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Statewide urban standards offer many advantages

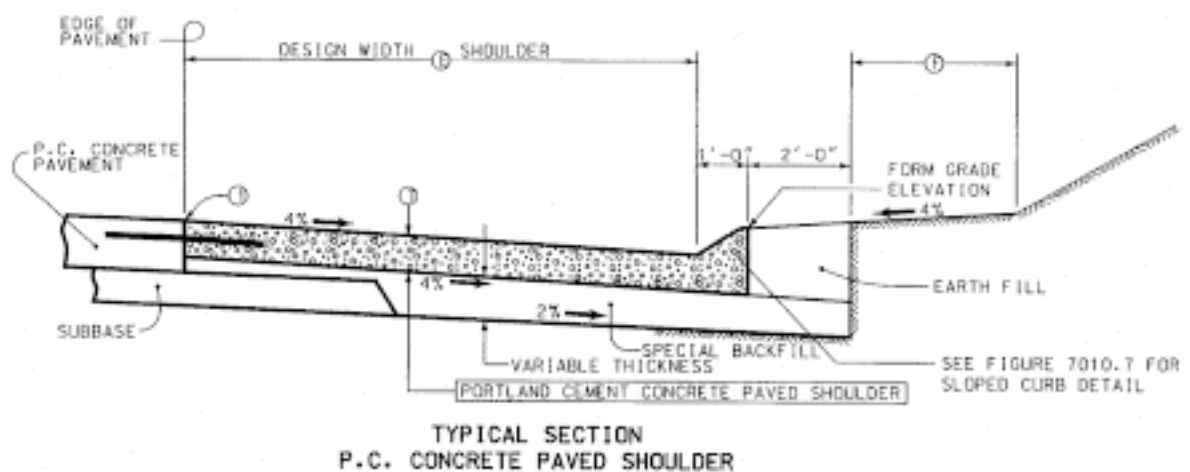
THE STUFF OF A contractor's dream—statewide design and specification standards for urban public improvements—is close to becoming a reality.

Since 1998, the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), the Central Iowa Urban Standard Design and Specifications Committee, and cities throughout the state have been working together to formulate statewide urban design and specification standards (SUDAS) for public improvements. The ultimate goal is to develop manuals of these standards. The manuals—one for design and one for specifications—would encompass statewide standards for all urban public improvements, including street and utility projects.

The advantages of such standards are numerous. They would

- encourage uniformity in design approaches and construction
- reduce planning time
- reduce construction costs
- help reduce errors and miscommunications
- eliminate bias toward materials and methods by promoting tested results
- provide uniform contract documents, bidding procedures, and contract policies

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Two manuals, one for design and one for specifications, would encompass statewide standards for all urban public improvements. The manuals will include illustrations and diagrams like the one above.

Stan Ring, LTAP library coordinator, passed away September 14. See pages 6–7.

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- allow governments to benefit from the exchange of ideas and solutions
- relieve local governments of the burdens of updating manuals with new regulations and information about new products and procedures

The current impetus behind the SUDAS manuals dates back to 1995. That's when the technology subcommittee of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Transportation Task Force recommended adopting "common standards for construction specifications and construction equipment" as one way the state could maximize the benefits of road use tax dollars. The recommendation also stated that these standards should be developed through a mutual agreement among the Iowa DOT and Iowa cities and counties.

To help develop the SUDAS, a steering committee that includes representatives of cities, counties, and the Iowa DOT will be appointed by state and local officials. The Center for Transportation Research and Education (CTRE) at Iowa State University will help develop support for statewide urban standards by meeting with the Iowa chapter of American Public Works Association, Iowa County Engineers Association, Iowa League of Municipalities, and metropolitan and regional planning organizations.

Dale Harrington, associate director for pavements at CTRE, will serve as a facilitator for all the groups and provide leadership in the development of the SUDAS manuals. Harrington says that local governments will definitely benefit from statewide urban standards. He notes that 30 central Iowa cities and counties are already experiencing the

advantages of using standard design and specification manuals. The manuals contain federal, state, and local specifications, and were compiled in the last few years by the communities.

Harrington says that because unified specifications are now available in central Iowa, contractors are starting to bid on jobs they typically wouldn't bid on, as illustrated by the experience of the city of Ames. "Previously, the city would have only one or two bidders for construction projects," says Harrington, "but now they're getting from four to six bidders. Increased competition usually means more bidders, less cost."

Before the statewide standards and manuals can be developed, Harrington says that organizational, management, and financial plans must be put in place. He anticipates those plans will be ready for implementation this winter or early next spring. The statewide manuals will be based on the central Iowa standard design and specification manuals and current Iowa DOT standards. Harrington expects the manuals to be published in one to two years.

For more information

The Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) library has a copy of the central Iowa urban standard specifications manual, which was prepared by the Des Moines Metropolitan Improvement Design Standards and Specifications Committee, in cooperation with Snyder & Associates. Contact Traci Stewart, CTRE receptionist, 515-294-8103, stewartt@iastate.edu, to request publication 1478, *Urban Standard Specifications for Public Improvements*. •



Computer expertise

Nick Burdine has joined the staff at the Center for Transportation Research and Education (CTRE). He graduated from Iowa State University in 1999 with a bachelor's degree in computer science. As a student Nick did computer support and web server maintenance for CTRE. He now puts his computer expertise to work researching and developing software tools and applications for transportation-related projects such as the Iowa Department of Transportation's Weatherview web site. He's currently finishing work on a pavement management sectioning tool, which will become part of the pavement management system. •