Background

In 2003, when the Virginia legislature passed a resolution encouraging the consideration of roundabouts as an alternative to signalized intersections where feasible, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) quickly realized it needed to accelerate its efforts on implementing roundabouts into intersection safety policies across the State. Because there were only a few VDOT engineers with roundabouts experience, leadership realized it would be necessary to create internal guidance and conduct educational outreach for its own staff, and it would need to begin educating the public about these new, unfamiliar round intersections. VDOT’s Central Office created a Roundabouts Review Committee to spearhead these efforts and provide technical reviews, subject matter expertise, and a range of public outreach efforts addressing issues and concerns associated with individual roundabout projects.

Approach

VDOT has used a variety of methods to reach out to the public and promote modern roundabouts. Its Roundabouts Review Committee released a 15-week series of roundabout facts to the public via the VDOT website. The committee also created a mailing list of VDOT staff interested in learning more about roundabouts who received the facts directly via email. These facts were presented as simple, one- to two-page flyers that provided information about various aspects of roundabouts. Topics ranged from roundabout benefits to interesting facts presented at conferences to interesting news stories about roundabouts, from public radio, for example. The facts themselves are short blurbs with photos or a story about a new roundabout in the State to increase readability. They were originally emailed to everyone from the governor and VDOT staff to local engineers.

VDOT also submitted articles to local newspapers and magazines in areas where roundabouts were planned and developed a video on the “Virginia Experience with Roundabouts” to supplement outreach. The video, created with the help of Washington State DOT and the Virginia Department of Education, informed viewers about key design elements and operational characteristics of roundabouts, benefits of roundabout installation, and the circumstances and conditions that make roundabouts appropriate.

The committee also prepared a brochure entitled VDOT Roundabouts – VDOT Answers Your Questions, which provided an easy-to-read guide of general information about roundabouts. The VDOT Roundabouts website also highlights the 15-week roundabout FAQ series on the homepage.

* Twenty-five percent are being installed on primary routes, and 75 percent installed on secondary routes—local streets and residential routes.

Figure 1: VDOT’s roundabout website highlights the 15-week roundabout FAQ series on the homepage.
Roundabouts have been around forever - false
Roundabouts are unsafe to Pedestrians - false
The public avoids using Roundabouts - false
They are unsafe next to schools - false

Roundabouts have been around forever and are not unsafe to pedestrians.

MISCONCEPTIONS

More information about driving safely through a roundabout is available at the Virginia Department of Transportation website at http://www.virginiadot.org/info/roundabouts.asp.

Tips for driving safely through a roundabout:
• As you approach the roundabout, slow down, look for the right and left lane signs. This will help you know which lane to enter. These signs should be posted along the roadside before you reach the roundabout.
• When you arrive at the roundabout, yield the right-of-way to any vehicles already in the roundabout. Sometimes an entry point will be a yield sign or a roundabout sign, or traffic signal. When the way is clear, you may enter the roundabout.
• While inside the roundabout, stay in your lane until you are ready to exit. Use your vehicle’s right turn signal to let drivers around you know what you want to do.
• Do not change lanes or take an exit before checking for vehicles that may be continuing through the roundabout or the lane next to you or behind you.
• Expect vehicles to be in blind spots you cannot see in your mirrors or side mirrors. Quickly glance over your shoulder and check for any vehicles that may be in your blind spot.

More information about driving safely through a roundabout.

Figure 2: Sample slide from VDOT’s public outreach presentation.

Section 3: Safe Driving

More information about driving safely through a roundabout is available at the Virginia Department of Transportation website at http://www.virginiadot.org/info/roundabouts.asp.

Tips for driving safely through a roundabout:
• As you approach the roundabout, slow down, look for the right and left lane signs. This will help you know which lane to enter. These signs should be posted along the roadside before you reach the roundabout.
• When you arrive at the roundabout, yield the right-of-way to any vehicles already in the roundabout. Sometimes an entry point will be a yield sign or a roundabout sign, or traffic signal. When the way is clear, you may enter the roundabout.
• While inside the roundabout, stay in your lane until you are ready to exit. Use your vehicle’s right turn signal to let drivers around you know what you want to do.
• Do not change lanes or take an exit before checking for vehicles that may be continuing through the roundabout or the lane next to you or behind you.
• Expect vehicles to be in blind spots you cannot see in your mirrors or side mirrors. Quickly glance over your shoulder and check for any vehicles that may be in your blind spot.

More information about driving safely through a roundabout.

Figure 2: Sample slide from VDOT’s public outreach presentation.

Figure 3: Roundabout information from Virginia’s DMV driver’s manual.