

The Infrastructure Bill Grants Cities More Control Over Street Design

Federal law now explicitly allows cities to apply NACTO street design guidance to federally-funded projects on city streets—even if a state requires different standards.

BACKGROUND: The IIJA grants cities explicit permission* to use the federally-recognized design guidance of their choice when implementing federally-funded projects on city-owned streets. [Congress](#) and [the FHWA](#) have recognized the NACTO *Urban Street Design Guide* and *Urban Bikeway Design Guide*. NACTO standards are compliant with, but not a substitute for, the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

TAKEAWAY: Per FHWA, Cities and communities looking to apply the [Urban Street Design Guide](#) and [Urban Bikeway Design Guide](#) to federally-funded local projects can now do so, without State permission.

HOW TO ADOPT A DESIGN GUIDE: Cities seeking to use a design guide different from their state’s standard should adopt the guide first. There are several paths to adopting a design guide. Two recommended options are discussed below.

↳ **Departmental Memo:** One fast way for a city to adopt NACTO guidance is for the city’s chief transportation engineer or equivalent to issue a memo stating “the *Urban Street Design Guide* and *Urban Bikeway Design Guide* of the National Association of City Transportation Officials [or other FHWA-recognized guide] are adopted as the city’s official street and roadway design standards including for the purposes of Federally-funded projects” or similar text. All departments involved in design decisions should be signatories to the memo.

↳ **City Council Ordinance:** A city council may adopt a NACTO guide or other recognized design guide through a Complete Streets ordinance or equivalent tool. The following examples are strong ordinances because they include a statement stating that “the *Urban Street Design Guide* of the National Association of City Transportation Officials [or other FHWA-recognized guide] is hereby adopted as the city’s official design standard.” If desired, a clause can be added specifying that the adoption is relevant to “all street and roadway projects on city-owned streets regardless of funding source.”

[Hoboken, NJ](#) [El Paso, TX](#)

***LEGISLATIVE TEXT:** *A local jurisdiction may use a roadway design guide recognized by the Federal Highway Administration and adopted by the local jurisdiction that is different from the roadway design guide used by the State in which the local jurisdiction is located for the design of projects on all roadways under the ownership of the local jurisdiction (other than a highway on the National Highway System) for which the local jurisdiction is the project sponsor, provided that the design complies with all other applicable Federal laws.*
(Standards 23 USC §109, IIJA Section 11129)