

RAMPS TO NOWHERE



DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT & CHANGE

By Barry Cassidy

Last Saturday morning my wife and I were going out to breakfast and she pointed at the Wendy's on Route 30 in Thorndale and remarked about the fact that they used such big stones that people waiting for the bus had to stand on the road to wait for the bus. There was not a lot of room between the cart way and the curb, making it a dangerous bus stop.

On the way back to our house, I pulled over and took a closer look because aesthetics and safety in highway improvements is part of my professional routine. When we got closer, we found that not only did the stones force people onto Route 30, there was a single solitary handicapped ramp. It went nowhere, as it ended with a curb and a pole (See photo). There was another one just like it on the other side of the driveway, but that can be expected.

Handicapped ramps to nowhere were not that prevalent when I first started working on streetscapes, but over the years the activity picked up as rules and regulations were interpreted locally by officials and engineering staffs. The practice happened in a frenzy when the Obama stimulus money was out there.

The stimulus money came with strings attached but mostly the famous "shovel ready" requirement ruled the day. The project had to be "ready to go" and unfortunately there did not seem to be enough projects that could be done quickly, so the crosswalk program was born. Every signalization project (closed loop) had to have handicapped ramps, and the race was on to spend this money.



From the standpoint of being able to spread this work around, it served its purpose of putting money on the street. People were out of work and construction trades were in for some poor economic times. In this frenzy, crosswalks were popping up everywhere. Too many times, these ramps essentially went to nowhere. It appeared to be a trend, because one borough or township had these ramps, it must be the right thing to do.

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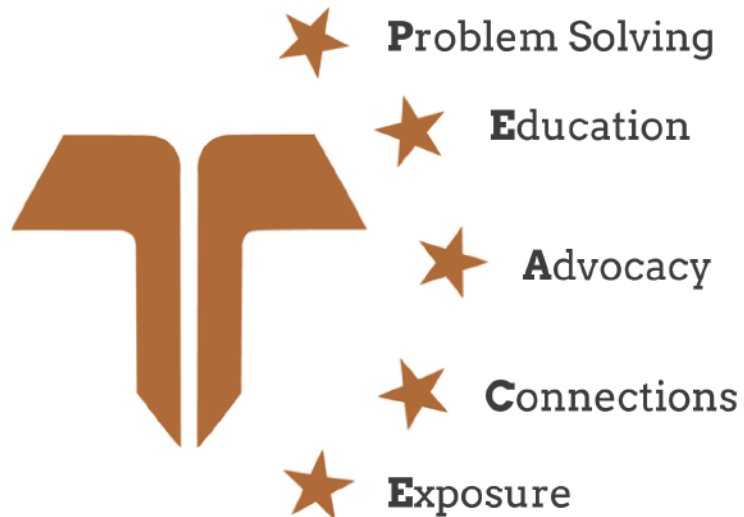
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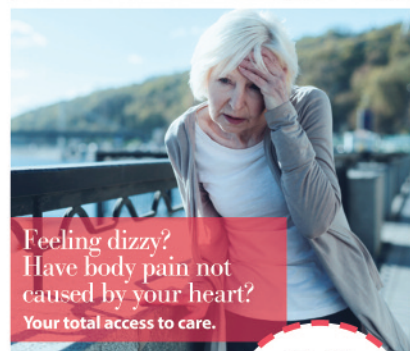
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It was not just in Pennsylvania either. We went to the beach in Manasquan, NJ and on the way home we were going to go to Point Pleasant's Spikes Fish Market and Restaurant to get some flounder, and I was in the wrong lane on Route 35 and I missed my turn. I went down about a mile on Route 35 and swung around the exit to get back to 35 North. I came to a red light, and there were four handicapped ramps to nowhere, as it was a field on two sides and Exxon Station and the turnaround ramp on the other corner. No sidewalks, no walking traffic, but there was a crosswalk with a ramp to nowhere.

It must be widespread, and appears it is becoming a folkway as a standard accompanying amenity. It has gained legitimacy in accepted culture. How could something like this happen?

Most of the time, when Federal money comes down, you are subject to the handicapped regulations. Sometimes the state will have a stricter interpretation, but pretty much, this is a federal standard. I view putting in ramps to nowhere as being "good enough for

government work." We are looking at mindless expensive improvements. Just because there is a space, a handicapped person does not have to get there — if there is no way for them to get there, and there is nowhere for them to go once they get there. In other words, people in wheelchairs rarely want to play "Frogger" with live action cars in the middle of highway somewhere. It is just not something people do. People that are ambulatory don't want to do that. No one wants to do that. Why are we allowing for it?

The regulations do not say to "waste money" and there is a "not technically feasible" category which in this case would fit the bill. I want to protest, but with the practice so widely used I feel that my concerns are falling on deaf ears. It is a trend.

This practice is a waste of valuable resources that could be directed elsewhere in an effort to improve our highways.

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