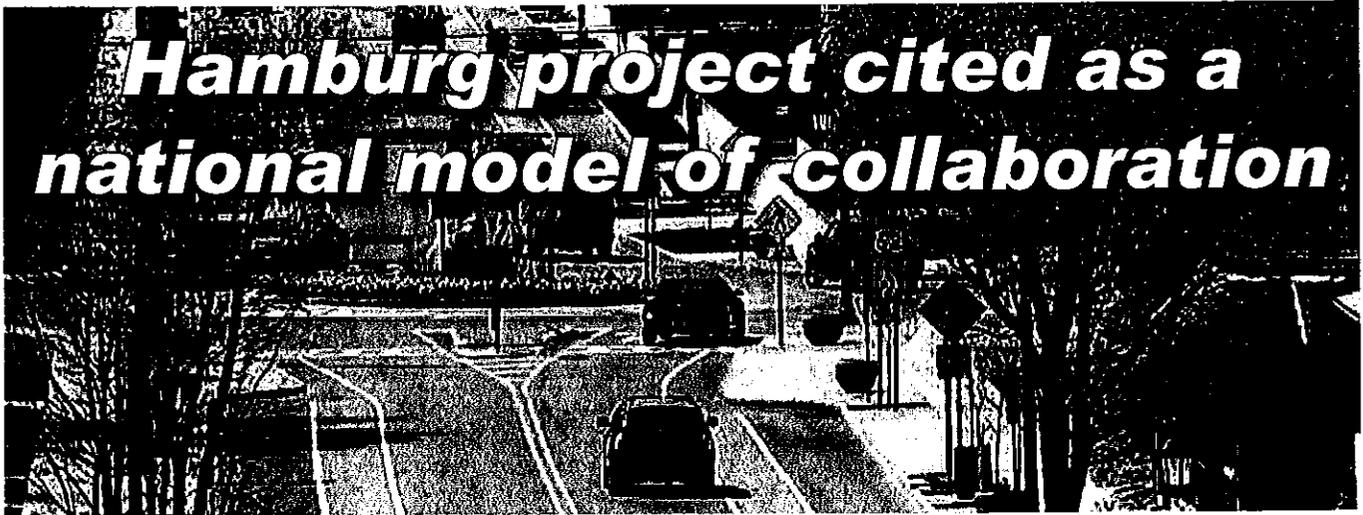


GBNVRTC

Newsletter for the GREATER BUFFALO-NIAGARA REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL
Metropolitan Planning Organization For Erie and Niagara Counties

Hamburg project cited as a national model of collaboration



A new roundabout on Route 62 in the Village of Hamburg.

The “Route 62 Project,” which has transformed the Village of Hamburg’s business district, has become a national symbol of transportation projects that promote livable communities.

It was selected as one of the top ten transportation projects in the nation by a panel of judges representing the American Association of State highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) was praised for its innovative management” of the project through “collaborative teamwork” with the community that resulted in a design with “far-reaching and positive effects on the quality of life in the village.”

As described by NYSDOT, the

\$23 million reconstruction of Buffalo Street and Main Street, which was completed in 2008, “rehabilitated the village’s central business district and replaced four signalized intersections with modern roundabouts.”

The Village Mayor, Thomas Moses, declared, “The extraordinary involvement of the community and the collaboration and responsiveness of NYSDOT has resulted in a distinctive project that has created a healthier community through improved traffic flow, reduced vehicle accidents and increased safety for pedestrians.

“Through the use of roundabouts, narrower traffic lanes, bulb-out curb extensions, crosswalks and amenities such as street trees, street lighting and stamped, colored concrete this project has helped to

change the look, feel and attitude of the community in a positive way.

“The Village of Hamburg is experiencing a revitalization as businesses and homeowners continue to invest in the community. The village has become a walkable place with a ‘can do’ attitude that is working to become more sustainable.”

Paul Gaughan, a village trustee, said, “The project has created surroundings that have sparked a meta-

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morphosis in our business climate. Business immediately started to invest in their buildings coinciding with the project. A strong citizen volunteer base has been the driving force in innovative landscape design and maintenance,

"I cannot stress enough the importance of the aesthetic side of this project. It is like hubcaps on a car. The innovative design of the project to include four roundabouts has become a very popular feature. Two years later businesses are growing and new businesses are moving in. People are excited about the new energy the project has created. Our community, both business and neighborhoods, feel a new sense of purpose."

The Village Police Chief, Dennis Gleason, said that traffic accidents had declined by 57 percent on the Route 62 sector from Oct. 1, 2009 to Sept. 30, 2010, compared with the previous three years, or from an average 79 accidents a year to 34 a year.

"People were skeptical at first," he said, "but the roundabouts have spoken for themselves. I think they are great. Traffic flows."

Michael Wallwork, a traffic engineer associated with Walkable Communities, was quoted in a New Urban publication as saying that the original route had been "noisy, ugly" with several signalized intersections that had "significant crash problems."

As described in an AASHTO report, "The initial objectives in the reconstruction of U.S. Route 62, in the Village of Hamburg, were to address severe safety, capacity and infrastructure deficiencies. Route 62 is not only the center of local business, but also a major truck route. This project had the potential to have far-reaching and positive effects on the quality of life in the village ...".

Its selection as one of the ten best projects in the nation was focused upon NYSDOT's "innovative management" of a relatively small project. "A NYSDOT initiative to be more customer focused encouraged collaborative teamwork between the agency and the community, which resulted in well-informed and community valued design alternatives," AASHTO reported. "Accidents have dramatically reduced in the project corridor ... and congestion has been minimized."

Kenneth Kuminski, the project engineer for NYSDOT, said, "Give the village credit. Roundabouts weren't really on our radar yet" when the state's plan was presented to the village in early 2002, although they have since moved into the spotlight.

"We had a lot of naysayers," Kuminski recalled. "Everybody was a naysayer at one point in time. The question was when did you have that enlightenment -- that 'ah-ha' moment."

At the "request of village officials and residents," NYSDOT hired Dan Burden of Walkable Communities, Inc., a "nationally recognized specialist of inclusive transportation design," to hold workshops with village residents to "develop design alternatives." Burden met with groups of stakeholders and community workshops were held.

A grass-roots Route 62 Committee, sometime known as "Imagine Hamburg," was organized and worked with Gaughan, the village trustee, to encourage community-wide participation.

Focus groups included local businesses, schools and community organizations, senior citizens, public service-providers, pedestrians and bicyclists.

From these collaborative sessions "a picture of the participants

top concerns and needs was developed" with emphasis on "their desire to live in a friendly, attractive village" with "slower traffic, more walkable spaces, and a restoration of the commercial core and character of the village."

They also wanted "to preserve historical sites and have greater access to their downtown nature area, 18 Mile Creek."

On a return to the village last summer Burden noted that the redesign includes not only the four roundabouts but mid-block pedestrian crossings, more on-street parking, narrow travel lanes and four-foot safety lanes between the travel lanes and the on-street parking.

"There is an abundance of new buildings, new activities," he said, according to the New Urban article. "The walk-up line at the ice cream store was 150-people deep"

The project is an embodiment of the "livability" theme that has since been stressed by the Obama administration for transportation investment. In 2009 U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood joined with the U.S. secretaries of Housing and Urban Development and Environmental Protection Agency in announcing an "Interstate Partnership for Sustainable communities" that would involve joint development and transportation initiatives.

It was reminiscent of a Hamburg theme. A village trustee, Laura Hackathorn, is credited with launching an initiative with the village's Economic Development Committee that produced a grant from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal that generated business renovation and restoration projects that harmonized with the transportation projects.