



CSS Quick Facts – Area-wide Transportation Planning

Area-wide planning encompasses planning at the statewide and regional levels, including statewide transportation planning required by federal and state regulations, as well as transportation planning conducted by MPOs and RPOs. The focus in area-wide planning is on the transportation system level and the identification of candidate projects and priorities. CSS integration is used to address contextual priorities within the geography, sometimes without a direct link to a specific transportation project.

The statewide planning process established a cooperative, continuous and comprehensive framework for making transportation investment decisions throughout the State; and is administered jointly by the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration. In metropolitan areas, the MPO is responsible for leading the transportation planning process. MPOs are responsible for regional transportation planning and related planning and programming activities. Outside of metropolitan areas Rural Planning Organizations are often responsible for transportation planning. Federal and state regulations spell out the role of MPOs and RPOs in transportation planning, with specific requirements for multi-agency participation, public involvement and consideration of land use and environmental factors, along with safety and mobility.

Planning and Environmental Linkages

Traditionally, studies performed, and decisions reached as part of MPO and statewide transportation plan development have not been used in conducting environmental analyses under NEPA. As a result, there has often been duplication of work and delays in implementing transportation improvements. Planning and environmental linkages (PEL) represents a collaborative and integrated transportation decision-making process – a core principle of CSS. FHWA considers PEL as “an approach to transportation decision-making that considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the planning state, and carries through project development, design, and construction.” The goal of PEL is to create a seamless decision-making process that minimizes duplication of effort, promotes environmental stewardship, and reduces delay from planning through to project implementation.

SAFETEA-LU Requirements

One of the key elements of Section 6001 of SAFETEA-LU calls for an increased emphasis on early consideration of environmental issues in transportation planning. Metropolitan and statewide long-range transportation plans must be developed in consultation with state and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation. Section 6002 provides for a new environmental review process that emphasizes interagency collaboration and participation, supporting the concept of early consideration of environmental concerns in transportation planning. The planning regulations directly address the planning-NEPA linkage in both statewide and metropolitan planning. These sections allow a corridor or sub area study to be prepared as part of statewide or metropolitan area planning; and they specifically allow a corridor or sub-area study to be used as the basis for carrying planning-level decisions and analyses forward into the NEPA process.

CSS Strategies and Opportunities at the State-wide Planning Level

- Identify projects of statewide significance and their associated environmental impacts
- Incorporate State transportation policies into Problem Statements that can be directly incorporated into project-specific Purpose and Need Statements
- Highlight potential conflicts between statewide transportation and environmental policies to allow transportation and resource agencies time to develop meaningful impact mitigation approaches that may be used on multiple project corridors
- Maintain stakeholder involvement process through handoff from planning to project development stages
- Engage in “green infrastructure” planning or other integrated approaches that identify important resources and seek to minimize impacts on these resources and capitalize on opportunities

CSS Strategies and Opportunities for MPO and RPO Planning

- Make a serious commitment to use CSS in day-to-day practice
- Coordinate regional visioning and planning with statewide planning efforts
- Coordinate regional transportation planning and visioning with local and regional land use planning
- Identification of environmental resources
- Integrated transportation and conservation planning
- Early avoidance and minimization of impacts on protected or pristine environmental resources
- Identification of landscape scale mitigation opportunities
- Make the investment in visioning up front and set objectives and priorities to save time and resources in later planning and decision making
- Develop a comprehensive public involvement/outreach plan with special attention to communities and system users who have not been engaged in previous transportation planning processes, and be sure to follow through
- Cultivate new partnerships; seek out individuals and organizations that can serve as resources for advisory committees, leadership, public outreach, and information/data sources on community context
- Consider the planning process as an ideal forum to educate the public, government officials and policy makers on the importance of transportation, the many competing factors, and the implications of various solutions to address transportation issues
- Improve public involvement techniques; work with trained facilitators and/or provide facilitation training for agency staff
- Improve the level of documentation of external and internal processes and interactions to facilitate later environmental and project development activities
- Use the CSS principles as evaluation criteria to assess progress in implementing CSS.