



Illinois Department of Transportation

Division of Public and Intermodal Transportation
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DIVISION OF PUBLIC AND INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS PROCESS

SUBJECT: Implementation Procedures

DATE: May 15, 2007

Background

Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) is an interdisciplinary approach that seeks effective, multimodal transportation solutions by working with stakeholders to develop, build, and maintain cost-effective transportation facilities which fit into and reflect the project's surroundings - its "context." Through early, frequent, and meaningful communication with stakeholders and a flexible and creative approach to design, the resulting projects should improve safety and mobility for the traveling public while seeking to preserve and enhance the scenic, economic, historic, and natural qualities of the settings through which they pass.

Context Sensitive Solutions aim to achieve transportation facilities that are sensitive to and inclusive of the users and surrounding environment. CSS is one of the cornerstones for creating healthy transportation facilities, mobility options and economically vibrant communities.

IDOT'S CSS Perspective – Inclusive Process, Multi-Modal in Approach

In 2003, the Illinois General Assembly enacted legislation requiring the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) to adopt CSS principles in planning, design, construction, and operation of major projects. In August 2004, the Department released a report to the Governor and General Assembly on CSS. This report contained guidelines for stakeholder involvement and design flexibility and laid the foundation for a CSS policy.

Departmental Policy D&E-21, *Context Sensitive Solutions*, was issued on Aug. 1, 2005. In addition to adopting the CSS concept in theory, the policy provides guidelines for defining the CSS process and its uses so that it is practical in approach and applicable to a variety of projects.

Since the policy has been in effect, IDOT has been proactive in better engaging local stakeholders at project conception so their concerns and suggestions are

considered long before final design is approved. These efforts are proving to be valuable and are achieving positive feedback from stakeholders.

It is important to note that the Department's CSS policy states that addressing all modes of transportation in the planning and design of a project is one key to providing a cost-effective transportation facility. This multi-modal planning approach helps provide an opportunity for a more inclusive design.

The Department's CSS policy has laid the groundwork for a stakeholder involvement process that is flexible, interactive, and ongoing throughout the project development process and inclusive of all stakeholders. IDOT also encourages local agencies to use CSS as a best practice in the development of local projects.

The Department also has made it a point to ensure that staff is properly trained on CSS policy and approaches and kept abreast of current CSS research. The CSS policy is reviewed on an annual basis. This builds on the Department's commitment to ensure that stakeholder involvement and input into the process are sought, as a component of developing a standard policy. The Department also is developing training tools that can be used by local communities to understand the benefits of a CSS approach to project planning.

Incorporating new planning concepts, at both the state and local level, can sometimes lead to increased project costs. The Department's CSS policy clearly states that certain project elements developed through the CSS process for a particular project may require cost participation from sources outside IDOT. Stakeholders are informed of this early so there is no confusion on this point.

The Department's CSS policy has afforded practitioners the ability to consider non-traditional project design elements and to combine them with comprehensive stakeholder input process.

Overview of the Division of Public and Intermodal Transportation (DPIT)

The Division of Public and Intermodal Transportation's mission is to support public and specialized transportation throughout Illinois by providing technical support and financial resources to local governments, public and specialized transportation operators, and rail operators. The Division's main roles are to:

- Develop and recommend policies and programs;
- Implement and administer operating, capital, and technical assistance programs;
- Coordinate and participate in statewide planning and programming activities;
- Conduct technical studies and engineering reviews of public transportation and rail freight projects and planning studies;
- Maximize the amount of federal funds received in Illinois for transit and rail projects; and
- Advocate for public and specialized transportation funding within IDOT.

The Division aims to enhance Illinois' transportation network and ensure that it is intermodal, interconnected, provides mobility options and supports the efficient movement of people, goods and services. The following functions are performed within the Division:

Northeastern Illinois Area Programs

Evaluate and administer capital and operating grant programs in northeastern Illinois for the Regional Transportation Authority, Chicago Transit Authority, City of Chicago, Metra, Pace, and suburban municipalities.

Downstate Area Programs

Evaluate and administer capital and operating grant programs for downstate urban and rural transit systems; and administer the Statewide Consolidated Vehicle Procurement Program.

Railroads

Administer the State's freight and passenger rail programs, including funding for freight, passenger rail and high speed rail capital projects and operating assistance for supplemental Amtrak service.

Program Support

Represents the Division in regional and statewide planning and engineering efforts; conducts engineering reviews, detailed evaluations, analyses of public transportation and multi-modal projects, and performs special public transportation planning studies.

Administrative Support

Provides financial and administrative support for the Division, maintains the Division's operating budget, provides accounting assistance for Division programs, and is responsible for financial compliance reviews and human resources.

CSS in the Division of Public and Intermodal Transportation

Although DPIT does not operate any public transportation service, it does have a review and concurrence role in the design and implementation of capital projects funded with state resources. DPIT's approach to CSS will be most clearly identified in the design of capital projects, and the stakeholder involvement and public outreach conducted in technical studies and other special projects led by the Division. Since many of these projects are locally derived, the Department will develop training tools to educate grantees and local sponsors on the CSS implementation procedures, and encourage the adoption of CSS elements as appropriate for individual projects. During the concurrence and review process for capital projects and technical studies, the Division will provide guidance to the grantee regarding potential CSS elements to be considered, assuming they have met federal and state design and safety criteria and are eligible for state or federal funding. For all other projects undertaken by the Division, a stakeholder

involvement strategy consistent with the type of project and the Department's CSS Policy is to be followed.

Implementation Guidelines for Capital Projects and Technical Studies

Capital Projects

Capital projects funded by the Division are for facilities that support public transportation services (such as a bus turnaround), and freight and passenger rail service (such as a transload facility).

Projects requesting state funding must be approved and reviewed by the Division prior to design and construction. Each project will be individually assessed to determine the best application of CSS. The concurrence and review process will provide additional opportunities for the Division to provide guidance to the grantee on implementation of CSS and that the project adheres to other state or federal guidelines, as applicable.

Technical Studies

The stakeholder involvement process for technical studies begins when the project is conceived. The majority of these projects are sponsored by metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), municipalities, transit districts or other units of local government.

An application for funding is required which identifies project goals, outcomes and deliverables. Each project will be individually assessed to determine the best application of CSS. The concurrence and review process will provide additional opportunities for the Division to provide guidance to the grantee on implementation of CSS and that the project adheres to other state or federal guidelines as appropriate.

Projects which require stakeholder input, if not conducted by the grantee, are undertaken by an IDOT-approved consultant. Stakeholder input is gathered through a variety of venues including focus groups, surveys, and public meetings and hearings. This input is sought early and often throughout the planning process and used to develop feasible alternatives for transit services.

Examples of CSS at DPIT:

Stakeholder Involvement and Public Outreach for Special Projects

Special Project: Developing Rural Planning Regions

DPIT is responsible for implementing two new federal formula programs created in the latest federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU (formally known as the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users) – *Job Access Reverse Commute* and *New Freedom*. These programs require that local plans be developed to address transportation challenges and mobility needs for the elderly, disabled, and low-income individuals.

As a part of this effort, DPIT established rural planning regions, as none previously existed in Illinois. An extensive public outreach process provided input, suggestions, and advice on the regions. Stakeholders who participated included the targeted populations (elderly, disabled, and low-income individuals), regional planning organizations, public and private specialized transportation providers, representatives from the business community, elected officials, and other state and local social service agencies. The statewide meetings covered three areas of the state (north, central and south) and gathered the necessary input to develop the rural planning regions.

DPIT partnered with various regional planning commissions to employ regional coordinators to provide technical assistance to local planning committees to carry out the federally mandated planning process. The mandate requires local input from the targeted populations, service providers, human service agencies, and transportation-disadvantaged residents. The cooperative effort should result in locally developed, coordinated, public transit human service transportation plans.

Special Project: CREATE

Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency program

The CREATE program has been designated in the federal transportation bill as a project of national and regional significance. CREATE is planned as a ten year, \$1.5 billion landmark public-private partnership that aims to alleviate congestion on metropolitan Chicago's rail network and enhance the efficiency of the region's transportation infrastructure by increasing safety and reducing motorist delays.

The program is championed by three main partners: Association of American Railroads (representing the six Class-1 Railroads, Amtrak and Metra), the City of Chicago and the Illinois Department of Transportation. CREATE is designed to address critically needed improvements to increase the efficiency of the region's rail infrastructure and the quality of life of Chicago-area residents.

The CREATE program has a major impact on the local communities due to the redesign of at-grade crossings, construction of railroad overpasses, and realignment of track, to name a few of the program's construction elements. To provide information about the construction issues and gather input on the program and individual projects, CREATE partners established an Advocacy Committee. The Committee hosts public meetings, where project background is provided and to open communication between the project partners and affected communities. The Committee will continue to conduct meetings with local officials, and other interested parties to ensure that they remain apprised of the project process and any community impacts.