



Public streets and rights-of-way cover as much as one-third of the land area in many communities. Street networks are the threads that weave a community together and give it physical form. Their design is more than an engineering problem.

Circulation design is the most visible element that communicates individuality and establishes community character. While streets have characteristically been designed to carry traffic efficiently and quickly, very little attention is given to fitting the design of the street specifically to a wide variety of community conditions.

The conventional street hierarchy and functional classification system optimizes motor vehicle functions and imposes a single street or right-of-way design template regardless of specific needs.

Unfortunately, this is often at the expense of other modes of transportation, community form, and environmental considerations. Recent transportation planning initiatives suggest that more

varied street design framework can have a beneficial impact on community form while still accomplishing the goal of smooth motor vehicle operations. In addition, recent studies conclude that alternative street designs can have a significant and desirable impact on environmental quality.

A change in the way you look at street systems can begin by evaluating your system using the checklist that follows.

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Street Design Checklist

- Identify areas where roads should not be placed (steep slopes, historic areas, wetlands etc.)
- In rolling terrain, the land itself should guide the layout of the roadway using the existing conditions to create interest and retain community identity.
- Identify community activity centers and connect these centers in as many ways as possible.
- Promote access and land-use integration within the community. In recent years, road systems within developments have been designed to discourage access and neighborhoods are viewed from the outside, identifying individual neighborhoods rather than connecting them to the community as a whole.
- Streets should be designed with the quality of the trip in mind. The need to get from point A to point B is no reason to have the trip be less than enjoyable. Significant buildings, open space, and activity centers should be considered and planned as focal points along major routes.
- Community design must accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists and motor vehicles.
- Is your traffic engineer your de-facto planner? Good circulation planning responds to topography, water bodies, wetlands and public utilities.
- Provide network options in your street system. Dispersing traffic to alternative routes rather than continually adding lanes to existing streets better solves/avoids congestion. Provide more, smaller streets.
- Plan locations of your communities “Great Streets” and insure that primary civic uses are located along them. The Kansas City Boulevard system is an excellent example.
- Review street design standards to insure a variety of design options are encouraged and allowed depending on site location and anticipated use of the street. Include alleys where appropriate, design neighborhood streets at a pedestrian scale (typically 26 feet wide, curb to curb with parking on both sides), and consider providing standards for boulevards, parkways and avenues for lower speed traffic.
- Design streets for both the motorist and non-motorist
- Research a variety of traffic calming measures including roundabouts, narrower streets and on street parking.
- Promote local street connectivity increasing walking, bicycling and transit use and thereby reducing the demand to further expand major streets. Encourage access within and between neighborhoods.
- Streets should be viewed as the significant community investment they are and be designed as any other permanent, community defining, public space. They do not just move traffic. Include standards for street furniture, planting and details, provide for buildings to come closer to the curb and to front the street. De-emphasize parking lots and encourage pedestrian activity in commercial areas.
- Foster unique and attractive streetscapes that protect and enhance neighborhood livability
- Minimize impervious cover to gain environmental and ecological benefits