

November 20, 2024

To: Mayor and Members of City Council
From: Sheryl M. M. Long, City Manager
Subject: Road Closure Policy Update

202402399

Reference Document #202401922

The Council at its session on September 11, 2024, referred the following item for review and report.

MOTION, dated 8/21/2024, submitted by Councilmember Walsh, WE MOVE that the Administration prepare a report and updated policy within 30 days for supporting small businesses during road closures.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Transportation and Engineering (DOTE) Permit Office requires a Traffic Management Plan (TMP) for those permitted construction activities that significantly impact public right-of-way, such as utility service road closures, to ensure safe passage for all travel modes, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and motorists. Before issuing a right-of-way permit, the TMP must be approved, meeting safety standards from the Ohio Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (OMUTCD).

To better align with the City's focus on pedestrian safety in 2023, the Permit Office updated TMP Guidelines which emphasized active transportation modes (walking and biking), minimum contractor requirements, a comprehensive checklist of items to include in the TMP and contact information for requesting police details and obtaining temporary no-parking signage.

Currently, the minimum contractor requirements include notifications to the affected properties immediately adjacent to the construction. Prior to the start of non-emergency construction, notifications by mail must be postmarked at least 5 days in advance and in-person notifications must occur at least 72 hours before construction.

DOTE regularly updates road closures on its website, with special event road closures listed on the Traffic Alerts page, and long-term closures shared via the News section and social media, as appropriate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The DOTE Permit Office recognizes the challenges of balancing construction work in the public right-of-way while maintaining access and safety for all road users. Construction, whether it is associated with a DOTE sponsored project or a permit project, can significantly disrupt residents, commuters, and businesses, affecting customer access, deliveries, and overall operations. To address this, for DOTE sponsored projects, our construction and design teams collaborate with impacted property owners and businesses to accommodate their needs. For permit projects, the DOTE Permit Office issues notification requirements as part of the permit conditions.

As part of the recent Riverside Drive closure, these notification requirements were exceeded by the permit holder, Greater Cincinnati Water Works (GCWW), who began notifying affected property owners and the East End Neighborhood Business District well in advance of the utility work, hosting community meetings and adding signage to inform travelers that the business district remained open. DOTE sponsored projects recently provided supplemental signage for longer-term road closures, including Mr. Gene's Dog House on Beekman Street and Hyde Park School on Edwards Road. Please see the images attached to this report.

These efforts demonstrate the importance of proactive communication and collaboration to keep residents, commuters, and businesses informed about project timelines, detours, and work progress despite the many moving parts and potential delays involved in construction.

SUMMARY

DOTE implements a structured process to manage road closures and construction activities, prioritizing safety and communication with the intent to support small businesses.

- DOTE Permit Office requires a TMP for significant construction activity impacting the street system; the TMP requires a comprehensive project description and traffic control measures that consider all travel modes.
- The updated TMP Guidelines includes a comprehensive checklist to address safety requirements, including the accommodation of all travel modes and the maintenance of ADA compliance.
- Contractors are required to notify affected properties before construction begins.
- DOTE communicates road closure updates through the City's website and social media channels, when appropriate.
- Currently, there is no dedicated funding available to compensate business owners impacted by right-of-way construction, nor is there a process in place to manage such a program.

CONSIDERATIONS

To further enhance the TMP process for the safety and accessibility in construction work zones and to minimize the disruption to businesses, DOTE would consider the following:

1. **Centralized Roadway Closure Information:** Efforts are underway to consolidate road closure and detour information on the city's Traffic Updates page as a central source for all roadway closures for permitted special events and long-term projects. DOTE is also exploring additional public awareness measures, such as an opt-in email and potential communications through the existing Cincy Alerts/311Cincy systems.
2. **Community Notification Plans:** DOTE will update the current TMP Checklist to require contractors to submit a communication plan outlining how they will notify the impacted community for construction activities that significantly impact public right-of-way. An impacted community would include the typical stakeholder groups such as Community Councils, Community Development Corporations, and Business Associations/Districts.

3. **Templates for Businesses and Contractors:** From the DOTE website, the department will work on providing downloadable templates for door knockers, handouts, and flyers that contractors and businesses can edit and print on their own. This would not be a requirement; it is an optional resource to encourage public awareness from contractors and businesses to communicate with their clientele.
4. **Supplemental Signage:** For construction activities that significantly impact public right-of-way, DOTE will require contractors to provide supplemental signage, especially in areas with Neighborhood Business Districts, to ensure clear communication about roadway access with the goal of improving visibility and business accessibility for patrons during construction.
5. **Post Signage in Advance:** For construction activities that significantly impact public right-of-way, DOTE will strongly encourage contractors to place signage along the affected routes before construction begins, giving commuters, residents, and businesses ample time to prepare and adjust their routes.
6. **Expand the Notification Period:** DOTE will extend the required notification period to at least 30 days for non-emergency construction projects with long-term road closures to allow residents, businesses, and other stakeholders more time to prepare.
7. **Navigation Apps:** DOTE can continue to update long-term closures in navigation apps like Google Maps, Apple Maps, and Waze. However, the department has limited control over these updates from outside service providers.

You can learn more about accessing the right-of-way and the TMP Guidelines from the DOTE website: <https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/dote/permits-licenses/dote-resource-page/>.

Attachment

cc: John S. Brazina, Director, Transportation and Engineering

