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You Want a Revolution

By Tim Padgett

Carmel, Ind., is driving in circles. Since 2001, the Indianapolis suburb has built 50 roundabouts, those circular alternatives to street intersections that have become a transit fixture in much of the rest of the world. Because roundabouts force cars to travel through a crossroads in a slower but more free-flowing manner — unlike traffic circles, roundabouts have no stop signals — in seven years, Carmel has seen a 78% drop in accidents involving injuries, not to mention a savings of some 24,000 gal. of gas per year per roundabout because of less car idling. "As our population densities become more like Europe's," says Mayor Jim Brainard, who received a climate-protection award this year from the U.S. Conference of Mayors, "roundabouts will become more popular."

About 1,000 roundabouts have been built in 25 states, and research bears out the benefits to states like Kansas, where the new design has produced a 65% average drop in vehicular delays, according to a recent Kansas State University study. Most roundabouts are also more aesthetically pleasing and cost much less to construct than stoplight intersections. The problem is teaching Americans how to navigate them. (Folks, cars entering a roundabout yield to those already in it.) But the heightened anxiety people feel in roundabouts makes them drive more carefully and remember that intersections are dangerous places. And as Tom Vanderbilt notes in this summer's best seller *Traffic*, "The system that makes us more aware of this is actually the safer one."

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