

FHWA's Fostering Livable Communities Newsletter

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Introduction

The Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA’s) Fostering Livable Communities Newsletter is intended to provide transportation professionals with real-world examples to help them improve the relationship between transportation agencies and communities, such as providing access to good jobs, affordable housing, quality schools, and safer roads. To access additional tools and resources, or to learn more about FHWA's Livability Initiative, please visit [FHWA's Livability website](#), or visit the interagency [Partnership for Sustainable Communities \(PSC\) website](#). To read past issues of the newsletter, visit www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/newsletter/. To subscribe to the newsletter, visit [GovDelivery](#).

Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



FHWA Livability Team Creates New Online Resources

In an effort to continuously support practitioners in advancing livability, the FHWA Livability Team has developed several new online resources. The Livable Communities Discussion Board, a “community of practice,” will serve as a forum for practitioners to discuss topics and share information related to livability. The site includes resources and discussions on topics such as performance measures, environmental justice, complete streets, walking and bicycling, tools and technology, and performance measures.

To register for the site, visit: <https://www.transportationresearch.gov/dot/fhwa/livablecommunities/>. Additionally, the FHWA Livability Team reorganized the FHWA Livability website and added new fact sheets and case studies. The case study page is now organized by the six livability principles making it easier to locate case studies by livability principles. The resources page also provides easier navigation and includes new items.

Please visit the FHWA Livability website at: (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/>) to access these and other resources.

Summary of FHWA Health in Transportation Activities

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Around the country, transportation agencies are building capacity in transportation and public health. Healthy and safe communities are a cornerstone of livability and the transportation network. The U.S. Department of Transportation and local and regional transportation agencies support health in transportation through a range of activities related to safety, air quality, and noise. The FHWA has long been a leader in considering important transportation factors that affect health through initiatives such as the Transportation [Safety Program](#), the [Bicycle & Pedestrian Program](#), [environmental review](#), and [air quality programs](#), which includes the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program. In addition to highlighting these well-established activities and programs, USDOT is working to bring transportation and health professionals together to improve transportation decision-making. Here are a few recent USDOT initiatives and research efforts:

- In 2012, FHWA created an internal Health in Transportation Workgroup to improve leadership and communication, build capacity, and explore opportunities to improve coordination between the public health and transportation community. Volunteers represent FHWA, Federal Transit Administration (FTA), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and Office of the Secretary of Transportation headquarters and resource center staff.
- USDOT is currently working in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Public Health Association to develop a “Health Index” to assist metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and State Departments of Transportation to evaluate the health effects of transportation decisions.
- In 2012, FHWA produced a whitepaper, “[Metropolitan Area Planning for Healthy Communities](#),” that uses exemplary MPO practices as the basis for a holistic framework. MPOs can use such practices to consider health in



the transportation planning process. An upcoming paper will investigate how State DOTs are incorporating public health into transportation planning and other activities, such as Safe Routes to School and assistance to localities.

The USDOT encourages State and local agencies to integrate public health into transportation planning activities. As described in the MPO and DOT whitepapers, some local initiatives include: formal or informal coordination with public health agencies, health-focused grant programs, and the inclusion of health priorities or criteria in formal transportation planning documents. A key tool for some organizations is a Health Impact Assessment (HIA), which can be used and adapted according to local needs and priorities. Like other planning or impact analyses, HIA is a tool that translates data about local public health goals and objectives into information that allows decision makers to assess the likely effects of projects or policies.

One place where the transportation professionals are leading the way is in Georgia. The FHWA's Georgia Division has initiated several training sessions to help Georgia MPOs integrate public health objectives and goals into transportation plans. In April 2012, the Environmental Protection Agency's southeast Regional Administrator and FHWA's Director of Field Services – South initiated institutional changes to educate transportation coordinators so that they may provide State DOTs with useful and relevant information about children's environmental health. Some State DOTs are now employing staff with Masters of Public Health degrees to help analyze and highlight health outcomes.

Our goal is that transportation professionals at all levels, but particularly within the planning and environmental disciplines, be well equipped to assist communities in transitioning to more livable communities. This can be facilitated by considering health in planning, project delivery, and operations. Transportation professionals can enhance health considerations and outcomes by reaching out to the public health community and providing a robust understanding of the transportation planning and project development processes.

For more information on FHWA's health activities and health research, see the health in transportation website at: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/health_in_transportation/.



The Idaho Rural Partnership Community Review Program – A Cornerstone of Livability in Idaho

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Planning for livability requires coordination; Idaho is fortunate to have an agency that facilitates much of the pre-project planning and development work for small rural communities – the Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP).

IRP is a small State agency with two part-time employees; the [Community Review program](#) is its signature accomplishment. IRP serves as the organizing entity for this program, drawing together professionals from every sector—including economic development, housing, transportation, arts, historic preservation, recreation, civic life, and others—to participate in reviews with rural communities in Idaho. FHWA has participated in this program for two years and five reviews.



Figure 1: The Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP) joins diverse public and private resources in innovative collaborations to strengthen communities and improve life in rural Idaho.

For each review, a small planning team spends several months working with the community to organize and plan for the review, conducting surveys, collecting data, and assembling the larger visiting team. The full visiting team then spends three days in the community for stakeholder meetings, interviews, listening sessions, site visits, and public meetings. The review closes with a town hall-style meeting open to the entire community. Visiting teams offer their observations and preliminary suggestions for community development, along with potential resources targeted for community needs. A full report of the review follows approximately six weeks later with more specific recommendations and resources to achieve the community's goals. Subsequently, the review team continues to engage with the community to help them implement the recommendations in the report.

Communities that complete the program are often in a better position to compete for State and Federal funding for projects identified during the review. For example, the city of American Falls completed a Community Review in 2009 and recently won three FHWA grants, including a 2.3 million dollar TIGER III grant for a complete streets project, which is a key part of their downtown revitalization. Kristin Jensen, American Falls Council Woman and Executive Director of the Great Rift Business Development Organization, attributed their success in obtaining the Federal grants to the momentum built during the Community Review.

IRP and the Community Review program embody the ideals of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities through improved collaboration and a holistic approach to community development. As a result of the program, IRP has built a network of regional development professionals that can be accessed when working with communities. The agencies involved have learned from one another and are more able to visualize opportunities for strategic collaboration while avoiding duplication of effort.

As a result of this network and the resulting knowledge of other agencies, the FHWA Idaho Division Office can more effectively oversee FHWA programs and assist communities in developing partnerships and securing funding. Access to this



broad and diverse network allows each partner to draw on a dynamic range of available resources and select the right tool for every job. The IRP Community Review program also demonstrates how government agencies can collaborate to use resources efficiently, limit duplication, and provide holistic assistance to communities.

“PopUp Main Street” Event in Little Rock, Arkansas

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In November, 2012, the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce “Create Little Rock” group and [StudioMain](#) hosted “Pop-Up Main Street,” a life-sized mock-up that allowed the public to experience an alternate version of the South Main (SoMa) neighborhood of Little Rock, Arkansas. The purpose of the event was to explore some critical questions: what if South Main Street were altered from a four-lane to a two-lane road, divided by a landscaped median, and supplemented with bike lanes? Organizers hypothesized that these changes would improve safety and draw attention to local businesses, revitalizing the neighborhood.

Inspired by the burgeoning [Better Block](#) initiative, this live experiment invited the public to actively engage in the build-out process of the demonstration and provide feedback in real time. The event focused on the three block section of South Main Street from I-630 to 15th Street and provided an opportunity for the organizers to partner with SoMa residents and business owners to show what the SoMa neighborhood could become. This included temporary lane alterations that provided bike lanes, the addition of a median, more shops, better cafe seating (using wooden pallets to serve as temporary fencing), and increased green space. Hay bales and potted trees were used to show what the street might resemble with additional vegetation and a boulevard type cross-section. The event coincided with 2nd Friday Art Night and continued into Saturday with a festive atmosphere that included music, food, and vendors.



Figure 2: In the full-size mockup, hay bales (upper left) provided a visual suggestion of what a median might look like. Duct tape delineated temporary bicycle lanes.

In recent years, the SoMa neighborhood has been slowly redeveloping from what was once an area of low property-value dwellings, fast food restaurants, vacant businesses, and empty parking lots into a district of opportunity. Developers are rebuilding the community slowly, with an eye toward sustainable environmental design. The neighborhood is anchored by Bernice Garden, which is privately owned but aimed for public use. This outdoor facility was designed by area architects and students from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. It includes a sculpture garden with recycled and reclaimed materials and a cistern to collect rainwater for the plants. It also includes a pavilion, which is home to a weekly farmer’s market and other community events. Many businesses that have moved into the neighborhood promote livability such as the Green Corner Store and the Root Café serving locally-grown and organic cuisine.



The community has not yet secured funding sources to complete the alterations to this section of South Main, but organizers plan to host a similar event on other sections of Little Rock streets annually. Based on the positive response from the community, they will also propose ideas for other two-day Better Block events.

Planning Transportation Assets for a Livable Southeast Michigan

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Southeast Michigan Council of Governments

Both the State and Federal government are moving toward prioritizing projects based on outcomes and performance measures. As part of the development of their long range transportation plan (LRTP), the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) has identified six outcomes for creating a successful region along with associated measures:

- Economic Prosperity
- Access
- Healthy, Attractive Environmental Areas
- Reliable, Quality Infrastructure
- Desirable Communities
- Fiscally Sustainable Public Service

A quality transportation system is critical to achieving every one of these outcomes; however much has changed in the region, the State, and the country in recent years. Compared to many other parts of the country, Southeast Michigan's transit service is very poor. This limits the region's ability to attract and retain talent and increase per capita income. Furthermore, a large proportion of current transit riders are entirely dependent on the transit system to get to work, school, and other activities. The needs for multiple transportation options will likely increase as the proportion of elderly people rapidly escalates. This requires greater emphasis on ensuring the non-driving public's access to the region's jobs, services, and amenities.

At the same time, the proportion of our roads that are in poor condition is increasing quickly, resulting in escalating costs. Asset management must be employed to maximize the rate of return on investment in all areas of transportation. Efficiencies in service delivery are needed, but cannot make up for the huge loss of gas tax revenue resulting from more fuel efficient vehicles and less travel.

The six guiding outcomes for the LRTP help to focus SEMCOG's efforts as it completes the new plan. As part of that process, synthesizing and communicating these changes helps focus the ongoing conversation about how to view the Plan. Key changes are reflected in the following table comparing the "Old" with the "New Reality."



Old Reality	New Reality
Success is defined by growth in populations and jobs.	Success is defined by quality of life. Little growth is expected over the next 30 years.
Region competes with the rest of the country.	Region competes with the rest of the world.
Parts of the region can be successful.	For parts to succeed, the whole must succeed.
High school education is sufficient.	Advanced education is essential.
The choice of where to work precedes the choice of where to live.	The choice of where to live precedes the choice of where to work.
Connectivity is defined by automobile access.	Connectivity is defined by access to many different things including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Technology and communications (computers, mobile devices); o Alternative modes of transportation, such as biking and public transit; and, o International economic markets.
Costly roads are built to meet peak travel demand.	Costs are avoided by reducing peak travel and through more effective use of existing road capacity.
Gas tax revenues fund transportation needs.	Gas tax revenues are declining due to an emphasis on conservation and energy efficient vehicles; these are no longer sufficient to fund transportation needs.
Employees work at the office.	Many employees work remotely – from home or other locations.
Employees work a traditional schedule.	Many employees take advantage of flexible work hours.
Transit only benefits those who use it.	Transit attracts people and jobs.
The Federal government will solve our problems.	We must create our own destiny.
More money will solve our problems.	We must reduce our costs as we also seek additional, more sustainable revenue.
Property taxes will provide adequate funding for public services.	Property taxes are insufficient to fund public services. Real property taxable value in Southeast Michigan has dropped 30 percent since it peaked in 2008 and, under current tax law, will not increase in inflation-adjusted dollars even when the housing market rebounds.
Planning agencies develop transportation plans as stand-alone documents.	A transportation plan must be consistent with other infrastructure services to achieve desired regional outcomes.
Freight facilities are widely dispersed across the country.	Freight facilities are concentrated in a few locations.
Biking facilities are purely recreational.	Biking facilities are an essential part of our transportation infrastructure.

Considering these new realities, our first step was to reach consensus on what the region needs to accomplish to be successful. Focusing on our six outcomes has compelled us to more strategically consider how our proposed actions can be



most valuable for the region. At the same time, it is also helping us to collaborate and discuss how investments may affect one another both regionally and across the transportation system. As a result of prioritizing the six outcomes, SEMCOG decided to maximize use of the existing system and reduce excess capacity. Many of the roads with excess capacity in the city of Detroit may be repurposed through some combination of [Green Infrastructure](#), bike lanes, and complete streets, which is consistent with the recently released plan, “[Detroit Future City](#).”

This is a brief glimpse into an outcome-driven process which has precipitated a new way of thinking about how to approach a long range plan. The plan is scheduled for adoption in June 2013.

Affordable Transit-Oriented Development in Honolulu, Hawaii

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Honolulu, the capital of the State of Hawaii and its most populous city, is faced with heavy traffic congestion and delays. Right now, the city has a prime opportunity to address these issues by implementing plans for transit-oriented development (TOD) that will drive economic development and enhance quality of life. Local, State, and Federal partners are working together to advance this cause.

The city of Honolulu, HI received a \$2.3 million U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-DOT [Community Challenge Planning Grant](#) in October 2010 to create TOD around the planned [Honolulu Rail Transit Project](#). At

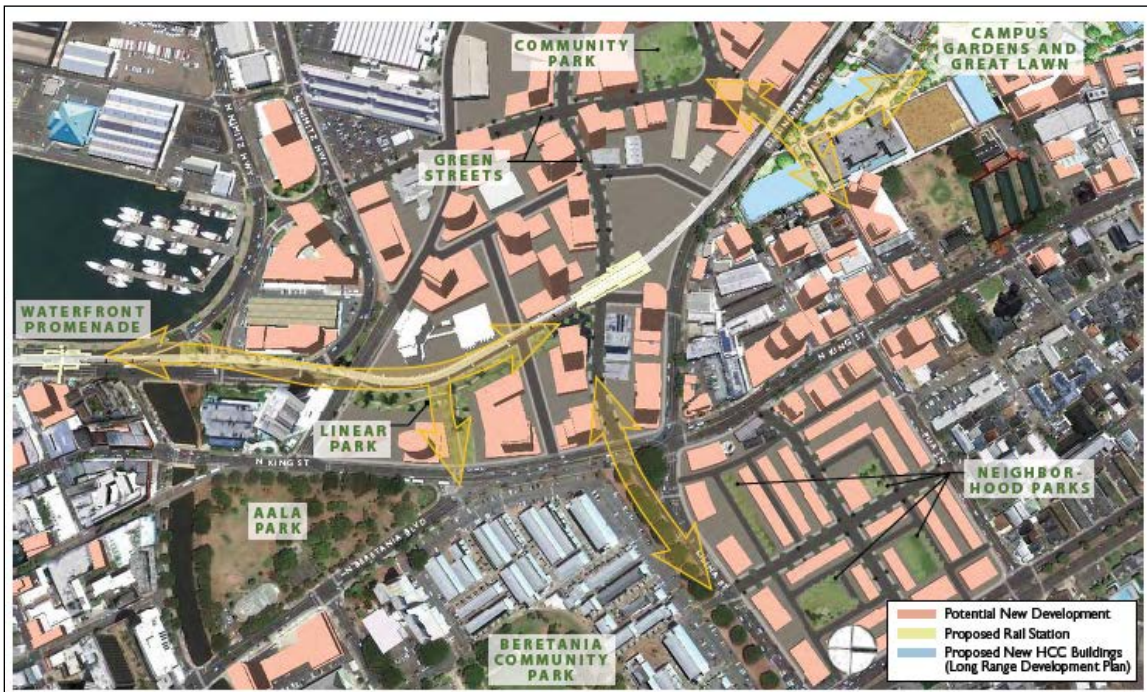


Figure 3: Overhead view of conceptual build out of the Iwilei station area. Integrating open spaces, open space connections and public realm improvements into the development program and designing spaces that respond to streets and neighborhoods ensure that high-density urban areas are livable and provide a high quality of life.



that time the city formed a task force to advance transit-oriented development while retaining affordable housing. The task force, composed of housing advocates, non-profit agencies, developers, public agencies, and other community stakeholders, surveyed housing and community capacity constraints over the past two years, but lingering uncertainty over the rail project had slowed its implementation. Over the past few months, new political resolutions and the November 2012 announcement that FTA will provide a \$1.55 billion [New Starts](#) grant for the rail line have reinvigorated the initiative.

In a high-cost area such as Honolulu, the challenges are as great as those of San Francisco and New York, but without comparable resources. The Community Challenge Planning Grant was to be used to

- Collect reasonably accurate data and the numbers and distribution of work-force housing;
- Evaluate the capacity of community organizations;
- Educate the public; and,
- Develop a new template for increasing the stock of affordable housing.

After collecting and reviewing the data, the task force focused on prioritizing TOD sites and assessing policy tools to spur development and preserve affordable housing along the Honolulu Rail Transit Project's 21 proposed stations (the first of which is scheduled to open in 2015). The task force selected three stations where the surrounding areas provided the most promise for affordable housing development, and considered several strategies to encourage investment in existing rental properties, such as creating a land-acquisition fund and a tax-abatement program. The task force also looked at ways to give developers more design flexibility, such as investing in parks (to lessen open-space requirements for new projects) and easing regulations on parking requirements, given that the developments will be near transit.

Understanding the regulatory constraints on the use of the grant and administrative procedures for partnering with neighborhood organizations will be the next hurdles. Honolulu will use the HUD grant to leverage funds from other sources, including the Hawai'i Housing Alliance, Kamehameha Schools, Community Reinvestment Act funds from local banks, and the city's Affordable Housing Fund and Clean Water and Natural Lands program. The ebb and flow of political support for the project has had the effect of uniting those entities with reach and experience in community economic development. In the midst of this effort, Hawaii's Office of Planning recently collaborated with Smart Growth America to produce a new report, [Leveraging State Agency Involvement in Transit-Oriented Development to Strengthen Hawaii's Economy](#).

The HUD grant, and equally important, the staff support HUD has provided, is helping to drive this effort towards a successful conclusion. HUD's Sustainability Officer and Government Technical Representative have focused their resources on the city of Honolulu's goal to maintain housing affordability along the rail transit corridor.



Spotlight on Region 3

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Region 3 (District of Columbia, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia) reported multiple livability-related updates for October through December 2012. Here are some highlights from the region:

Marietta Borough in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

Once a vibrant economic center for the iron, pharmaceutical and national defense industries, Marietta Borough has succumbed to the economic stagnation plaguing so many rural towns and villages. The Borough, a small historic community along the Susquehanna River, is attempting to maintain and attract a new vibrancy and tax base through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, and has received funding from EPA to conduct a workshop under the [Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities](#) program.

The grant funded a workshop held in summer 2012 that helped the Borough Council identify topics to address; namely, zoning ordinances, walkability issues, and capitalizing on the natural aesthetics of the Susquehanna River and the adjacent trail system. Since the workshop, FHWA has helped the Borough connect to State organizations that offer technical and financial assistance like the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Preservation Pennsylvania and PA Downtown – a subsidiary of the Department of Community and Economic Development. FHWA has also begun negotiations with Norfolk Southern which operates an active rail line through the community.

Envision Lehigh Valley

The Region 3 Regional Engagement Team (RET) participated in a meeting for Envision Lehigh Valley, a plan to create a sustainable region by addressing economic and social distress in the region, which is funded by a [Sustainable Communities Regional Planning](#) grant from HUD and supplemented by FTA [Alternatives Analysis](#) funds for bus rapid transit. This is a major outreach effort designed to engage the citizens of Northampton and Lehigh Counties to create a truly sustainable Lehigh Valley region. RET principals participated in breakout group visioning discussions on economic development, fresh food access, transportation choices, housing choices, job/housing balance, and climate and energy, and served as resources for questions related to their respective programs. Prior to the event, the team met with the grant recipient, Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation, to discuss the project and learn of ways that the Federal Partners can be of assistance. More information is available online at: <http://www.envisionlehighvalley.com/>.

Announcements/New Resources

- EPA released a report, [Creating Equitable, Healthy, and Sustainable Communities: Strategies for Advancing Smart Growth, Environmental Justice, and Equitable Development](#). The document offers low-income, minority, Tribal, and overburdened communities' approaches to shape development that responds to their needs and reflects their values.

