



## **FHWA Webinar: Public Outreach for Road Diets: How do you answer the tough questions?**

**Link to Web Recording:** <https://connectdot.connectsolutions.com/p14sz21cmej/>

### **Julie Lambert**

Good afternoon or good morning to those in the west and welcome to the Road Diet Webinar.

My name is Julie Lambert and I will be moderating the webinar.

I want to remind those of you calling in to the teleconference for audio that you do need to mute your computer speakers or else you will hear the audio over the computer as well.

Today's webinar is scheduled to last an hour and a half. We will have three presentations and the remaining time will be for audience question and answer. If, during the presentation, you think of a question, please type it in to the chat area on the left side of the screen. Please make sure you send your question to everyone and indicate which presenter the question is for. The presenters will not be answering the questions during their presentation and I will start the Q&A session with the questions typed into the chat box. If we run out of time or are unable to address all questions, we will attempt to get written responses from the presenters.

The PowerPoint presentations used during today's webinar are available for download from the file download box that will be at the bottom left of your screen.

Today's webinar will start with a brief welcome by Rebecca Crowe from Federal Highway Administration's Office of Safety. Becky?

### **Rebecca Crowe**

Good afternoon and welcome to the webinar. Over the last few years we have been promoting road diets and we have seen tremendous success. They are in standard practice in many states and they are identifying sites for reconfiguration. I did post our website in the chatpod, please check it out. We have a lot of resources and case studies and today you will hear from some great speakers talking about how they answer the tough questions. So a big thanks to Jon Kaplan, James Le and Ken Sides. Thank you for taking the time to speak to our audience.

### **Julie Lambert**

Thank you, Becky!

Our first presentation will be from James Le. James Le is a Senior Civil Engineer who has been working in Vision Zero since it has been announced in Seattle in 2015. He has over 10 years of broad range transportation experience in both private and public sectors. He currently works in the Project Development Division where he works on various programs within Vision Zero including safety corridors, research, enforcement coordination, and evaluations. James I'll now turn it over to you!

### **James Le**



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Hello, everyone. I am here to tell about our outreach in Seattle. The slides are about our core values, mission and values of the city. I will give you some background and then talk about our program. We will defer questions until the end of the webinar.

Seattle is one of the fastest-growing cities in the U.S. Employers are moving into the area. To deal with the growth, this is kind of what we are seeing. Traffic volumes are going down and transit ridership is on a trend. People are choosing not to drive a personal vehicle. This is what happens in my office. We have the public emailing and calling us. They are demanding that they want safe streets where they work and live.

In 2015 we announced our Vision Zero program. Vision Zero is our plan to end traffic death by 2030. We have a multi-pronged approach. It is important to evaluate your projects and tell the public. These are the changes and these are the results. It is to incorporate equity into your project, as well. Death and serious injuries do not discriminate. Within Vision Zero, we have safety corridors and spot improvement programs. We have monthly coordination meetings with SDOT. They are aware of the changes when they are enforcing traffic laws. We have partnerships with several transportation companies that provide subsidized rides. There is another perspective to our data -- we use lots of data to prioritize and identifying where we need to make our investments. We are striving to be more proactive. We based a lot of our prioritization against collisions. Recently completed research and we looked at traits of the collisions. We looked to where they were the most high and we looked at locations that don't have police reports. We can implement something before collisions happen. At the end of the presentation -- I have my contact info. If you want our findings and reports, feel free to reach out.

We recently lowered speed limits across the city. What this does is lay the groundwork to look at speed limits across the city and see what is appropriate for the land you use. Speed plays a big role in fatal injury collisions.

I will talk about the safety corridors projects. We don't use the word for diet when we talk to the public. It frames it around safety. Sometimes we hear proponents calling it a road fitness project. We have a lot of history around these projects. This map highlights the projects. The one and the lower right-hand corner shows the pictures and results.

There are a lot of collisions. When we go to the public, we keep the message simple. We could give those lots of data, but we want to keep the message simple. The neighborhood is where they live and work. It was important for us to have strong leadership support. For the overview, Rainier Ave S is a wide street. It serves multiple transit routes. 13,000 people use this. At a minimum, we have 13,000 people crossing on a daily basis. In addition, the land in the area is a neighborhood and commercial streets with some local business shops. Lots of people are walking and dining in this area. Looking at the data, there have been lots of injuries. All along our study area, there is an average of one crash per day. When we looked at the map and the people who live in the community, it has the highest concentration of communities of color in all of Seattle. Want to hear from these people. I will talk about how we got them to come to the meetings. For our outreach, we identified our audience. We had a serious meeting and asked for feedback. We came out with our design. On the right was a flyer we distributed. We have



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the flyer translated into nine identified languages of the area. To hear from the people we reach out to our department of neighborhoods. These people are contracted by the city to reach out to their respective communities; they bring them to our meetings and inform them about our projects and programs.

This is a picture of one of the engagement liaisons. They have a microphone on. The people at this table speak his language. As the speaker was speaking, we instructed them to speak slowly so it could be translated. They are getting the message in real time. We had nine of these different tables. This room was packed. These are the speeds we saw. There are speeds as high as 38 miles per hour. Our project exhibits twice as many crashes compared to these other routes. That tells us that the country is very crash rate is high. We reached out to our traffic operations center. We asked how long it takes to clear an incident. How long to clear one crash? We looked around the corridor and it was 47 minutes. If you are going to talk about delays as part of the project, it is important to note about delays.

In 2015, we implemented the pilot project in our area. We lowered the speed limit to 25 miles per hour. This is the area where we see the most people walking. There is a neighborhood with lots of people walking and crossing the street to get on the light rail. We used the shown testing to find out the before and after travel time and when we looked at the overall network and travel along the corridor in the southbound direction, we projected that cars with experience a delay of two minutes and 30 seconds more. For transit travel time, we looked at how long it took a bus to get through; they experienced an additional one minute delay. If their delay was more than two minutes, we would have had to add an extra bus to the service which would have been extra cost. Our timing group went from 60 seconds in the morning peak shown in the new configuration.

This is what it looks like before re-channelization. We also used this project as an opportunity to square up and intersection to provide safety from vehicles coming out of the Street. Another thing to note, I suspect there is someone who works for Google Street view who lives in the area. Every time we do, someone comes out to do a Street view. Feel free to go to Google Rainier Ave S to look at before and after pictures. This is what it looked like one week after the changes. The community comes through annually to do a heritage parade where they celebrate the different cultures in the area. There are food booths and games. If you're looking at the street level, you can see some marks right here. These indicate how we removed the paint from the old project. It is very clean right now. Once dirt covers it back up, you will not see the lines. That is typically how we remove lines from all our projects.

Here are the speeds. Previously it was 30 miles per hour. Now it's 25 miles per hour. Speeders are down. It's important to note that this design is. As long as one person is starting at the speed limit, everyone is driving at the speed limit. We sent in terms to collect lots of travel time data. I mentioned that we predicted a two-minute and 30 second time delay. Travel times have improved. We made several improvements for buses to get into traffic more immediately. Collisions are down across the board. I wanted to highlight when you add in the left turn lane, they go down dramatically.

During our initial meeting, we had people who lived in million-dollar houses coming to our meetings telling us volume would go up in the area and it didn't. The ones going through the commercial area



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transferred to Martin Luther King Jr. Way. This has a light rail on it and designed to more cars. We heard a lot from the community. Now they are driving more slowly and it's safer to make turns. The last bit of advice is to make sure your leadership is behind the meetings. We had the mayor, to come to our meetings. Make sure the audience that comes out to the meeting is a true representative cross-section of the people who live there. Use data to drive the improvements and tell the story. If your agency or jurisdiction hasn't done a diet before, I would recommend taking out some of the low hanging. This is my contact info. Feel free to call or email me.

### **Julie Lambert**

Thank you, James!

Next we'll hear from Jon Kaplan. Jon Kaplan is currently the Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Manager at the VT Agency of Transportation. He has worked in the VTTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Program for 16 years, including 2 years as the Vermont Safe Routes to School Coordinator. He is a registered civil engineer who has been involved primarily with bicycle and pedestrian facility planning and design since 1993. He graduated with a B.S. in Civil Engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, MA. He is a registered Professional Engineer in Vermont and a member of the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals and the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

Jon?

### **Jon Kaplan**

Thank you, Julie. Good afternoon or good morning. I will focus in on the marketing aspect of road diet projects. I think James did a great job of setting the context and wherever they are in terms of safety that is the same for us, as well. We have not been implementing them for too long. Several of our larger municipalities have a few projects that were starting in 2009 before the term road diet was being used. We were using the Every Day Counts initiative. We are working on a process for how we will select for diet projects in the future. I will focus in on the mistakes we made and what we learned.

Fortunately, we have a successful project that was completed this summer. In the past, we were generally coordinating our road diet projects with resurfacing projects. That gives you the opportunity to change pavement markings. Because of the progress of a paving project, you have to have temporary markings. That gives you the opportunity to try out a reconfiguration. In the past, the projects were primarily driven by bicycling advocates, as opposed to the safety perspective. Some of the things we learned not to do are duties without any kind of process. Doing a minimal public outreach and not having any objective evaluation criteria. That is something we learned from an unsuccessful project. Public opinion ruled the day and turned against us. It was not the state's call to keep it, but the municipality decided not to keep it.

What we learned is to really engage the public and businesses early, long before the contractors are rolling their equipment to the project. We provide a background for the configuration and the intent. And then, establish criteria and collect data before anything happens. Then you can use the data to



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make your case before and after. Definitely look at adjacent traffic issues. One project that was not successful; there was an entrance to a high school fairly close to where we were working on.

It confused the whole issue. If you are going to do a trial, the longer to keep it out there, the better. I know when we did our project this summer; we included a long enough trial period. We made sure the contracts specified that the contractor could not work in the corridor during the evaluation period. Then you have things going on that would impact how traffic is actually flowing through the corridor.

This is a little about the project under construction the summer. James mentioned the low hanging fruit and trying it on a corridor where you are likely to have success.

It already had a two-way left turn lane and then travel lanes in each direction. There was essentially no shoulder. Almost 50% of the crashes were rear-ended and sideswipe. People knew it merged. They would try to scoot past slower moving traffic. This was a prime commuting corridor.

Some of the things we did in terms of marketing and outreach. The town had done a planning process to look at the corridor. They approached us about what we could do in terms of better access for bikes. This was all happening at the same time we were embracing the EDC initiative. We were able to incorporate some of their planning work into our design. We created a video in-house to go over the basics. That video went up on our YouTube site. We promoted that pretty heavily. It is still out there. There's a link at the end of the presentation. There is a lot of outreach to businesses along the corridor. Prevent to the local Chamber of Commerce and got their feedback. Before it started was key. This project had a public information officer. There were weekly construction updates that always included a sentence or two about the project. There were links to other information we had. The public information officer does the communication was not just one way. Anyone could contact her with questions. She would relay those to me or the project manager. The interaction was very critical to people feeling they are being heard. We did have a project specific website.

We had a project and got everyone to agree to do the trial. In the project plans, there were two different striping layouts. I mentioned that we did the initial layout on the base course. The contract had a 30 day minimum to 60 the maximum spelled-out. Having the opportunity to having the markings out there for a good period of time and to be open to feedback and really having the opportunity to adjust the markings was important. We did make some adjustments. There was some truck turning issues. We ended up with buffered bike links lanes. We ended up with buffered bike lanes.

These are some of the things we collected data on before and after. Crash data, traffic volume, traffic speed, pedestrian crossings, there were not many. Signals were a concern. The overall travel time to the corridor. I know the travel time basically increased. I think it went from one minute and a half to a minute and 50 seconds. We had a survey. We did two versions. Preconstruction survey about what they thought about the upcoming project.



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A link to the survey was provided and the construction update. We got a little over 650 responses. In addition to the set questions, they were able to provide open ended comments. We also wanted to find out some of the traveler reasons for using the corridor.

How do you feel about the upcoming lane reconfiguration? 62% were neutral or in support. Then we asked essentially the same question in the trial period. Over 75% indicated they did not support the reconfiguration. It was quite a change. When we allowed the open-ended comments, a lot of the comments were simply anti-bike comments. We took these results with a grain of salt. Quite a few comments had nothing to do with the reconfiguration. We will do it for safety and evaluate criteria. We will make the opinion based on all the data. That was a little challenging. Having the data really helped. Just a couple examples. The open-ended comments were on both sides of the issue. From, it's a stupid idea to, it will definitely improve safety.

In terms of outreach, something that helped us was that the media really paid attention, especially during the trial period. That led to some inquiries from newspapers and television. That give us further opportunities to explain what we were doing. It gave the public different ways to get information. That was a real bonus. There are a couple of things we are still working on for future marketing. That is to make some kind of post-construction video. We made the decision to keep the reconfiguration. We have some aerial images. We will get some images about how we would do the road diet. That gives an interesting perspective. Another thing that is important would be the long-term evaluation. Now that the configuration has been out there for a year, now we can go back and look at the crash differences. We can see how the traffic and bike volumes have reacted to the reconfiguration. We have also talked about looking at some of economic developments and economic impact metrics. We did a work in partnership with our regional planning commissions. They are another partner to do outreach and education. They help us decide what corridors to do in the future. My contact information is on the last slide.

### **Julie Lambert**

Thank you, Jon! Next we'll be hearing from Ken Sides.

Ken Sides is a professional engineer at Sam Schwartz Engineering who has been building road diets, complete streets and modern roundabouts since 1998. He is a member of the TRB and ITE Roundabout Committees, and is a designated FHWA Roundabout Peer Expert. He has been doing public outreach for innovative roadway projects since Key West in the early 90's. I will now turn it over to you, Ken.

### **Ken Sides**

Hello, everybody. I am going to talk a little history and basics. Back in 1999 they did case studies. In 2004, Jennifer found that crashes went down, efficiency went up and livability went up. The cover of her report is deliberately faded. If you adjust the color contrast, you see a roundabout. Let's see if we can recover this. Intersections are where a lot of the action takes place. Road diets and roundabouts go together like peas and carrots. Let's look at downtown Asheville. We know they usually involve Lane narrowing, Lane elimination and repurposing of real estate. This is downtown Asheville. We will count all the other lanes. There are 18 of them. They came about a roundabout corridor concept. You can



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have landscaped medians or angled parking. Here you see lots of lanes. Some are turn lanes, otherwise known as storage lanes. Do they need all the lanes? It was not good for pedestrians to cross all those traffic lanes. They came up with this rendering. Is this possible? Could it really happen here? It to be greener. It could be more business friendly. The answer is, yes. There is only one lane to cross. There is a pedestrian refuge. There is a bike ramp. This is what Asheville did downtown. Might there be a possibility of more development? You can see there is a building. This is one of the approaches. Look at different it is. You had 18 lanes. Now there is only eight. There is also a bike ramp. This is a crosswalk. Is there anything we can do to make that more dramatic so they understand pedestrians belong there. I have been using this. It is plastic and is strongly contrasting the old and new. Yellow is the last color that persons losing their vision can see.

The first of two studies was done in Clearwater, Florida. The residence went to learn what to do. Look of the body language. They are not sitting there glowering at authority figures. They knew what they were doing and did a good job. When they were done, they signed their work. They took their plans. They went around to their neighbors and got signatures.

That resulted in millions of dollars and more than 30 roundabouts. That method was very successful. If you want to learn more about this, FHWA has written materials.

For case number two, public involvement occurred. This is in downtown Sarasota. They converted it to this. A lot of people are living there in condos. This is an interesting case. They converted it to this. The public space in the foreground, there was bicycles and has kind of faded into the background. They are not sitting there. You can combine a road diet and an intersection diet. There is a public garden there. This is the same intersection. Notice there is a potted plant. This woman has chosen to relax and read a book right next to the intersection. Can you imagine anyone posing to relax at one of intersections? Let's talk about this. If you wanted to find to the edge of the public space, all Sarasota has to do is add planters. We have ballerinas posing. You don't have that going on at your average intersection. Road diets can be about transforming a space.

Your classic five lane divided roadway. This is actually the city can have some influence. This gives a bad impression to visitors. It is not very pedestrian friendly. We developed some alternatives. At the meeting, we showed them to the public. We showed all the usual things we would show. Crash data with graphics. Data in different formats. We showed them nine tables like this. This is what the street looks like now. There is only a 4 foot sidewalk. Per day, there is an existing bike lane but still not a pleasant experience. But we are looking at is a project that would be driven by a need for economic development. We were hearing about where about safety. You can't have a vibrant street with 4 foot sidewalks. Wide sidewalks require fewer lanes. Fewer lanes require roundabouts. Travel through the corridor is mainly affected by these intersections. We know it's hard for folks to understand to say, we will take away a couple lanes and things will be all right. It is not a roundabout project. The reason the road diet has to happen is to have economic vitality. Fewer lanes make wide sidewalks possible. That makes economic development possible. This is sort of a conceptual version to emphasize this point.



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There is our 4 foot sidewalk. There is the bike lane that almost nobody uses. Here is one of the alternatives. This is interesting. And 8 foot pullover lane. The emergency management folks were interested in something like that.

It also provides a buffer between the sidewalk and lanes of traffic. For some reason, showing the public those did not convey the idea of the project. Roundabouts were not the issue. The Chamber of Commerce unanimously supported the proposal. The Rosemary District to the north was also okay with the proposal. We had to do a different job of explaining the project. We have this rendering of how it could be. But at the meeting, the conversation got bogged down in level of service. Even though it's only about cars, not other mobility's, two hours per day, five days a week.

What we will need to do a show people that taking away lanes will get a return. It will be a different street and a different world that will attract new developers. How will we convey all that? We had to come up with an interesting tool, which is really my point of the presentation.

It is way better than our typical engineering simulation. Because of the Adobe connect technology we are using, I can't show you moving images. This is a 3-D model that is accurate. There are renderings of buildings we would expect. It runs on top of the gaming software. They are interested in 3-D world. The software can be run live at our second public meeting. The videos will also be available. You can change the quantity of vehicles and the volume of cars. You can move up the traffic. You can show the existing street and the alternatives. You can show possible future development. You can crank up the number of pedestrians. This is alternative A, a modest increase in sidewalk width. This is a different one. This tool will help the public understand what they would get.

In this case, send me an email. That concludes my presentation

### **Julie Lambert**

Thank you Ken!

Michelle, before we begin the Q&A, would you like to explain to the group the Road Diet Workshop slide that is presently up?

### **Michelle Neuner**

We just wanted to make sure that everybody knew that FHWA is offering free road diet workshops. The basic agenda is when to consider a road diet. I think, a lot of time, FHWA likes to identify a potential candidate. Basically, just contact Becky. You can see her contact information on the slide.

### **Julie Lambert**

Thank you, Michelle! ... I'd now like to start off the Q&A session with the questions posted online. After we get through the questions in the chat box, if we have time we will open up the phone lines. If we're unable to get through all of the questions, we will get written responses from the presenters and they will be included in the finished transcript.



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My first question is for Jon. James indicated we do not refer to it as the road diet, is that the same for yours as well?

### **Jon Kaplan**

We did not completely shy away from the term. We did talk about reconfiguration, but we used road diet, as well.

### **Julie Lambert**

I have a question for everyone. There is a little discussion regarding the question. Has anyone else concerns with drivers using the center lane as a pass lane?

### **James Le**

This is James in Seattle. We did initially, but we got lots of enforcement out there. That stopped.

This is [ Indiscernible - low volume ] . Should you happen to have water roundabouts -- modern roundabouts , you can actually have a continuous median and said of a turn lane -- instead of a turn lane . Drivers can go to the next roundabout and go back to where they wanted to go and make a safe right turn . You also get a nice median . There are occasions where you do have a corridor. -- There are occasions where you have a corridor with roundabouts at both ends.

### **Julie Lambert**

This question is for Jon. Do you have any advice or experiences related to first introducing TWLTL to an area?

### **Jon Kaplan**

The project we just had this summer was a little different. We had a two-way left turn lane. We are working on some educational materials on the left turn lanes. I did hear from a number of people in the meetings that they did not understand how to use them. I think I have observed that. People feel hesitant. That is where the route we are going. There is good guidance about not making them too wide.

### **Julie Lambert**

Our "roadside safety engineer" will insist that placing things near the roadway (trees, art, facilities for people) will make the road less safe. How would you respond to this argument?

### **Ken Sides**

There is a great little sheet you can download called 22 reason why street trees are desirable and not a problem. The real issue is speeds. I think it's good to focus on trying to get the speeds the down. Given that there are intersections all along the way -- that is what really determines the time.

### **Julie Lambert**

Thank you. Does anyone else want to chime in?

### **Jon Kaplan**



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This is Jon. I think it has to do with context. If you're in an urban area with a lot of different things going on, then you certainly don't want to make things hazardous. You have to look at the overall picture of who is using a particular space and what is its function. I am an engineer and would argue that the whole concept of clear zone gets misused. Anyway, probably going out on a limb, but you have to look at the overall speed. If we're talking about safety and vulnerable users, speed is critical. If someone driving a car is a poor enough driver that they go off the road at 20 miles per hour they probably won't die, they are in a machine .

### **Julie Lambert**

What funding sources did you access for implementing road diets?

### **Jon Kaplan**

This is Jon. This is one of the benefits of doing it as a paving project. No extra funding or additional funding had to go into the project. It was not looked at as any kind of a bonus.

### **James Le**

This is James. The project that I mentioned was funded from a large capital project that went under budget. Moving forward, have that large \$1 million levy. We framed it around Vision Zero. We are also working with paving projects group. We identify appropriate speed limits for the corridors.

### **Julie Lambert**

It appears we have run out of time. Thank you everyone. I will be sending out an email to all registered participants that will include the chat pod contents as well as other follow-up details. Thank you for your participation in today's webinar.