

Planning *by* Design

Exploring Traffic Calming

What is Traffic Calming?

Everyone wants solutions to traffic congestion, increased vehicle speeds, and traffic volumes in our neighborhoods. Traffic issues are becoming a significant component in the quality of life of our residential areas. As traffic volumes increase, our mobility, safety, and air quality deteriorates. We also experience an increase in noise pollution and we become more reluctant to walk or bicycle on our streets. This diminishes the quality of life in our communities. Many communities have looked at traffic calming to help alleviate these traffic concerns.

Traffic calming is a form of traffic planning. It attempts to equalize the use of streets for cars, pedestrians, and bicycles. Traffic calming uses devices and techniques to reduce traffic volume and speed while maintaining mobility and access. Common traffic calming goals include making drivers aware of sharing the road with other users and designing safe and accessible streets.

Traffic Calming Devices

Traffic calming uses various devices and techniques to reduce traffic speed, reduce collisions, and improve the safety of our streets. The most common device is the speed bump. This rounded, raised area of



A roundabout was used to calm traffic and enhance a commercial area.

pavement extends across the roadway and helps reduce vehicle speed and traffic volume. Other speed-reducing devices include speed tables, rumble strips, changes in roadway surfaces and curving road alignments. Closing streets, establishing one-way traffic patterns, reducing lane widths, and installing median barriers are also traffic calming techniques. Traffic circles or roundabouts are another way to slow traffic, increase efficiency, and add green space to our neighborhoods.



Curb and sidewalk extensions define parking and traffic lanes.

Roundabouts are raised circular islands, usually landscaped and located at the intersection of two streets. Traffic is kept in constant motion around the circle, and entering vehicles yield to cars already in the intersection. Other traffic calming devices include chokers or curb extensions and chicanes. These techniques narrow the street at intersections or at midblock locations by extending the sidewalk or planting area. In commercial areas, curb extensions slow traffic, decrease turning speeds, reduce pedestrian crossing distances, and add space for landscaping and seating. A chicane is a form of curb extension that alternates from one side of the street to another. It forces vehicles to drive in a serpentine pattern—reducing traffic speeds and collisions.

Future Planning

These are just a few examples of devices and techniques used to calm traffic and help make our streets more livable. Not all devices are appropriate for all situations. A comprehensive examination of a community's transportation system is needed before traffic calming can be implemented effectively.

Additional information on traffic calming techniques is available from MCPC.

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