Road Diets and Complete Streets

Description

"Road diets" are changes to a street's design where one or more motor vehicle travel lanes are removed. Commonly, this occurs when a 4-lane street is reduced to a 2-lane street and pedestrian and cycling facilities are added to make it a "complete street." A complete street is one that accommodates and protects all road users in proportion to their risk.

How it Works

Reducing the number of motor vehicle travel lanes and/or implementing complete street conversions makes the street more of a "drive-to" destination (where drivers travel more slowly and attentively) rather than a "drive-through" corridor (where drivers travel faster and less attentively). It also attracts more pedestrian, bicycle and public transit-oriented traffic. Its destination nature creates a calmer, slower, safer and more attractive venue—a place where people are more likely to want to walk around, enjoy the setting and visit local businesses.

Evidence of Effectiveness

- Studies have shown that complete street projects have been successful in reducing motor vehicle crashes by between 19 and 47%, depending on the characteristics of the implementation site.

Best results occur when:

- A buffer zone for opening car doors is included in the design if protected bicycle lanes are installed on the sidewalk side of a vehicle parking lane;

- Local governments conduct a transportation planning review of the potential for road diets to negatively impact nearby residential areas;

- The transportation planning review takes into account that some trips will be converted to other modes, as has commonly been found when road capacity is reduced and the availability of pedestrian and bicycle routes improves. Where analysis suggests short-cutting might occur, road diets and complete streets can be combined with area-wide traffic calming to protect adjacent neighborhoods; and

- There is continued evaluation of the overall net impact in affected areas.