



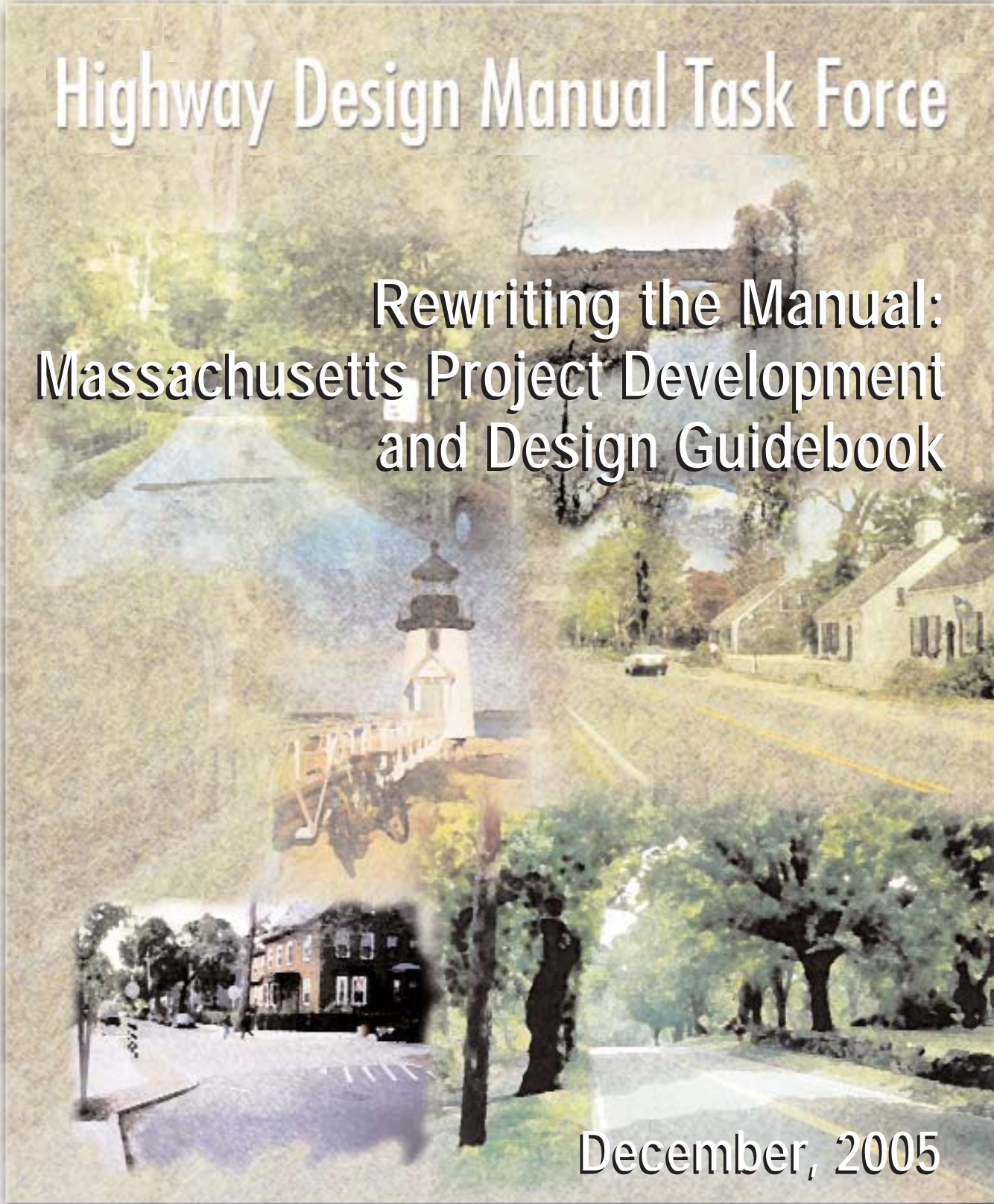
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Highway Design Manual Task Force

Rewriting the Manual: Massachusetts Project Development and Design Guidebook

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Massachusetts Project Development and Design Guidebook

From the time Governor Romney announced his first Transportation Policy Initiative, “*Communities First*,” MassHighway has been committed to not only satisfying the intent of the initiative, but in going beyond it to develop a state-of-the-art Project Development and Design Guidebook. The new Guidebook fully embraces context sensitive solutions, and addresses all modes throughout the design process within one comprehensive document. Working in partnership with MassHighway from the outset has been the Highway Design Manual Task Force. The Task Force, representing a broad range of interest groups and geographic diversity, has been a driving force and collaborative partner in the development of the new Guidebook.

Notable differences between the existing Highway Design Manual and new Project Development and Design Guidebook are summarized below.

- Involvement by others in the development of the new Guidebook. The Highway Design Manual has not undergone a systematic update since the late 1970’s and was done at that time solely by MA DPW staff. Updates since that time have been on a chapter by chapter basis to address changes by AASHTO and to convert from English to metric units.
- Incorporates the best of MassHighway’s existing policies, including early environmental coordination and design exception review process.
- Substantial emphasis on the Project Development Process.
- Integration of vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian considerations throughout the planning and design process.
- Inclusion of traffic calming as part of mainstream design.
- Less emphasis on functional classification and more consideration as to area type.
- Greater flexibility in determining appropriate design speeds and pavement allocation.
- Guidance provided for additional areas, including access management and landscape design and aesthetics.
- Acknowledgement of parkways and historic roads.
- Inclusion of Footprint Roads as a project type.
- The need for all to think.

The complete Public Draft Project Development and Design Guidebook can be viewed on the MassHighway website (www.mhd.state.ma.us).

Highway Design Manual Vision and Goals

The Guiding Principles of the new Highway Design Manual are:

1. To ensure that the safety and mobility of all users of the transportation system (vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians) are considered equally through all phases of a project, such that even the most vulnerable (e.g., children and the elderly) can feel safe within the public right of way.
2. To ensure that the overarching principles of Context Sensitive Design (a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility for all users) are incorporated throughout project development, design and construction.
3. To present a clear project development and design process that is transparent in its intent, and can be administered consistently throughout the state. The intended result is a streamlined process for which there is project consensus among all stakeholders, that can be expeditiously accomplished within a reasonable project cost.

Additionally, the Highway Design Manual seeks to:

- reflect current best practices which can be used as a national model;
- be consistent with the desired intent of reducing of sprawl;
- provide better balance among municipal, state and consultant participants in terms of responsibilities and benefits;
- provide guidance for the development of stronger definitions of purpose and need;
- provide a more transparent process and an improved project development process;
- provide technically sound, documented decisions;
- provide more clarity and guidance on where and when certain standards apply;
- take into consideration maintenance issues;
- streamline the review process resulting in quicker review times;
- provides a process that facilitates coordination with utility providers;
- provide a process that results in less costly projects;
- ensure a consistent approach statewide;
- result in projects that have an environmental net benefit (“green design”);
- clearly define when exception requests are required, and the process for obtaining, if necessary;
- result in the request of design exceptions as being “exceptional,” recognizing that context sensitive principals are already incorporated into standard design preparation and review;
- measure the success to which the goals of the Highway Design Manual are met;
- become a universally used tool of choice because of its inherent value (regardless of the project funding source, or reviewing authority).

The new Highway Design Manual will also reflect the fact that from this point forward, all projects will be developed using English Units, and incorporate elements of the 2001 AASHTO Green Book “A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets”, as applicable.

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COMMUNITIES FIRST: ROMNEY EMPOWERS CITIES AND TOWNS
New program gives cities and towns unprecedented flexibility in road projects

Additional Contacts: **WEST CONCORD** – Governor Mitt Romney today unveiled a new initiative to give communities more flexibility and input in designing local road and bridge projects, helping preserve the character of cities and towns and cutting through bureaucratic red tape imposed by the state.

Romney said the new policy, *Communities First*, is one in a series of ideas the Administration will propose to give communities more control over their own finances.

He said, “My Administration is committed to providing local communities with the tools they need to manage their own budgets by removing bureaucratic red tape and costly state mandates whenever possible.”

Romney added, “Local residents are most familiar with the unique qualities that make their communities special. We will make every effort to empower them in the decisions that directly impact their everyday lives.”

Romney said the new policy will both modify state highway design guidelines and require collaboration with local leaders in the design process. At Romney’s direction, the state will:

- Review and revise the Massachusetts Highway Department’s Design Manual to incorporate the principles of *Communities First* by October 1, 2003. An Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from municipalities and regional planning councils will be formed to assist in this process.
- Appoint an Ombudsman in the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction to serve as a liaison to community concerns. The Ombudsman will help expedite the waiver process and ensure flexibility in the application review.
- Provide increased accommodation and consideration for design changes that provide for

bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

Romney's Chief of Commonwealth Development, Doug Foy, highlighted Main Street in West Concord as a prime example of the need for *Communities First*. He noted that local officials had been planning a reconstruction project since 1997, but have not been able to proceed because of a disagreement with the state over road width and the possible elimination of trees along the corridor.

Foy said, "Times have changed. The Romney administration wants the taxpayers to take ownership of their cities and towns and be part of the decision making process."

In the past, the Massachusetts Highway Department has based its design criteria on rigid guidelines. If a community identified a design change that was counter to the guidelines, a waiver application had to be filed. The Highway Department reviewed the waivers and made a determination based on a number of elements, such as safety precautions and cost implications. Sometimes a waiver that was initially rejected was approved on its second or third submission, raising complaints about a lack of consistency, cooperation or a set of clearly defined review standards.

"Governor Romney envisions a government with as few bureaucratic impediments as possible and this is a giant step in that direction," said Transportation Secretary Daniel Grabauskas. "When it comes to the Massachusetts Highway Department, the people of Massachusetts are in the drivers' seat."

The *Communities First* initiative builds on the *Fix It First* policy unveiled by Romney earlier this month. *Fix It First* targets the state's resources to repairing existing roads and bridges before undertaking new highway projects.