U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

State DOTs and MPOs and Livability

State DOTs and MPOs are advancing livability and supporting local livability initiatives

State departments of transportation (DOTs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) play a vital role in advancing livability and supporting local community livability initiatives. Through planning, policy and guidance, project support, and funding, State DOTs and MPOs help local communities to identify and achieve broader goals and to implement an integrated, multimodal transportation network.

While all states administer livability-related Federally funded programs, such as the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) program, Transportation Alternatives (TA) set-aside, or Safe Routes to School activities (see Factsheet on Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) programs), some have developed integrated initiatives that combine multiple livability-related issues. Initiatives incorporate livability principles into state and regional planning, scenario and corridor planning, context-sensitive solution and design, complete street policies, policy and design guidebooks, local municipality and rural planning, project prioritization criteria, performance measures, and many more tools and strategies.

Washington State DOT Initiatives:

The Washington State DOT (WSDOT) has implemented several programs that support livability and sustainability at the local level. The Local Programs Capital Program serves as the steward of the FHWA funding that goes to public agencies throughout the state. Related initiatives include:

- **Livable Communities Policy and Complete Streets legislation**
- **'Green Streets' design practices to prevent and treat stormwater runoff.**
- **Programs to make communities more walkable and bikeable.**
- **Initiatives to improve, connect, or re-connect street grid systems to reduce emissions and traffic congestion, and improve walkability.**

Although there is significant flexibility in many of the FHWA and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs related to livability, some major programs are especially flexible. Within the Federal-Aid Highway Program, the CMAQ program, Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG), and Highway Safety Improvement programs can all be used for a broad range of livability-related projects.[1]

Success Stories: How State DOTs and MPOs are advancing livability

Statewide Transportation Plans. The Illinois DOT's Long-Range Transportation Plan focuses on long-term objectives fostering livable communities throughout the state. One of the five main goals is livability, which seeks to enhance quality of life through transportation investments advancing local goals, providing multimodal options, and preserving the environment.[2]

Regional Transportation Plans. Each MPO prepares a Metropolitan Transportation Plan to accomplish objectives for the development of the regional transportation network.[3] In 2019, the Boston Region MPO published their long-range transportation plan, titled *Destination 2040*. The goals for this plan include safety, mobility, clean air, and transportation equity, all of which support the MPO's vision of a sustainable, healthy, and livable region connected by a modern and well-maintained transportation system.[4] Regional transportation plans

[1] Congressional Research Service. Federal Aid Highway Program (FAHP): In Brief. 2020.
[2] Illinois DOT. Long Range Transportation Plan. 2019.
[3] FTA. Metropolitan Transportation Plan. 2019.
[4] Boston Region MPO. Destination 2040. 2019.

can provide valuable insight to implementation and local operations rather than higher-level statewide long-range transportation plans.

I-70 Mountain Corridor (Courtesy of the Colorado Department of Transportation)

Context Sensitive Solutions and Design (CSS/D) Approach. The CSS/D approach considers a range of factors to develop mobility solutions, within the context of broader community goals. The Colorado DOT's I-70 Mountain Corridor project addresses concerns about accessibility and environmental impacts by carefully considering the scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources making the corridor unique. Specific accessibility considerations include the compatibility with existing and planned transportation systems and access to local and regional mobility, including non-motorized mobility.[5] The Colorado DOT partnered with communities and stakeholders to develop a recommendations manual, a historic context report, and design guidelines for all current and future projects along the corridor.

Policy and Design Guidelines. Several State DOTs and MPOs have developed guidelines for roadway design, pedestrian and bicycle travel, and transit. The Southeast MPO in Cape Girardeau, Missouri adopted the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in 2018. This plan aims to guide investments in active transportation infrastructure throughout the region to achieve a number of livability-related goals: improving safety, providing more transportation options, improving public health, increasing property values, supporting economic development, and reducing pollution.[6]

SMART SCALE *Funding the Right Transportation Projects in Virginia*

Project prioritization. Incorporating project prioritization and evaluation criteria into funding decisions is one way that State DOTs and MPOs can help advance livable projects. The Virginia DOT uses the SMART SCALE tool to evaluate the benefits of proposed transportation projects and establish priorities.[7] Projects are scored using a data-driven, outcome-based process that is transparent to the public. SMART SCALE utilizes evaluation measures that quantify the benefits of each project for six factor areas: safety, congestion mitigation, accessibility, environmental quality, economic development, and land use. This tool allows the State to select the right transportation projects for funding while ensuring the best use of limited tax dollars. Projects may be submitted by regional entities, including MPOs, Planning District Commissions (PDCs), public transit agencies, and counties, cities and towns that maintain their own infrastructure.

Performance measures and scorecards. The California DOT (Caltrans) developed a Smart Mobility Framework (SMF) and Scorecard to evaluate the transportation options available to urban, suburban, and rural residents. The guidebook provides a planning framework to help guide and assess how well projects and programs meet the definition of "smart mobility," which includes six principles: location efficiency, reliable mobility, health and safety, environmental stewardship, social equity, and robust economy. Caltrans applies principles to specific place-types, each with its own set of performance measures. Since the publication of SMF 2010, Caltrans continues updates to the original framework to reflect changing priorities and goals.[8]

Available Resources

Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center

Context Sensitive Solutions and Design

SMART SCALE Fact Sheet

[5] Colorado DOT. I-70 Mountain Corridor.
[6] SEMPO. Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. 2018.
[7] FHWA. Virginia DOT Project Prioritization. 2017.
[8] Caltrans. Smart Mobility Framework. n.d.