New Hampshire Department of Transportation
Accelerating Practical Solutions Workshop
Workshop notes

On March 6, 2018, the Governors’ Institute on Community Design, a program of Smart Growth America, facilitated a workshop for New Hampshire DOT and its partners on Complete Streets and Accelerating Practical Solutions. The following memo provides notes from the workshop discussions and summarizes the feedback submitted from participants through evaluation forms distributed at the end of the workshop.

Participant Discussion Notes

9:30am - 10:30am: Overview of Practical Solutions (Emiko Atherton) and Why Choose Complete Streets (Mike Rutkowski)

Comments/Questions:

- The ROI of Complete Streets projects accrues to the broader good, not necessarily the agency making the investment. Any way to address that?
  - Complete Streets projects can/do help increase the tax base (though not necessarily for the state)

- Perception that Complete Streets increases maintenance costs
  - Make sure this is actually true (before/after analysis of costs)
  - Traffic calming measures, landscaping, and lighting make it harder to plow with typical equipment.
  - To have sidewalks, localities must cover maintenance because of the way NHDOT is funded. Multimodal projects only happen through partnerships. Some localities can take that on, but others can’t.
  - TIF districts are one solution some localities are using.
  - If you can do an evaluation beforehand to show that property values will increase, localities may be more willing to take on maintenance.
  - If you do a corridor study, invest in a $15k market analysis to help make the case.

- Need to move away from calling Complete Streets investments “amenities” or “add-ons”

10:45am – 11:45am: The current project development process in New Hampshire (Bill Oldenburg); discussion facilitated by Emiko Atherton

Comments/Questions:
• Is NHDOT’s Context Sensitive Solutions process part of or in addition to the big project development chart? (A: In addition).

• Feedback from participants that when projects go through the full CSS engagement process, the results are great (ex. Concord project with roundabouts resulted in broad buy-in and helped catalyze a rezoning effort).

Are there opportunities to bring Complete Streets into the project development process?

• Could we establish 10’ lanes as the standard and make exceptions for 11’ and 12’ lanes?
• Every time we repave, should be an opportunity to take a step back and think about how to do things differently (might even be a matter of removing lanes in some cases)
• Rather than looking at projects from the centerline out, plan from the ROW line in (or even beyond the ROW) – different way of thinking gets different results.
• Which should come first: Complete-Streets supportive land use or the roadway design? (A: will always be somewhat iterative/it depends on the context).
• How to bring CS into maintenance projects, which typically include a more streamlined, less detailed scoping process? Florida example: Public Works shares upcoming work order list regularly in advance so that locals have an opportunity to raise needs before projects are scoped.
• New multimodal design criteria (still in draft form) – will provide considerations for different types of roadways or contexts.
• NHDOT’s project development has distinct stages with checklists – find ways to insert Complete Streets considerations into those checklists.
• Statewide Complete Streets policy? Some local participants noted that it would be valuable to have that as a framework (wouldn’t need to be prescriptive)
• NHDOT has designated a “heavy truck network” through planning – would be useful to do something similar for a bike network
• Concord has had a lot of success working with NHDOT but it usually falls to the locality to ask for Complete Streets elements (often at the 11th hour). Would be valuable to have more interaction with and nudging from the state earlier.
• Differing opinions on who should be initiating Complete Streets projects. It has historically been the local partners. Should it always be?
• On state routes, minimum speed limit is 30. Challenging to reduce speed to a level that encourages pedestrian activity. Misconception that lowering speed limits slows travel speeds (design is what is important)
• Local partners tend to be good at responding to proposed projects (ex. Asking for a bike lane in response to an upcoming resurfacing project), but less successful in conveying in advance that they want a bike lane for the route. Creates a challenge.
• Need to periodically revisit the goals behind a project to make sure they still apply. Sometimes projects can be on the books for 15-20 years.
• Challenging for NHDOT to strike a balance between need to prioritize throughput/safety versus other needs on major state roads. (What is NHDOT’s role?)
• Sometimes local agencies do not support Complete Streets as avidly as the advocates.
• Sometimes NHDOT has to say no to locals because funding is limited and need to stick to the primary purpose/scope/budget (ex. re-decking a bridge)

Themes to take into the afternoon:
• Who should be initiating Complete streets projects? Who pays? Who should be responsible for maintenance?
• Where does ultimate decision-making power lie if there are conflicts between competing needs/users/priorities?
• Should communities be responsible for articulating what they want (and NHDOT responsible for responding)? If so, what is the best way for them to do that?

12:30pm – 1:00pm: Review a model inclusive project development process (Emiko Atherton)

Comments/Questions:
• MassDOT’s Complete Streets funding program (example presented) could be a good model for NH. They provide funding for localities to hire consultants to do Complete Streets planning. Good way for NHDOT to provide support/education/capacity to localities without being prescriptive.

1:00pm – 2:30pm: King Street, Boscawen Case Study Exercise (facilitated by Mike Rutkowski)

Setup/context:
• Potential problems to address: getting pedestrians across safely; improving aesthetics; left turns
• Existing roundabout was initially controversial but has since been accepted
• Opportunity to build on successful parallel rail trail
• Northern split is challenging to navigate if you are not familiar with it (not intuitive)
• Crashes primarily concentrated by the traffic signal (fewer at the roundabout)
• Town is updating zoning currently

Report out:
Group 1:
• Balancing needs of people who live in the area vs people driving through
• Poor pedestrian access along and across
• Wanted to keep traffic moving, but slow speeds
• Considered an elongated roundabout like in Dublin, NH (though could do a more basic crossing if budget is an issue)
• Narrow lanes and add bike shoulder in both directions
• Add strategic plantings to help slow speeds and improve aesthetics

Group 2:
• Looked at providing sidewalks and parking by the ball field
• Considered typical cross section of 11’ traveled way, 5’ bike lane, 5’ grass strip, 5’ sidewalk (but difficult to know without actual ROW dimensions).
• Focused on closing sidewalk gaps, intersection treatments, adding bike lanes and a merge area, and kept the proposed second roundabout.

Group 3:
• Goal to slow traffic along the corridor.
• Competing priorities: commuters during the week vs. weekends and what the community might want (ex. promoting commercial growth)
• Considered 3-lane typical that could accommodate turn lanes along the larger intersections, but go down to two lanes with grass strips in between
• Picked three nodes to focus on
• Some concerns about the proposed traffic circle and its impact on access for residents in the area immediately surrounding

Group 4:
• Looked at access management, since the corridor currently has almost continuous driveways, which create unpredictable conditions.
• Kept proposed crosswalk locations and considered pedestrian-actuated signalization to increase visibility
• Added bulbouts
• Identified access points from rail trail up to the street

Group 5:
• Problems: split is weird and unpredictable for all modes; crosswalks at unpredictable locations; inconsistent sidewalks; access management; speeding issues
• Priorities: Pedestrian crossings, realignment of route 3/route 4 intersections; create more connectivity to the rail trail; and accommodate bicycles
• Tradeoffs: Could add a pedestrian signal but would slow vehicular traffic; changing cross-walk locations could make them more predictable but might have ROW impacts; if more pavement is added, it will increase water quality treatment needs and costs; etc.
• Safety: Align intersections so that they are four-way; add sidewalk for full length of project.
• Depot road – put sharrows for the stretch of road to the ballparks; consider a pedestrian signal at the crossing.
• Discussed location for bicycles on the roadway; talked about additional connections to rail trail but decided against it.
• Considered 11’ lanes with shared bike use, and 5’ sidewalk with grass panel in between if the city would accept maintenance

Group 6:
• Create more of a sense of place (e. town banner at Depot St., vegetation, a farmer’s market day, etc.)
• Repair sidewalks where necessary
• Consider restoring the river crossing at Depot St.

Group 7:
• Focused on Depot as key area because of commercial uses; didn’t think it warranted a full roundabout or signal
• Talked about turn lanes but decided it would encourage speeding, so came up with landscaped median instead
• Kept roundabout, kept a striped shoulder all the way down
• How to encourage people on the trail to come into the town center?
• Added sidewalks on both sides in the key middle stretch (ideally would extend the full way, but this group prioritized the commercial area)
• Talked about how to slow down speeds by the residential areas (no consensus, unsure how much pedestrian activity there is).
• Question: how much does the town want that to be a “place?”

Group 8:
• Used the problem of vehicle speeds and the problem of poor pedestrian crossings as things that could be tackled together
• Extend sidewalk in both directions
• Created a landscaped island with pedestrian refuge at each crosswalk
• Moved the crosswalks away from some of the intersections
• Reduced driveway access
• Added street trees
• This group knew that there is a heavy volume of sand and gravel trucks at Queen Street, so they relocated the crosswalks at that intersection for less conflict
• Considered installing pedestrian crossing beacons

2:30pm – 3:30pm: Brainstorm session on updates to current processes (facilitated by Emiko Atherton)

Challenges/tensions that came up during the case study and discussion, including from notecards submitted by participants:
• Safety vs. travel time level of service and left turns
• Traffic calming vs. more difficult maintenance
• Through traffic vs. local desire for sense of place/economic development
• Peak vs. off-peak use of road
• How to slow traffic on straight, flat, road while maintaining min lane/shoulder widths?
• Parking for businesses vs. space for other users
• Plantings: aesthetics and traffic calming vs. added maintenance
• Adding sidewalks/crossings for pedestrians vs. increasing conflict between pedestrians and cars
• Use of limited ROW (ex. left turn lanes? Bike lanes?)
• Location/type of bike facilities
• Roadway lane typical (10’? 11’? 12’?)
• Restricting access points for safety/flow vs. business desire for access
• Is the parallel rail trail enough for bikes? It does not provide direct access to businesses/residences
• Where to locate crosswalks?
• Need for improvements on roads not managed by the state? (Ex. Depot and Queen)
• Need for more info:
  o How do people move through or within the corridor?
  o How much ROW is available?
  o Who are the primary stakeholders (Businesses? Residents? Commuters? Any social justice issues?)
  o What is the project goal (Slow traffic? Increases businesses? Make more walkable?)
  o What are the town’s priorities?
  o What are the costs and constraints?
  o What is willingness of town to maintain?
  o What will land use be in the future? Master plan?
  o Bike/ped volumes? Latent demand?
  o Turn volumes?
  o Conceptual vs. actualized benefits (need supporting data)?
  o No substitute for going to the site in person

Roles:
• How are project costs determined?
  o NHDOT does a sniff-test to see if the costs submitted by locals seem realistic.
  o If not, they check with the locals to see if they want to revise the scope or request more funding, which moves them further down on the project list.
If the cost is severely underestimated, the project could be rejected for the 10-year plan.

- DOT develops alternatives based on available funding and presents them to stakeholders for feedback

- Unlike many states, NHDOT’s ten-year plan is passed into law (updated every two years). That is the primary opportunity for projects to get added.

- With limited funding, do demonstration projects to build enthusiasm and buy-in

- Can NHDOT try to do projects in phases? Maybe there are small improvements that can be done in the interim.

Challenges revisited:

- Public input is focused on needs and desires; then the project budget is established. Could do a better jobs of going back to the public, saying here is the money we have, let’s work through what should stay in the scope together.

- Hard to get people to show up for public meetings

- One bridge in NY costs more than NHDOT gets for 20 years. Major budget constraints.

- NH reelects the entire legislature, governor, and governors’ council every two years – political turnover presents a big challenge.

Key themes to address, revisited:

- Why initiates?
- Who pays?
- How to prioritize with limited budget?
- Public input
- Changing political climate
- ROI
- Maintenance

Who initiates?

- NHDOT could provide leadership to communities education, capacity building, technical assistance. Give communities the tools to ask for the right things.

- One concern with having a statewide Complete Streets policy is not wanting the state to be telling localities what to do, not wanting to override their existing policies.
  
  - Feedback from localities that it would be helpful to have a framework from the state; encourage RPCs to work with localities to develop policies that work for them.

- Show localities what their options are.

- Does NHDOT have the resources to provide education or technical support? Could partner with other stakeholders (ex. public health will sometimes help fund training).
• Provide more guidance to localities on how/when to engage in the project development process?

Funding/ROI:
• Need to spend money upfront on professional help to scope and price projects correctly before it gets to the ten year plan
• Get consultants to help on economic study to sell the long term benefits to elected

Ideas from notecards submitted by participants

Who initiates?
• Town meeting w/public
• RPCs through the 10-Year Plan process
• Comes from both sides/partnership/routine meetings or other ongoing involvement
• Make a policy designating agency responsible as part of project development process
• DOT and RPCs could work together to show which Complete Streets tool can help the town reach their goals – then the municipalities can initiate.
• Need more detail in projects when they are scoped. Make sure projects are well conceived and estimated; spend funds upfront to get it right.
• Could provide more lead-time before resurfacing to allow cities to determine if other improvements are needed.
• Public concern or problematic data raised to state/observed by state
• NHDOT said municipalities w/ Complete Streets policies are easier to work with. NHDOT could launch a program to encourage municipalities to adopt CS.

Who pays?
• Funding will always be limited. We need to partner with sponsor to leverage funding (PPPs?)
• User fees, tax plans
• Using state/federal funds makes sense along state/federal routes to promote safety improvements
• Owner of facility unless another agreement is met
• Depends on who benefits

How to prioritize with limited budget?
• First get a good scope and establish a good price initially; then share alternatives with associated costs with stakeholders and officials for a decision.
• Could have stakeholders role-play different advocacy perspectives, then reconcile as a group
• Base it on answering what is context of the location and who are the users
• Use ROI/benefit cost analysis that quantifies all benefits (safety, mobility, maintenance, etc.)
• Fund projects with the largest economic benefit; measure regionally by delay and locally on growth potential
• Create a policy on priorities
• Make matrix with safety, capacity, context to evaluate
• Better initial scope with defined issues
• Prioritize by safety/capacity
• Develop screening criteria
• Remove political influence
• RPCs to develop priority project outcomes
• Start with scope, what public wants. Develop alternatives with pros and cons for each, rank alternatives based on public input. Provide cost for each alternative; select alternative that fits the budget
• Collaborate with stakeholders to identify their priorities and what they can live without
• Break large projects into smaller ones.
• Provide catalogue of Complete Streets options for municipalities to guide solutions – beyond the AASHTO standards!

Public input
• Need to develop an interest. A lot of people might not care about complete streets because they don’t bike. Bring up children/grand children.
• Include more public participation through different avenues (public meetings, email, social media, etc.) and use different formats (videos, in person, rq tags, etc.)
• Visit the area and observe problems
• Go where people are located who will feel the impact. Use existing groups that meet regularly.
• Combine traffic counts with surveys of passerby
• Reach out early to solicit input to define scope
• Do engagement throughout – make it seem like their idea, and in some cases it should be
• There is a process – follow it!

Changing political climate
• Seek “help” from politicians who have been around for several terms
• Streamline the process; accelerate projects
• Show up and speak up at every opportunity and connect the dots between CS and public health, economic development, etc.
• Brand a policy directive
• Ongoing education of elected officials on benefits of Complete Streets and CSS to the economy, both locally and statewide
ROI/funding

- Critical to understand ROI upfront so you can get support for project – spend dollars on professional help.
- Find or create data
- Quantify increased revenue/property tax to support infrastructure investments
- ROI should become a part of project selection/evaluation
- Change funding cycles? Smaller projects?
- Get those who will benefit to help fund– fees, CIPs, etc.
- Raise taxes
- Don’t think we are ready to measure it aside from a single community and local funding source.
- Evaluate the success of past projects, including public opinion survey and economic analysis

Maintenance:

- Share responsibility vs. finger pointing
- Maintenance agreements must be set and abided by. State has limited funding/equipment for certain tasks.
- Reality is that it will have to fall to the municipality
- With current responsibility and inventory – NHDOT. Otherwise towns.
- Include maintenance staff (NHDOT and towns) in decisions that could effect maintenance or longevity
- Budget more into maintenance program
- Consider joint/shared effort between town and state
- Have local businesses/shareholders contribute funding to maintenance of the facilities
- Increased coordination with maintenance during planning and design
Summary of Participant Feedback Received

Total feedback forms received: 32

1. Please rate your overall satisfaction with this event on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highly satisfied.

   Average: 4.11 out of 5

   Comments:
   • Great workshop – knowledgeable presenters, made topics interesting and understandable!
   • At some points it seems NHDOT was being attacked by the municipalities.
   • Well done – no real other comments.

2. What part of the workshop was most useful to your work?

   • Dialogue between town/planners/engineers/state
   • Hearing about current NH and town examples/practices; case study was helpful exercise
   • Reasons to choose Complete Streets
   • Consideration increased to multimodal transportation when appropriate
   • Interaction with other staff and professionals; local project/problem solving
   • As a planner, the case studies and multi-step frameworks for project development
   • Approach to Complete Streets as a process
   • Hearing about the current process at DOT
   • Networking; group discussion
   • Free-form discussions
   • The case study that explored the issues that arise even from a simple paving project
   • Discussion at the end
   • Candid discussion
   • Understanding the role of communities, RPCs, NHDOT and the legislature in the 10-year plan process
   • Practical application to a local project
   • Tradeoffs; balancing needs of various users
   • Having access to the views and dialogue of DOT staff in an environment where there are defining parameters
   • Thinking about the potential economic/growth benefits of providing infrastructure beyond the traveled way
   • Gaining greater understanding of the range of possible solutions
   • Group interaction/discussion; specific NH experiences, processes, and data.
• Discussion prior to lunch time to listen to other viewpoints
• Group case study
• Reviewing model of inclusion within project development
• Getting a better understanding of Complete Streets
• Reminder to seek alternatives/more coordination with planning agencies and towns
• Case study
• Overview of Practical Solutions; Why choose Complete streets
• Interesting seeing how much planning goes into planning changes

3. Has the workshop changed how you will approach your work? If so, how?
• Above me decision for department and state on our goals
• Yes. Looking at projects more globally and the simple measures that may be taken to improve the road for all users at the very beginning of projects. Seeking ways for more public outreach.
• Not really. Currently the designs I work on include CSS/Complete Streets. Staying within budget is our biggest issue with scope creep. Another item is AASHTO’s A Guide for Flexibility in Design, so we are getting more tools in the toolbox.
• I think we do a good job including public input and “completing” projects.
• Yes, more patience with basic input. Consider multiple modes within budget.
• I am better educated about high level process of implementing CS concepts.
• Probably not. I was already bringing pedestrians and bicyclists into my design considerations.
• Fortunately I’m retired! (But yes, generally)
• No
• I don’t think so
• It’s consistent with my approach
• From the above case study there were many provided methods for dealing with the issue without incurring extreme costs
• As an advocate I’ll keep encouraging towns and NHDOT to use a Complete Streets approach.
• I will understand how to communicate better and why things are the way they are.
• Possibly – it may cause a change in department policy.
• More awareness of early consideration of all modes.
• Yes, I will use this experience to initiate more in-depth conversations about CSS design.
• Try to review projects in the field with an eye toward other non-motorized users
• Yes – it will cause me to reevaluate how we solicit and review projects
• More holistic approach
• Yes, consider overall impacts and improvements; get bike/ped improvement early in design development

• Probably not. Currently we try to reach out for public involvement early and often.

• Yes, only when discussing and interacting with municipalities to keep them better informed.

• No. It continues to re-enforce our early involvement with local community to identify issues and concept solution

• Probably not. Type of projects I work on are LPA projects which focus on providing sidewalks and bike lanes based on scope and budget

• No, try to incorporate already

• No, I was already a CS advocate

• Possibly increased my awareness of the issues

4. Is there anything you would change about the focus or structure of this workshop? Any topics you wish had been covered?

• It’s not as simple as the workshop emphasized when in highly political and small budget state.

• More examples of other states’ Complete Streets practices to try to enhance/develop our own; suggestions for public outreach beyond public hearings – what seems to work best?

• No. Maybe more on transit. Mike and Emiko were great!

• Well done.

• More local experience with winter design. Not all BMPs work in winter.

• Examples of difficult locations where Complete Streets projects were successful; tools for outreach to the public; more discussion on “economic” benefits of Complete Streets that we can bring to the public

• Maybe include some Complete Streets elements

• Good topics and content. Emiko needs facilitation training. Also help being more succinct.

• Greater focus on how the state funding works, and the limitations of NHDOT that are prescribed by our governor/legislature and FHWA.

• More examples of successful and unsuccessful applications would have been helpful.

• Alternatives to traditional public meeting to better understand local priorities; to what degree should we consider magnitude of users (ADT=12,000 vehicles vs. 100 peds/bikes)?

• I was probably more vocal than I should have been given I was an outsider to the agency.

• Like to learn more about ROI.

• Exercise was too long.

• Additional examples with success and failure.

• Talk about competing interests and how to resolve them through compromises.
• Case study example in advance and more group case studies – discussions and interactions were beneficial.
• More overview of successful application of Complete Streets evaluations.
• None. I think the workshop was well organized with presentations and input from audience.
• How to get more public input.
• Bring in info about what other states similar to NH are doing.
• How to still get change with depleted funds and unsupportive elected officials.

5. What next steps should the participants of this workshop now take?
• Observe examples of other states/towns; Complete Streets guidance/policies
• Implement a better process to help incorporate the Complete Streets process/ideas better into our state projects
• Use what we learned!
• Greater emphasis on evaluating multimodal needs early.
• Look at more than traffic.
• Follow-up readings? I will be discussing messages with staff at RPC.
• Do something other than drive roads, e.g. walk, bike.
• Be more holistic in DOT projects.
• Seek to implement Complete Streets policy in their agency.
• Continued dialogue.
• Work on increased communication between local, regional, and state levels; help communities see which CS tools will help them reach their goals.
• Incorporate strategies and tactics discussion today into project design.
• Don’t forget what we learned!
• Finalize our Complete Streets design criteria.
• Start to incorporate these design features into design when appropriate.
• I want to further explore the grey area of state routes in urban compacts.
• Figure out how to “sell” or “get” management on board with improvements beyond the roadway.
• We all need to learn more.
• Implement in every day work.
• Enhance and grow communication efforts
• Review projects they manage; internal processes
• Implement early discussion
• Continue to think about all options when planning.
• See how they can apply the lessons learned
• Convince elected officials that it is important.

6. Any considerations you think should be addressed in the follow-up recommendations Smart Growth America will be developing?

• 
  NHDOT’s limited maintenance funding for bike/ped facilities.

• 
  How do we sell this to non-believers? How do we get locals to provide funding for their facilities (add-ons, not the basics)? For example, we can afford a sidewalk on one side but not both. The town wants two sides. How do we get them to step up with that added cost?

• 
  In winter and areas with high seasonal or special events traffic.

• 
  Using existing expertise and capabilities of RPCs for development of technical assistance/policy work related to Complete Streets (like MassDOT)

• 
  Public input process, how to get the public more involved.

• 
  Have NHDOT increase awareness of CS tools and the way they solve problems.

• 
  Look into faster project delivery.

• 
  Urban compacts.

• 
  Yes – session focused around actual case studies.

• 
  Training for municipalities.

• 
  Provide overview of other state Complete Streets policies.

• 
  Changing the mindset of our elected officials.