

# PLANNING FOR ROAD CONSTRUCTION

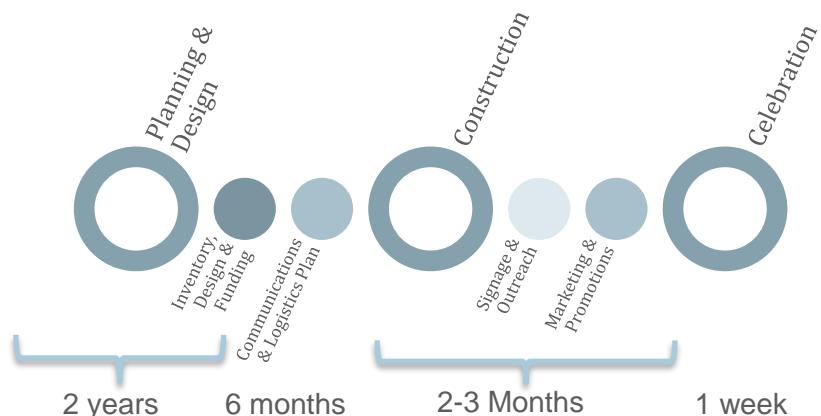


## OVERVIEW

Road construction can be one of the most challenging and concerning events for downtowns and other commercial districts, and yet is an event that virtually every district will experience at one time or another. The process is inherently full of uncertainty and prone to constant change. Despite the obstacles associated with the construction process, there are also numerous opportunities and advantages that can result from the project given careful planning. Examples include improved utilities, accessible and functional sidewalk and roadways, additional streetscaping and pedestrian amenities, and the inclusion of alternative transportation systems. As the business mix and customer base in a commercial district changes over time, construction offers an opportunity to make adjustments to the physical infrastructure which complement the new uses. The construction planning process also requires communities and businesses to evaluate circulation, access, marketing and function of various infrastructure elements, which can also lead to additional programming or ordinance changes that increase economic opportunities or improve the visitor experience. This guide provides an overview of considerations, strategies and activities that communities can use to navigate, survive and thrive during the construction process from first announcement through project completion.

## Construction Planning Phases

Although the period of heavy construction attracts the most time and attention, a successful construction planning process will begin as much as three years prior to construction. In fact, many of the greatest opportunities for communities and businesses to influence the shape of the completed project occur during the earliest planning phases. This planning and implementation period includes several distinct phases which will dictate the type of activities undertaken at the local level. These phases are outlined in the timeline below, and the graphic outline on the following page.





- Existing asset survey/Circulation mapping
- Identify infrastructure challenges/opportunities
- Identify access & phasing concerns
- Create project schedule and communications plan
- Project pricing/funding
- Develop business assistance or incentive program

- Launch communications platforms for businesses, residents and customers
- Implement wayfinding and alternate transportation/parking plans
- Utilize marketing, advertising and events to increase customer traffic

- Host a public unveiling of the new streetscape
- Recognize businesses and property owners that invested in their properties

## Planning & Design

The greatest opportunity for district gain comes during the planning phase. Making changes to the scope and logistics of a project becomes increasingly difficult the further into the project decisions are made. Even seemingly simple changes such as a new bike rack may require a different sidewalk width, potentially altering the parking or turn lane location, concrete required, etc. Fortunately, most large transportation projects are scheduled several years in advance, so communities have ample opportunity to adequately identify and refine a future vision and plan for the reality of construction. Although the City/County/State will engage the services of engineers and landscape architects, and may even host a public meeting or two, there is significant opportunity to take the lead in gauging public opinion and advocating for a shared future vision of the corridor in question. Without a dedicated and thoughtful planning process, potential opportunities may be missed. Effort spent surveying the physical area, business needs and other aspects of the project area during the lead up time will pay significant dividends during the actual construction period.

### Major Planning Tasks:

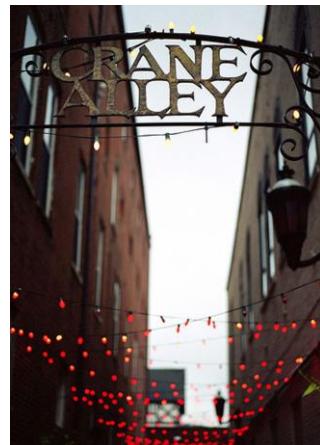
- Complete an inventory/survey of current infrastructure, business, residential and community assets. If it has not already been done, identify the number, type and location of amenities such as trees, lights, benches, water fountains, ramps, doors, curb cuts, etc. Identify any broken or missing streetscape elements, or areas of limited accessibility.

- Hold a community visioning session to identify areas of future need – what properties are envisioned to be renovated? Where would future streetscape elements go, if installed? Are there hanging planters or flowerpots that need to be supported on new lightpoles? Do holiday decorations or events require outlets at certain intervals? How do people circulate around the downtown? Where do they feel comfortable? Or unsafe? Can lighting or curb bumpouts help address these issues? Identifying areas of opportunity and concern, as well as a common vision for the preferred look and feel of the district is an important first step in planning.
- Make decisions regarding logistics and timing tradeoffs associated with construction scheduling. Advocate for avoiding work during dates/times when construction activity is a significant deterrent to cherished community activities or critical to business success. Keep in mind that plans which disrupt fewer businesses at one time may result in a longer overall project – balance these considerations with the realities of your customer base and economy.
- Work with the engineering and design team to incorporate as much of the desired future vision as possible. Identify any areas which cannot be funded within the construction budget and launch a fundraising campaign to incorporate these amenities to be installed as part of the project. Determine if there are any projects that should/could take place prior to construction that will improve circulation – alley enhancements? Parking lot striping?
- Determine a plan for maximizing the construction period to make business and property improvements, address any accessibility or circulation issues and improve signage and wayfinding in the district.
- Seek out partnerships or grant funding to provide necessary support to affected businesses and property owners in the district.

**Tip:** The Wisconsin DOT publishes a Traffic Guidelines Manual which can be downloaded online, and/or may also be available in hard copy at your local City/County office. This guide will provide information on lighting, right of way and sidewalk requirements that can be used on state roadways.



*Rear buildings and alleys can be beautified to make these areas more inviting, improving circulation when front access is limited.*



A significant amount of the work in the planning phase requires becoming increasingly familiar with the project area. In addition to physical surveys, stakeholder outreach and surveys are the primary way to obtain this information. Some of the critical questions which should be asked as part of this outreach are provided in the table below.

Questions to Ask	Strategies/Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What events do we need to avoid?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Although construction season is limited by weather, with planning it will likely be possible to avoid or phase construction to accommodate major events such as campus move-in, annual harvest festival, etc.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the peak periods for our businesses (seasonal, day of week, time of day)?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As stated above, a peak business week may be able to be avoided for active construction work. During the project, opportunities will exist for tradeoffs between construction hours and duration. (i.e. work could start earlier in the morning so that evening dining is more enjoyable, etc)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there businesses with only one entrance? Are there areas of the district which will lack handicap accessible entrances?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Survey all businesses, buildings and sidewalks to determine preferred and secondary entrances in the event that a primary entrance is blocked.</li> <li>- As a result of this survey, you will also be able to identify any locations where wider sidewalks (to accommodate ramps or bike racks) or additional curb cuts may be necessary to make the district more accessible.</li> <li>- Walk the district at night to determine if there are any areas that are particularly dark or unsafe, and address lighting for these areas as part of the infrastructure plan.</li> </ul> <p>BONUS: Also consider expanding or altering existing façade programs to make side/rear entrances eligible in advance of the construction to improve access &amp; signage.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What time do businesses receive deliveries? When does garbage pickup occur? Where do employees park? (especially relevant for evening workers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Zoning regulations limiting truck traffic or deliveries during certain hours may need to be relaxed in order to provide needed services to businesses and residents. Alternate dumpster locations or employee parking arrangements may also need to be identified and communicated prior to the project.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examine your streetscape and amenities. Are there items that are missing or on the wish list? Lights, bike racks, benches?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify how many and where these amenities should go, and work to include them in the project plan. If needed, launch a fundraising campaign to generate additional funds to make these items part of the project. It will be cheaper to include them now than to add them after the fact. Consider crowdsourcing, adopt a bench, merchant tip jars or other strategies to raise dollars for wish list items.</li> </ul> <p>TIP: If trees are removed and replaced as part of a DOT project, that cost is included in the project budget. Trees which are kept, only to die later, must be paid for through local dollars.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Determine if there are likely to be costs incurred by property owners as part of the project. The cost of filling underground coal chutes, upgrading building plumbing to connect to new sewer and water infrastructure and even sidewalk upgrades may result in costs or charges for individual property owners. Determine what these costs will be, and provide this information up front.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If there are activities that many businesses will be required to undertake, it may be possible to coordinate these activities and negotiate a cheaper joint rate from a relevant contractor or service provider. This is true of items such as plumbing as well as signage.</li> <li>- If significant investment is required, a local revolving loan fund or coordinated lending program could be created to help cover these costs during the short term, as the cost of these repairs will come at a time of already shrinking business revenue.</li> </ul>

## Communications and Promotion: Pre-Construction

Once a comprehensive set of information has been gathered on current downtown activities and individual business/resident needs, a comprehensive communications plan can be developed. Targeted messages and information will need to be provided to a variety of groups, and a plan established for communicating with each group established.

Efforts to identify and mitigate/address concerns or perceptions before construction begins will help ensure a coordinated message during the project and limit preventable losses or obstacles while increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes which can be leveraged by the investment such as improved business health, enhanced district appearance and expanded marketing awareness of district offerings. The following table illustrates three common high-level issues that are experienced by many districts undergoing a construction project, along with strategies districts can utilize when working with individual businesses to identify, avoid or offset potential negative impacts to their business while maximizing district coordination during the planning period.

Issue	Strategy/Solution
Business owners are concerned about the loss of business and have a negative attitude about the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Consider partnering with a local SBDC or other small business assistance center to offer free business consulting sessions to impacted businesses prior to construction. Sessions can help businesses restructure cash flow, establish effective marketing campaigns or identify alternative revenue streams (i.e. delivery, monthly memberships) that will offset any walk-in traffic losses during construction.</li></ul>
The construction project includes significant investment in streetscape and public sector amenities, but many existing buildings have dated or poorly maintained facades.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The construction period is the perfect time for individual businesses to undertake projects, as the construction will not detract from the customer experience.</li><li>- Consider increasing the funding or match portion of an existing façade program for projects which will occur just prior to or during the construction period.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If no local funding is available, consider waiving permit fees for specific types of projects or reducing the review time to encourage more projects to move forward during the project timeline.</li> </ul>
<p>Media and businesses are focused on the negative aspects of the project – project duration, cost and access limitations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a fact sheet on the project that highlights the benefits to the district from the work. Some examples might include: less potholes, safer sidewalks, # of new trees, # of new benches, feet of new bike lane/path, \$ of ancillary property owner investment, etc.</li> <li>- If you have renderings of the completed project, be sure to include those with all of your messaging to highlight the future vision rather than the present reality.</li> </ul>

### ***Business Outreach & Preparation***

In addition to a proactive approach to identifying and heading off high profile issues, it will also be important to conduct individual outreach to business owners within the district. Despite the best of intentions, most businesses will face some loss of sales during construction. Providing business owners with a reference guide to plan for likely construction-related costs and/or losses is important for retaining businesses for the duration. It will be helpful, if, in addition to outlining the potential challenges a business might face, you can also offer a list of available assistances to address these issues. Developing a comprehensive set of assistances and strategies which will be employed by the district that a business can utilize and/or participate in can significant improve business confidence in the district and commitment to positive messaging throughout construction. A sample set of business assistances might include:

- Coordinating purchasing arrangement for needed property improvements.
- Wayfinding signage system with business names/logos.
- Relaxed signage guidelines during construction.
- Waived fees/expedited permitting for improvement projects during construction.
- Expanded façade/building improvement loan/grant program to increase funds available or accommodate rear/side entrance improvements.
- Business assistance program to offer professional guidance on cash flow management and/or marketing to impacted businesses.

- Coordinated business marketing opportunities such as radio spots, newspaper ads, restaurant placemats and construction project website presence.

Likely business impacts and preparation strategies:

- Depending on the exact location and scope of the project relative to an individual business, lost revenue of 17-40 percent can be expected during the project period. Studies show that 68% of businesses can be expected to experience a decline in business, with restaurants and bars experiencing the most severe decline, automotive and general merchandisers the second largest decline, and destination businesses or service providers experiencing the smallest declines in foot traffic.
- Noise, vibration, dirt, dust and short term utility outages can also negatively impact businesses and add cleaning or repair costs to the budget.
- Required improvements to the building sidewalk apron, interior plumbing or right of way to accommodate public infrastructure improvements may incur significant costs.
- Loss of/limited access to loading, employee parking or accessibility may create hardships or require changes in terms with vendors/suppliers.

Business marketing strategies:

- Offer free delivery services
- Offer specials to construction workers, area residents or district workers. Construction workers represent a potential new customer base, and area residents and workers are more likely to remain in the area for dining with parking and access restrictions. These audiences will also appreciate the recognition that they are all in it together, and may grow to become loyal customers.
- Ramp up social media and email communications lists/contacts in order to communicate regularly with customers that may be hesitate to visit without detailed parking and access information. Weekly emails and even daily Facebook posts may be appropriate during the heaviest construction period.
- Install temporary signage (or make permanent improvements to rear/side entrances) to identify your business location and entrance for customers arriving from an unfamiliar direction.
- Alter your hours of operation to provide customer options during quieter evening hours or weekends when a visit will be more enjoyable. Be sure to coordinate these hours with similar/neighboring businesses.



*Temporary signage reminds customers that you are open and directs them to alternate entrances.*



- Be strategic about inventory ordering and hiring for the construction period. Don't fill vacant positions immediately prior, and reduce orders of seasonal or perishable items until the impact of construction can be determined.
- Secure a line of credit from your lender based on current sales. Funds may be needed to address cash flow issues or cover unexpected costs during construction and will be easier to secure during a typical business cycle.
- Notify vendors and suppliers about the construction schedule and anticipated access/routes to your business. Coordinate any necessary changes in delivery frequency or timing as needed.
- Communicate positive information with customers and the press. Spreading negative messages about the difficulty in doing business during construction will only ensure more people stay away.

## Communication & Promotion: During Construction

During construction, communications and marketing will be the most important activity for businesses and districts. Communications between district stakeholders (businesses, residents) and the project team, and between the district and potential customers are equally important. Since these internal and external communications are separate and distinct, they are discussed individually below.

### ***Internal Project Team Communications***

The most important part of internal communications is having a regular and consistent meeting time to touch base on project progress and identify any issues which arise. A weekly project team meeting, followed by a business/property owner open house (i.e. coffee with the crew) session can go a long way toward ensuring that everyone is on the same page and communicating the same information. Beyond these regular meetings, establish an internal email group, private Facebook page and/or text notification system which can provide everyone with daily updates of street and sidewalk closures, or up to the minute notice of any utility shut offs associated with the project. This will also let businesses report any incidents or areas of concern as construction progresses without having to wait until the next week. For those businesses or residents with limited digital engagement, assign block captains to deliver notices or drop by and provide updates.

### ***External Communications & Marketing***

In contrast to businesses and residents which will be intimately aware of the changing face of construction, most potential customers will perceive the entire district as one big construction zone and will have a general tendency to stay away until everything is completed. Providing a steady stream of information and creative/unique messaging to make people rethink these assumptions is critical to keeping people coming downtown.

There are some items that are simply best practices for districts experiencing construction projects. These strategies are useful and essential for reducing confusion and presenting a proactive and positive message to the public.

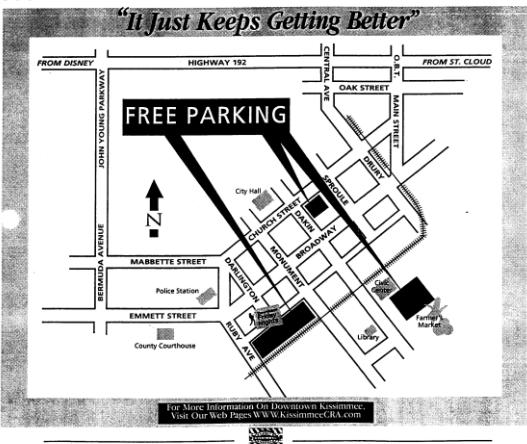


- Host a public construction kickoff event to launch the project in a positive way – a bridge breaking, ground breaking or jackhammer party. Since the street will be torn up, consider allowing residents to paint on the concrete and photograph the end result.
- Install custom wayfinding signage at the entrances to downtown including detour route directions as well as arrows directing visitors to parking and business access. Having signs with arrows indicating which businesses can be accessed from which locations is critical to minimizing confusion. If possible, also post a map highlighting any access points that will remain stable during the project to provide a visual for visitors.
- Evaluate public parking locations, hours and rates. It may be necessary to extend time limits, reduce fees, or add parking restrictions in adjacent neighborhood areas during the construction period to accommodate relocated employees and offset customer inconvenience. Publicize maps of new parking arrangements in all marketing materials.
- Establish a brand, logo, theme or slogan for the project and use it for all communications related to the project. Examples such as 'pardon our progress' 'paving the way for the future' or 'bridging the gap' will help keep people on the lookout for updates on progress and fun events as part of the project.

- Establish a dedicated Facebook page or website dedicated to project information, progress updates and events. Those impacted regularly, or customers planning a trip downtown can visit it to familiarize themselves before they arrive. Send regular updates (weekly via email, daily to bi-weekly via Facebook) providing updates, reminders of events, and promotions for businesses offering specials.
- Coordinate with area businesses to develop a calendar of events (some ideas are included below) as well as promotions which will occur during the construction project. Consider offering joint promotions to simplify marketing. For instance, partnering with a local delivery service to offer free delivery, a back-door bonus for anyone that finds the rear entrance, or a coupon for a discount on a car wash for visitors.
- If the district is large, consider hiring a free trolley during weekends or extended evening periods to help shoppers travel from parking to shopping areas.
- Consider adding an e-commerce component or linking system to allow customers to shop at local businesses online during the project period.
- Create a media and marketing plan that includes a schedule of releases focused on positive aspects of the project. A media guide should also be made available on the project website which includes a project timeline, future impacts, vision images and



## ...Downtown Kissimmee



photos/statistics from all of the construction-related events. Provide a list of speaking points on the project to all major stakeholders in the community which highlight the fact that the district is NOT closed, that the project will create opportunities for the district, has leveraged private investment, and directing everyone to the project website.

In addition to the items above, many communities have gone a step further with creative marketing or messaging tactics to keep customers engaged with and connected to the district even during construction. Consider employing one or more of the below strategies during your upcoming project.

- Install a live webcam or two at strategic points in the district to allow people to check in on project progress from their phone. Many kids (and adults too) will enjoy simply watching the machinery work and seeing downtown from a new perspective.
- Encourage businesses to remain open one night a week once the construction crews have gone – this makes it more pleasant for customers to visit, and can create a fun and novel experience for customers walking around construction sites to view progress on their way to stores. A single unified evening also makes it easier to market to customers. Encourage walking between businesses by hiring bands or other performers at key locations along the route.
- Market a cone zone lunch special every Wednesday at the restaurant closest to the active construction zone to provide additional support.
- Work with the construction crew during one of the evening sessions to make some machinery available for a ‘touch a truck’ event that lets children get up close and personal with the vehicles. Consider giving away kids hard hats with the “I survived” slogan and project logo.
- Use the dirt road (with permission) to host a weekend dirt bike festival, or offer horse-drawn carriage rides or historical reenactments to take advantage of downtown’s new (and temporary) historic look. Similar activities such as sand volleyball or a streetwide sandbox event might also be possible during a weekend lull in construction.



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- Work with a local sports team or service group to host a car washing (or store window washing) fundraiser to provide an amenity to workers and keep storefronts looking clean. Alternatively, sponsor the group and offer free car washes to the first 100 customers of the day as a promotion.
- Install public art along the construction walkway or detour, or host a community art event to decorate plywood enclosures for pedestrians to make the walking experience more pleasant. Washable chalk paint tends to hold up for a week or two and can also be used to add sidewalk or street art and/or wayfinding messages to detour paths.
- If there are businesses which will realistically have limited access for a prolonged period, explore ways to allow them to utilize an empty storefront elsewhere in the district, or to offer some of their products for sale in other businesses for the duration of the project. Not only will this offset some of the potential construction-related sales loss, but it also might introduce new customers to their business.
- Incorporate humor into your marketing – recognize that construction is not fun. Use construction message boards or business signs to post messages like ‘Smile – 100 days left of construction’ or ‘5 blocks left to go’. Develop a thermometer sign that tracks the percentage of the project completed. One community installed a new mural and unveiled it slowly according to the amount of construction left.

*For non-local visitors:*

Those customers that might be traveling through, or are not within the typical marketing area, may arrive at your district without any idea that a construction project is underway. For these individuals, signage is critical – they are already there, so if it is easy for them to determine where they should park and how to navigate to businesses, they are likely to remain. If they are faced with a road closed sign and no further direction, they are likely to go elsewhere. In addition to the wayfinding signage system described above, listing the website or offering a brochure rack providing additional information may also be helpful.



*Above: Elkton, Ohio used a children's contest to submit designs for decorative bridge pylons. The winning designer received \$500, and the chance to see their design implemented as part of the installation.*



*Below: The Downtown Alliance of Lower Manhattan hosted community art events to paint barricades used as part of the road construction project. The Art Alliance of NY also hosted a contest to design a better construction shed, now standard as part of all City projects.*

## Celebration

Once the project is over, it is important to recognize the community spirit that was present during the construction period, and also to publicly welcome customers and visitors back to the district to formally unveil the new district and announce the project completion. The celebration will be a sign to those that have avoided the area during construction that it is safe to return, and creates an opportunity to recognize the effort of those involved in making the district a better place. Some ideas for unique construction related activities that can be part of a block party or other open house celebration include:

- Postpone the automobile opening of the street for a day to host a block party, bike rally or street dance.
- Hold a formal ribbon cutting.
- Hold a lighting ceremony for new streetlights.
- Have a contest for people to be the 'first' to drive down the new road.
- Have a kids bike race, frog race or foot race down the new road.
- Host a community dinner in the middle of the street.
- Create a time lapse film of the construction progress and highlighting any property improvements.

**South Street Bridge Re-Opening!**  
Saturday, November 6th



**Schedule of Activities**

**All Day - Green and Sustainable Day**  
Penn Museum of Archeology and Anthropology  
(1/2 off admission for those who walk, bike, or take transit to the Museum)  
Free pedicab rides provided by Velopark (1-4pm)

**2 - 4pm** - Car-free access to bridge for bicyclists and pedestrians  
Spiral Q Puppet Theater  
Bike Parade  
Bicycle Service Station staffed by the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia  
Bridge games sponsored by the Bridge Club of Center City

**3pm** - Re-Opening Ceremony with Mayor Michael Nutter

**4-7pm** - Post-Ceremony Celebration hosted by South Street West Business Association at "the Triangle" (23rd & South & Gray's Ferry Avenue)  
Live Music, fall drinks, and "\$1 Days" at South Street stores

