

Paul Beyer, Director of Smart Growth
Governor's Smart Growth Cabinet
Albany, NY

ENHANCED SIGNAGE, SIGNALS, and ROAD MARKINGS

Description:

Eyesight, physical ability, and response time can be compromised by the aging process or by conditions of birth or by life events. For these older people or younger individuals, conventional street signs, signals, and road markings may not serve their driving needs, particularly in congested, confusing, high-speed areas. Municipalities can take several steps to help seniors and younger-aged people with temporary or permanent impairments to navigate the roadways more safely and comfortably:

Larger, easily readable sign lettering: Street name and directional signs can be made more visible by using larger lettering, more legible fonts, color-contrast between lettering and the background, and avoiding the addition of pictures as a background to the lettering (such as trees, houses, flowers, etc.). As a cost-saving measure, Departments of Transportation can introduce user-friendly signs incrementally as old signs are replaced.

Brighter stop lights: Increased brightness means increased visibility.

Appropriately timed signals. Traffic signals should be timed to allow enough time for both elderly and younger people of varying abilities and situations to cross the street safely, particularly in areas frequented by pedestrians.

Bright, colorful road markings: Like stop lights, brighter, colorful road markings are more visible; contrasting colors can be read more quickly.

Protected left-turn signals: Left turns at busy intersections pose the greatest danger to drivers, and research has shown that left-turns are a particularly dangerous spot for older drivers. A particular issue for left-hand turns is the ability to discern who has the right of way; adding more green lights specifically for left turns, while all other traffic is stopped, creates a safer environment.

Four-way stops: Communities can selectively convert two-way stops to four-way stops at heavily-trafficked intersections. (Note: Too many four-way stops can actually compromise safety by encouraging "speed spiking" – quick accelerations to make up for lost time at stop signs – and "rolling" – driving through the stop sign without coming to, or near, a complete stop.)

Benefits:

- Safer driving conditions for all residents, particularly older people, children, and people with disabilities.
- Safer environment for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- Communities may feel they cannot afford the cost of replacing existing amenities and infrastructure; however, costs can be minimized by gradually incorporating these recommendations in the normal course of replacement and maintenance.

Resource—written and web:

- *A Blueprint for Action: Developing a Livable Community for All Ages* (May, 2007). MetLife Foundation, Partners for Livable Communities, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging. View on-line: U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Regulatory Barriers Clearing House: http://www.aginginplaceinitiative.org/storage/aipi/documents/Blueprint_for_Action_web.pdf.
- Mary Kihl, et al (2005), *Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide*. Washington, DC: AARP, Public Policy Institute: http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/d18311_communities.pdf.
- Deborah A. Howe (November/December, 1992), "Creating Vital Communities: Planning for Our Aging Society," *Planners Web: Planning Commissioners Journal*, Issue #7: <http://www.plannersweb.com/articles/how030.html>.
- Michael Payne, et al (2008), "Livable Communities: Helping Older Ohioans Live Independent and Fulfilling Lives," Scripps Gerontology Center Publications, Oxford, Ohio: Miami University: <http://sc.lib.muohio.edu/bitstream/handle/2374.MIA/263/fulltext.pdf?sequence=1>.
- Wendy P. Craig, *Older Drivers: Show'em Some Grace*. Western North Carolina Elder Law: <http://www.wncelderlaw.com/older-drivers.htm>.
- Anita Stowell-Ritter (March, 2002), *Understanding Senior Transportation: Report and Analysis of a Survey of Consumers Age 50+*. Washington, DC: AARP, Public Policy Institute: http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2002_04_transport.pdf.
- *Highway Design Handbook for Older Drivers and Pedestrians* (May, 2001). McLean, VA: The Federal Highway Administration, Research, Development, and Technology Turner-Fairbank Highway Research Center. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/humanfac/01103/>.
- "Reducing Highway Fatalities," *Welcome to the FHWA Safety Program*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. <http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/>.
- LED-enhanced solar-powered signage—signage systems that provide advance warning to motorists of required road stops; they can be free standing stop signs, used in conjunction with warning signs of all types, or can be customized

for site-specific applications with in-pavement signal lights, overhead beacons, and/or other signaling devices. Example of one brand:
<http://www.lightguardsystems.com/activeStop.shtml>.

- Articulated, spring-back post foot for road signs, traffic signals, smaller street lights, and the like:
<http://www.patentstorm.us/patents/5379716/description.html>.