

CREATING AN ADA TRANSITION PLAN

Sherburne County entered into a contract in early 2012 with Stonebrooke Engineering to prepare an ADA Transition Plan. Concurrently, the County entered into an agreement with MnDOT State Aid that provided a portion of the funding for this project. At the time of the development of the agreement, Rick Kjonaas from State Aid asked that the County provide a brief synopsis of the process that Sherburne County underwent for developing the ADA Plan, as well as a summary of lessons learned. This brief 'white paper' summarizes the process of developing the plan and offers some thoughts on how to approach developing a plan for other counties and cities.



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Step 1: Staff Training

All engineering and field survey staff attended a full day of classroom and field training. Representatives from Stonebrooke briefly discussed the history of the development of ADA laws, regulations, and guidelines and the need for preparing an ADA Transition Plan. The process of incorporating ADA recommended design standards into transportation projects is fairly straightforward and involves five basic steps: surveying, field evaluation, design, construction, and compliance checks. Specific information related to each step was presented, including the basic design components of ramps that would be consistent with ADA recommended best management practices. These basic components included descriptions of pedestrian access routes, landing requirements, ramp slopes and widths, and detectable warnings.

Examples of various ramp types were presented, as well as ways to analyze existing pedestrian facilities to enable redesign and construction of pedestrian ramps. Photos of these various types of ramps were shown in the before and after condition to better explain how corners were analyzed and how solutions were arrived at to allow these corners to be consistent with ADA recommended standards.



It is worth noting that not all existing pedestrian facilities can be constructed consistent with ADA recommended standards because of existing constraints. These constraints could include drainage issues and/or drainage structures, entrances, and utility conflicts. In these cases, the documentation of existing conditions, based on field survey information and notes, and an explanation of why strict adherence to the recommended standards could not be achieved was a very valuable piece of information for the overall ADA Transition Plan. Governmental entities need to do what is reasonable and practical in trying to become consistent with the ADA recommended standards without spending an exorbitant amount of funds. Every city and county is trying to stretch budgets as best as possible and to learn that documenting why certain features of a particular corner are not consistent with recommended standards was very helpful.



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The presentation also included information on signal systems; specifically, on accessible pedestrian signals (APS) and crosswalks. However, more emphasis was provided on the construction process and the need to 'field fit' the curbs, ramps, landing areas, and other accessibility improvement details. The success of making a corner consistent with ADA recommended standards rests heavily on the contractor during construction and on the inspector that is working with the contractor to get the best fit for the field conditions. Again, documentation during construction is very important. This documentation is recorded in a checklist with any exceptions noted.



The training process also included field inspections of recently constructed intersections. It was readily apparent that ramps constructed in the past, even fairly recent past, were not consistent with current ADA recommended design guidance. There was significant discussion of why these ramps were not consistent and what could be done to make them consistent. While the 'classroom' training was helpful and important, the field walk was a lot more useful to be able to see how ramp retrofits could be incorporated into existing situations.

Step 2: Self Evaluation

The first real task in the process was creating an inventory of existing pedestrian facilities and included evaluating pedestrian accommodations from parking lots to the entrances of County buildings and other facilities that the County occupies space in. The self evaluation performed by County staff examined existing pedestrian facilities and evaluated them for conformance to current recommended design guidance as published by the United States Access Board, and MnDOT design recommendations.

The evaluation was performed by a single county staff member and was completed on a part time basis over the course of approximately one month. Each location was evaluated, documented, and photographed. The inventory was a critical part of the process and helped to identify the magnitude of the county needs and to assist with future budgeting.

Step 3: Developing Policies

Concurrent with the self evaluation and inventory efforts, Sherburne County worked on developing policies and practices for the implementation of accessibility improvements that would be included in the Transition Plan.

This is a key part of the Plan which embodies the County's approach to achieving implementation of these improvements. As indicated previously, the County believes that in order for the Plan to be successful, it must be reasonable and practical. To that end, the Plan identifies major categories for future improvements to the pedestrian facilities on County roads. These categories are new construction, reconstruction, reconditioning and resurfacing, public request and stand alone projects. New and reconstruction projects will



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incorporate ADA recommended standards. Reconditioning and resurfacing projects will incorporate the recommended standards on a case by case basis.

There are three reasons for differentiating between these project types. The first issue is the need for any ramp improvements. In other words, it depends on the level of pedestrian activity on these roads. Second, the contractor hired for an overlay project may not have the necessary equipment for grading and forming the ramps. Finally, a large number of ramp corners would significantly affect the cost of the project. In fact, if the cost were significant enough, an overlay project could get cancelled. Again, the decision as to revise current ramps on a resurfacing project would be done on a case by case basis. However the County will provide curb cuts and ramps at intersection corners along overlay corridors if there is an adjacent sidewalk or trail system and no access exists.

Step 4: Improvements Schedule

The schedule for implementing the ADA Transition Plan is tied to the County's five year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for roadway improvements. After 5 years, items identified in the County CIP would be consistent with ADA recommended standards. After 20 years, 80% of accessibility features within the jurisdiction of the County would be consistent with the recommended standards.

Step 5: Public Outreach

Public Outreach was also a component of the Plan's development. As part of the outreach program, the County advertised in the local paper, the local paper wrote an article about the County's program after interviewing the County's

public works director, and an open house was held after the draft Plan was completed. The open house included a variety of informational posters, maps, and brochures in order to best present the Plan to the general public. Despite the County's efforts to advertise the project only a small number of interested residents and a few elected officials attended.



Sample Poster

Step 6: Additional Tasks

Additional tasks and/or features of the Plan included identifying an ADA Coordinator and developing a grievance procedure. The ADA Transition Plan also includes numerous appendices which will be reviewed on an annual basis to monitor the progress made on the Plan.



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Appendices include the inventory of County roads and facilities, schedule, budget information, and, recommended standards. In addition, the appendices also include a explanation of the grievance process and a formal grievance document that can be completed and submitted by interested parties. An emphasis of the grievance process was to encourage concerned parties to work with the ADA coordinator and county staff first to resolve their concerns prior to filing an official grievance.

Before embarking on developing an ADA Transition Plan, it seemed like a daunting task. However, the process was very educational, enlightening, and enjoyable. It is important to understand the impediments that handicapped citizens encounter on a daily basis and to embrace the need to make the necessary changes that can make it easier for them to get through their day.



Finally, a governmental entity needs to make its own decisions with regards to what is needed and what can be afforded. However, preparing the Plan and going through the process is the right thing to do. Engineers make a difference every time a roadway is improved and it feels good to get those projects accomplished. However, this effort is truly “feel good” work that can help those that are not as fortunate as most.

The process was not as complicated as it looked when the project began. Determining how to incorporate these changes into a five year CIP and further determining what the costs will be in making these changes is the most difficult task. However, there are more good examples to point to every day and cost information available from these projects which make it a little easier to quantify these costs.

