

Abstract

A Preliminary Research for the Seoul Street Design Manual: Setting the Direction towards a Walkable City

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As manifested in various urban policies, the Seoul Metropolitan Government(SMG) has made great efforts to improve the pedestrian environment. The City of Seoul has managed “Car-Free Day” events several times, and has designated pedestrian-only streets in many areas. However, it is not always convenient to walk in Seoul. On the streets, citizens still experience narrow sidewalks, streets cluttered with street furniture, and slanted sidewalk angles which are not safe for the mobility disadvantaged. The SMG still has work remaining to enhance the quality of the walking environment.

In pursuing this goal, public officials in the SMG have realized an urgent need to seek guidance from a street design manual. Herein, the existing manuals were reviewed to see if they could be of use in the redesign of Seoul streets. It was found that the manuals were simply not up to the job, presenting many problems. First, in most cases, the national government created the manuals. Thus, they did not reflect the unique characteristics of Seoul’s built environment. Second, the manuals provided only general direction for street design, without specific details to deal with the diverse types of streets found in Seoul. Third, they set the focus on a few elements of street design, while considering various factors in an integrated manner is a key element for desirable street design.

For these reasons, the SMG plans to create a Seoul Street Design Manual. As preliminary research for such a manual, this study drew on lessons from other cities in the world. The manuals for various cities abroad all have a common theme: they aim to convert current “Incomplete Streets” that were designed for automobiles to “Complete Streets” that put pedestrians and bicycles on equal footing with cars. Nevertheless, their coverage of design elements, the level of details included in the guidelines, and the contents of the manuals still differ from each other.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Seoul experienced rapid growth with the construction of major urban highways such as the Olympic Freeway. It may be evident that Seoul has not treated pedestrians and bicycles with due respect compared to automobiles. Therefore, we suggested that the Seoul Street Design Manual should focus on the design of Complete Streets, for which the design principles are proposed herein. Moreover, for a city like Seoul with various street types, it is important to provide customized design strategies for each street pattern. Readers can also find them in this report.

Since physical developments, including buildings and transport infrastructure, have almost been completed, it is crucial to implement the design manual step by step. Although a design scheme such as road diet is a desirable outcome for pedestrians, it would bring about chaos for auto users if executed instantly. Learning from cities abroad (such as the Parklet program in San Francisco), we proposed a method to carry out the design proposal through gradual and acceptable changes.

Finally, the creation of a fine street design is a task that should involve a wide variety of fields including transportation, urban design, and environmental engineering. This report also suggested organizing a Task Force (TF) to collect useful ideas from many disciplines. That way, citizens walking on the streets in Seoul could benefit for years to come.

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