



## IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

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\$25,157



Citizens often contact local agencies with requests to install traffic safety devices, such as a stop sign or warning sign.



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# Putting Research into Practice: Addressing Citizen Requests for Traffic Safety Measures

## What Was the Need?

City and county engineers often receive communications from residents about traffic or unsafe drivers. In many cases, citizens ask a local agency to install traffic control measures, such as a stop sign, warning sign, or devices that indicate a crosswalk or change in the speed limit. These requests may be received by phone, by email, through social media, in person or at local council meetings.

Not all jurisdictions handle these citizen communications in the same way. In some cases, the concerns may not be routed to the right personnel within the agency. Other times, the agency may address the concern but the public may not understand the rationale behind the action taken.

In light of these issues, the City Engineers Association of Minnesota and Minnesota County Engineers Association determined that local jurisdictions would benefit from a more uniform approach to handling citizen requests about traffic safety.

## What Was Our Goal?

The goal of this effort was to develop a process that could be used consistently by agencies of various sizes to address the concerns of citizens seeking local, small-scale traffic safety measures. Guidance would include a process for tracking traffic control issues, evaluating those issues and recording any resultant actions or changes.

## How Did We Do It?

Investigators worked with a Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) to create a uniform approach that local agencies can use to respond to citizen requests for traffic safety devices.

TAP members included nine city representatives, five county officials and two state transportation representatives. The TAP identified common concerns and approaches to handling citizen concerns based on what they experience on a regular basis, and walked investigators through their process of taking requests, communicating with citizens, and evaluating and acting upon requests.

The TAP also identified common requests, discussed common traffic safety approaches and described situations in which specific measures work well. The group identified best practices in responding to citizen concerns and prepared a guidebook describing essential steps in responding to citizen concerns.

## What Did We Learn?

Effective and prompt communication and candor are critical components of any citizen-response process. The guidebook offers tips on listening to citizens and having an open

*A guide for local agencies includes steps for effectively communicating with citizens who make traffic safety-related requests. This uniform approach will help improve service to residents. Guidance includes evaluating requests and taking appropriate action while maintaining an open dialogue.*

*“The guide makes it clear that it’s better to tell citizens what you can do than what you can’t do. Their specific request for a stop sign might not be right but other approaches, like a speed trailer or police enforcement, might address a real traffic concern.”*

—Steven Bot,  
City Administrator,  
City of St. Michael

*“This document was developed using guidance and experience from our TAP members, who take calls from citizens each day and have learned what approaches work best. The knowledge shared should help other agencies address citizen requests.”*

—Rena Kuehl,  
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Installing a warning sign may not resolve a citizen’s traffic safety concern. New guidance provides city, county and state engineers with a process for identifying effective solutions and explaining the decision to citizens.

dialogue to identify the core problem, engaging citizens in the process, and apprising them of the plan of action and the time frame involved. Standard responses to typical suggestions are also included along with guidance for explaining to the citizen why the request may or may not solve the problem. Among the recommendations in the guide for communicating effectively are responding to citizens outside of social media and assigning a specific agency employee to collect requests.

Typical citizen concerns addressed in the guide are organized in four categories: speeding, traffic volume, safe crossings in streets and at intersections, and sightline blockage from vegetation, fences or walls. Some concerns do not yield to quick fixes and require a more detailed evaluation, such as requests for traffic-calming devices, bicycle facilities or other, wider-ranging efforts.

The process for addressing citizen concerns is described in several steps. Agencies must identify the problem the citizen wants addressed, record it in a uniform way, ask appropriate questions, repeat the issue back to the citizen for verification, and offer help if further evaluation of the alleged problem is necessary. Evaluation should entail a site visit, preferably in the company of the citizen, and further study where necessary. Findings or appropriate responses should be communicated with an offer of what the agency can do, even if the action differs from what the citizen originally requested. If an evaluation will take a month or longer, the agency should update the citizen periodically and convey the estimated timeline.

Along with the step-by-step process for responding to citizen concerns, the guide identifies effective uses of commonly requested traffic safety measures, such as stop signs and signs that alert drivers to a change in speed limit or a school zone ahead. It cites concerns with these measures, alternatives to them and educational tools related to the traffic safety issue.

The guidebook also provides methods for documenting concerns and tracking the process in addition to sample form letters and response templates that can be used as guides when communicating with citizens. Three case studies describe situations encountered by Minnesota agencies along with measures taken to address the issues.

### What’s Next?

The guidebook that resulted from this project will be sent to city and county transportation agencies and will be available online. It has also been presented at Minnesota conferences and will be presented at future Minnesota meetings.

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*This Implementation Summary pertains to the LRRB-produced Report 2017RIC05, “Addressing Citizen Requests for Traffic Safety Concerns,” published December 2017. The full report can be accessed at [mndot.gov/research/reports/2017/2017RIC05.pdf](http://mndot.gov/research/reports/2017/2017RIC05.pdf).*