guidance go into effect?

Application of the Design Manual may depend on the stage of design. The Complete Streets Policy applies to new projects and existing projects if they are in early stages of design. Projects earlier in design should incorporate complete street policies; for projects that are further along and already have design work completed, some flexibility will be provided.

Please review how right-of-way widths are changing for the new cross sections/street types.

The proposed street right-of-way widths tend to be a little bit wider than existing right-of-ways associated with the functional street classification in the current manual. There is not a one-to-one correlation from the functional street classification to the new street types since the street types take into account both traffic volumes and the context of the roadway. When looking to retrofit an existing roadway, there may be a variety of existing right-of-way widths available, which need to be considered in the selection of the street type. Right-of-way may need to be acquired to accommodate the desired street type. On roadways with new alignments, the right-of-way widths provided in the new street type details would prevail.
Has the County accepted the possibility of worsening traffic operations as consequences of speed reduction, removal of channelized lanes, removal of auxiliary lanes, etc.? It is understood that these changes are in effort to improve safety, but it comes at a consequence of capacity which may be difficult to sell to the public. Has the County expected the consequences of impacts to traffic due to slowing speeds?

Improving safety and accessibility for all roadway users is the focus of the Complete Streets policy. There can be tradeoffs for some of these features. We believe that the speed management strategies reinforce posted speed, which is the speed vehicles should be traveling. Removal of auxiliary lanes could impact capacity and throughput, but those will be evaluated on a case by case basis, to make sure there is not a major, detrimental impact on capacity and throughput.

There is not a prohibition on auxiliary lanes, and analysis needs to be conducted to show their need in accordance with the new manual, while balancing accommodation of all modes and prioritizing safety.

Are gutter pans intended to be included in bike lane width in the typical sections?

This question was discussed at length by the Complete Streets Implementation Team (CSIT). Gutter pans are not considered a bikeable surface and are not included in area where cyclists are expected to ride. The seam and slope of the gutter pan and proximity to the curb do not provide a good riding surface. Sometimes the way the lanes are marked includes the gutter pan, but the cyclist is not expected to ride there; a wide enough bike lane is to be provided without the gutter pan.

Regarding the Design Speed / Target Speed Concept: Why doesn't target speed equal the design speed for ALL street types with multi-modal facilities?

The following response has been revised from the response provided in the workshop for clarity.

Streets are to be designed to encourage compliance with their target speed. However, it is recognized that despite the best efforts of the designer, operating speeds for a minority of drivers may be higher than the target speed of the street. Since design speed is associated with values used for design of safety-related elements (including sight distance between all users of the street), in the case of higher-volume streets, the Design Manual provides for a small difference between target speed and design speed to account for variations in operating speed.

With the expansion of access to the roadway network, is there any plan to educate younger cyclists on how to use these facilities safely who may not have knowledge of the "rules of the road"?

We received a similar question at the previous workshop. The Design Manual itself is not the right place to address ongoing education efforts, although they are important. Changes to roadway designs will require additional education for all road users. This Complete Streets implementation effort includes some education follow up once the Design Manual is released and new designs come out. This will take a broader community effort with non-profit partners, community groups, the school system, etc. in order to broaden knowledge of the rules of the road. This will be an ongoing long-term effort that we will begin with the Complete Streets Implementation Team once the Design Manual is passed. The County will however need greater community support to make people aware.

Saying that Complete Streets will “reduce traffic throughput” is very car/vehicle centric. Motor vehicles are not the only traffic on the road and adding bike lanes will increase bike traffic.

It is important to note that we do consider all users of the streets as traffic; if we’re talking about motor vehicles we try to specifically refer to motor vehicle traffic. Bike lanes can actually improve throughput; we look at everything through a multimodal lens and are intentional with our selection of language.
Can you talk a little more about the Level of Service (LOS) requirements for vehicular capacity, safety tradeoffs, and timelines for update to the APFO requirements? I’m curious how clear the guidance is on decisions where there’s a clear conflict between capacity and safety (like adding vehicular lanes at locations with unsignalized ped crossings, etc).

APFO (Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance) requirements have not yet been updated. The next steps in the Complete Streets policy implementation are to review subdivision regulations and APFO, incorporate Complete Streets, and ensure these updates are consistent with the updated Design Manual.

**Information supplemental to that provided during the Q&A at the workshop:** The Complete Street policy notes that, “When there are conflicting needs among users and/or modes, safety shall be the highest priority; particularly safety for the most vulnerable street users (pedestrians, bicyclists, children, seniors, and people with additional accessibility needs).”