

Creating Calmer Neighborhood Streets for all Users
by Peggy Souza

Maintaining the feel and safety of our neighborhood without isolating ourselves from our larger community and neighbors is a complex dilemma. Traffic has increased and more people will become part of our community. These are facts. Any traffic calming measures considered should be effective in making our streets safer, as well as a win/win for all of our neighbors and our environment.

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDT) conducted a study “Determination of Access Restriction Eligibility Luxmanor Community” in December 2009. This study considered land uses (Tilden Center, Luxmanor Elementary, etc.), existing traffic restrictions (no turn lanes), traffic calming efforts (speed humps, circles, etc), traffic volumes, and Critical Lane Volume Analysis (CLV) to evaluate capacity and levels of service. Service parameters of existing intersection analysis were rated using the following grading system:

- A = Very low delay
- B = Short delay
- C = Number of vehicles stopping is significant
- D = Influence of congestion becomes more noticeable
- E = Limits of capacity, moderate to excessive delay
- F = Over saturated traffic conditions, excessive delay

Our intersections were determined to function at A and B levels of service. Two exceptions: Old Georgetown & Executive and Old Georgetown and Tuckerman. These intersections are large, traditionally engineered intersections with signals and turn lanes.

Additionally, MCDT analyzed the amount of non-local traffic utilizing neighborhood streets. After performing a license plate survey it was determined that only one location exceeded more than a 25% match of non-local traffic (79 vehicles on Marcliff Road south of Cushman during the PM peak period). As a result of the above study, recommendations for restricting access to certain streets have been made as a means to mitigate the traffic. However, proven studies indicate that by rerouting traffic, we create a win/lose scenario for some our neighbors. There are more effective means to achieve the results we seek.¹

¹AASHTO Green Book (2001), and ITE “Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities” (2006)

After attending several planning meetings with various interested parties, I would like to suggest the following courses of action as a “first step” in creating neighborhood streets for all users. My suggestions are derived from The Smart Transportation Guidebook.²

²The Smart Transportation Guidebook (2008) <http://smart-transportation.com/guidebook.html>

First, we attempt a few pilot improvements to determine effect. Start with a few measures to create neighborhood friendly streets on the community's primary streets before moving into side streets. Additional measures can be added as needed. Any actions taken now will impact the quality of life in our neighborhood for decades to come, so it makes sense to act deliberately and thoughtfully.

Tilden and Tuckerman are considered “framework” or primary streets and they must allow emergency vehicle access to the neighborhoods. This prohibits the use of speed bumps, signals, etc. on these roads. Our challenge to create desired speeds that are consistent with neighborhood use can be accomplished by reducing the speed with visual cues, creating a safer environment, and reducing the traffic flow to achieve these goals. Slower speed limits mediate the “shortcut” mentality of saving time and could possibly reduce non-neighborhood commuter traffic.

- Eliminate double-yellow lines. This encourages people to cut through and gives the impression of a highway effect.
- Bulb-out Boats – Separates street parking, pedestrians and bike lanes, while breaking the visual line with pleasing trees. Small curb extensions planted with a tree. Reinforces the neighborhood tree lined street without impeding emergency vehicles.
- Roundabouts – Proven to slow traffic volumes more than stop signs or signals and to reduce auto accidents, yet environmentally friendly as they eliminate auto stops/starts. Entrances at Old Georgetown/Tuckerman, Old Georgetown/Tilden would be natural sites.
- Raised pedestrian cross sections at Tilden/Cushman, Tilden/Danville, Tilden/Luxmanor and Tuckerman/Windermere cross streets. Pedestrian crash rates are two to four times lower on roadways with medians. Additionally, the raised crosswalks reduce the speed of cars traveling on the roadways.

By environmentally and psychologically changing the appearance of our straight streets from double yellow lines to streets with evenly spaced trees on small bulb-out boats breaking up the site line, raised pedestrian crossings protecting walkers by making them more visible, and protecting the entrances into our neighborhood with roundabouts with some type of monument or signage, we can recapture the sense of neighborhood on our streets.

For further information, you can find supporting information on the Internet at <http://smart-transportation.com/guidebook.html>. I would welcome working with a group to see these projects through.

NOTE:

“The Smart Transportation Guidebook, published in March 2008, was developed through a partnership between PennDOT and the New Jersey Department of Transportation. The goal of the Guidebook is to integrate the planning and design of our transportation system in a manner that fosters development of sustainable and livable communities. The Guidebook has equal applicability to rural, suburban and urban areas. It has information that is useful for all of the people involved in building communities, including transportation planners, traffic and design engineers, local governments, and community residents. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) have given the Smart Transportation Guidebook the prestigious Award of Excellence. This Award “recognizes outstanding initiatives across the country to develop, plan, and implement innovative transportation planning practices.”

