

FHWA's Livable Communities Case Study Series

California – Connecting State DOT Planning and Local Community Goals

Challenge—Connecting State transportation and local land use planning

Typically in the United States, statewide transportation planning decisions both impact and are impacted by local land use decisions. When State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) and local governments do not coordinate on these decisions, this can result in conflicting or redundant plans, inefficient resource allocation, and tension between State DOTs and local communities, especially if State transportation planners are not aware of local priorities. Many planners see a need for greater coordination between statewide transportation planning and local communities to create more holistic plans with greater public support.

Solution—Create a State DOT office for community planning

Some State DOTs have addressed this challenge by creating offices for community planning. Such offices focus on coordination between statewide transportation and local land use plans. They also work with communities to create community-based or context-sensitive transportation plans that enjoy greater public support within their communities. The following are examples of how State DOTs have created and used such offices.

Caltrans – Office of Community Planning

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) created its [Office of Community Planning](#) (OCP) in 1999 “to promote and participate in community-based planning that integrates land use, transportation, and community values.” Caltrans created the OCP as a result of a strategic planning process that identified a goal to innovate at the intersection of transportation decision making and land use planning. The office built on its existing Caltrans work, such as local development review, but the OCP also aimed to strengthen partnerships with local governments and to promote community participation in transportation planning processes.

The OCP provides resources for public engagement, strengthening partnerships with local governments and helping Caltrans integrate community-based transportation planning into its operations. The OCP has helped Caltrans develop plans and projects that better incorporate the needs of all users of the transportation system. One successful project was the improvement of the [Kroy Pathway](#), a pedestrian path near U.S. Highway 50 in Sacramento that the local community considered dangerous. The OCP brought Caltrans, the city of Sacramento, and the local community together to develop a conceptual vision for the pathway. This early planning work led to a project that improved sightlines, lighting, landscaping, and fencing to enhance multi-modal access to transit and development.

The OCP supports community planning efforts through [Environmental Justice and Community-Based Transportation Grants](#) and by providing data and analysis tools to help local governments integrate land use and transportation considerations. For example, OCP-led research developed [a new tool to analyze multi-modal trip-generation rates from “smart growth” development in California](#). This tool is especially useful for communities planning for new urban infill or transit-oriented development.

Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



WSDOT – Community Transportation Planning Office

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) created the [Community Transportation Planning Office](#) (CTPO) in 2010 to coordinate local, regional, and State land use and transportation planning. WSDOT had already been working with communities to review projects under the State's [Growth Management Act](#), but the State wanted to develop a more systematic approach for local coordination as a part of how WSDOT manages the State transportation system. One of the primary goals was to use State and local resources more efficiently through greater collaboration, emphasizing additional creative solutions to meeting local needs beyond just building new infrastructure. By coordinating with communities and communicating realistic expectations, WSDOT hopes to manage its system more efficiently.

The CTPO works with municipalities during [Growth Management Act](#) and [State Environmental Policy Act](#) reviews to foster consistency between State and local plans. The office also provides data analysis tools and training to support local land use and transportation planning. In 2013, the office completed its new [Community Planning Portal](#) to share statewide transportation data with local and regional planners, stakeholders, and citizens. By building relationships with local governments and providing tools and knowledge, the CTPO hopes to improve the coordination of land use and transportation planning throughout the State. The CTPO is a small office with limited funds, but it has a large impact by training and collaborating with others, both internally and externally. The CTPO's approach is one of “dispersed implementation,” in which it achieves greater land use and transportation coordination through local partnerships.

TDOT – Office of Community Transportation

In 2013, the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) created the [Office of Community Transportation \(OCT\)](#) with a mission to “coordinate the State’s transportation planning, local land use decisions, and community visions to guide the development of a safe and efficient statewide transportation system.” The office strengthens partnerships with local agencies and ensures that State transportation planning efforts support municipalities’ plans for future development.

The OCT has stationed transportation planners in each of four regions of the State to facilitate local public involvement in TDOT initiatives and provide resources to local partners to develop transportation goals that support their community visions. One successful project in 2013 was in Dyersburg, where the OCT facilitated a discussion with TDOT, the city, and the advocacy group Pioneering Healthy Communities to include a bicycle lane in an upcoming road repaving project. Now Dyersburg has its first bicycle lane, increasing alternative and active transportation options for the community.

Conclusion

Creating an office for community outreach and coordination can help State DOTs foster livable communities by developing transportation plans that more effectively incorporate the needs of local communities and enjoy greater public support. Each of these offices also plays an important role in collecting and providing access to transportation data for local communities. Ultimately, this coordination with local land use planning can lead to projects that are cost-efficient, conserve environmental resources, and improve conditions for all residents.

Federal Highway Administration: www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability
Partnership for Sustainable Communities: www.sustainablecommunities.gov/

