

Engaging the Public Through Print and Web Outreach

How Carmel, Indiana, Uses Innovative Media to Shape Public Perception of Roundabouts

Location

Carmel, Indiana
(Central United States)

Implementation Stage

City of Carmel staff prefer to start outreach 10 months to a year before construction to get people on board early. However, until construction begins, staff note that citizens may be less likely to take roundabout outreach seriously.

- ✓ Planning
- ✓ Design
- ✓ Construction
- ✓ Launch

Roundabout Type/Setting

Multi-lane roundabouts in an urban setting.

Target Audience

- ✓ General Public

Strategies Employed

- ✓ Branded project website
- ✓ Informational direct-mail postcards
- ✓ Video animations of future corridors
- ✓ Public involvement at open houses and community meetings



Background

In the late 1990s, the City of Carmel, Indiana, began installing roundabouts within its jurisdiction, where they soon became a common type of intersection design. This change in intersection design policy stemmed from an influential roundabout champion—the City’s mayor. Mayor Jim Brainard took office in 1996 and subsequently pushed for the installation of a roundabout at an intersection that, at that time, was in the project development phase for major rehabilitation. His interest in roundabouts stemmed from his visits to Europe, where modern roundabouts are common, and a ski trip to Vail, Colorado, where the city had installed a roundabout to reduce recurring congestion experienced during peak skiing season. Since the mayor’s first push in 1996, the City of Carmel has constructed over 60 roundabouts with the support of the public.

In 2007, the City proposed building a pair of roundabouts at major cross-streets along a popular/central parkway to enable the free flow of traffic along the route. As depicted in Figure 2, the roundabout, situated on a bridge, would have a teardrop shape and would be elevated above the Parkway. The City chose this shape because it would result in a smaller overall project footprint. As these roundabouts would have a unique shape compared with many of the City’s other roundabouts, the City knew they would need to do extensive outreach to ensure the public would be supportive of the project, both before construction began and during the build-out of the intersections.

Approach

As a first step, the City decided to give the project a “catchy” name that would be used on all outreach materials—Project CarmelLink. Staff developed products to facilitate communication among all stakeholder groups, including the City, community groups, businesses, and citizens. This project’s comprehensive outreach program included:

- Postcards – Provided information to local homes and businesses across the city with general project information, specific road closure and detour details, and general roundabout driving techniques
- Managed mailing list – Emailed postcard information to all members of the list
- Roundabout stickers – Described “rules of the road” for roundabouts
- Video animations of the future corridor – Helped citizens visualize what the corridor would look like once the roundabouts were completed, posted online throughout the project and used extensively at community meetings
- Branded project website – Provided information on the history of the project, a project calendar, links to roundabout-related educational materials, news articles, and frequently asked questions



Figure 1: The CarmelLink logo.



Figure 2: Overhead photo of the completed roundabout installed above the Keystone Parkway at 136th Street.

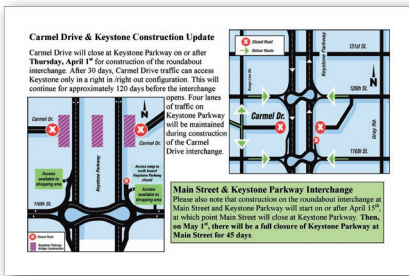


Figure 3: The City of Carmel mailed postcards, like the one above, to residents and businesses around each zone of the construction to inform them of detours, project durations, and other pertinent information, all for about \$1 per card to print and mail.

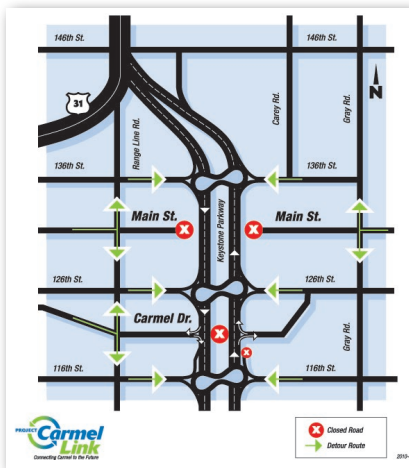


Figure 4: The map above was used to inform motorists and local residents of the new intersection patterns along the Keystone Parkway's CarmelLink Project.

- Community meetings – Provided a quarterly forum for the Neighborhood Association Network and the Small Business Association Network to discuss any concerns or questions related to the roundabout project with Mayor Brainard during the planning and construction process.

Results

Led by the strong support of a champion mayor, the City has successfully gained the support of the public for roundabout projects. The City has not conducted any benchmarking or satisfaction surveys, but according to City Engineer Mike McBride, "You know things are going well when the phones are quiet. This is one of the best measures of success, in our minds." From the safety and mobility side, the City tracks crash counts, minutes saved per commute, and other quantitative safety information at each roundabout installed across the jurisdiction. During the 2008 construction season alone, crashes along the Keystone Parkway corridor decreased 25 percent as compared to 2007 before the beginning of construction for the roundabouts.

The combination of outreach strategies, including public meetings with the mayor and City engineering staff, postcards, and an engaging branded project website enabled the city to successfully influence public perception of roundabout projects. Staff monitoring website hits during the construction of the roundabouts found that 15 percent of people went to the project website via a search engine, while over 80 percent of people either went to the site directly or were linked from a referring site, such as the City's roundabout website. Staff feel that these statistics show that they were able to engage the public in checking in regularly for project updates.

Lessons Learned

- Use hard data to help sell the case for roundabouts to people— sharing data on the minutes of time saved per commute resonates well with citizens.
- Publishing project updates frequently helps engage citizens in the construction process.
- Begin developing outreach products early in the planning and construction cycle.
- Take the time to sit down and talk with people about a proposed project. It takes time to get people on board, but once you do, City staff feel that a project can be successful.

Outreach Investment

City of Carmel staff stated that the outreach products were a very low-cost investment but required a fair amount of staff time to pull together. Each postcard cost about \$1 to print and mail. The videos that the City developed have been used for years, so in the long term, the costs are considered to be very low. For this project, the City hired consultants to assist with the development of a project website, but most of the other outreach products were developed in-house.

Related Products

General Information Website

<http://carmel.in.gov/department-services/engineering/roundabouts>

Video

CarmelLink video player (includes virtual drive-through simulation and project update videos)

<http://www.carmellink.com/>

Project Website

CarmelLink roundabout project website

<http://carmel.in.gov/department-services/engineering/roundabouts>

Brochure

City of Carmel Roundabouts – Improving the Quality of Life

<http://carmel.in.gov/home/showdocument?id=4898>

Learn More

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