



CSS Quick Facts – Corridor and Sub-area Planning

Transportation corridor and sub area planning activities are distinguished from area wide planning and project development in that the primary goals are to refine understanding of a specific transportation project and to establish the process by which it can be approved and delivered. This includes developing the information needed to establish the project purpose and need, the range of alternatives to be evaluated and the issues that will define the project's environmental evaluation and approval framework. The focus in corridor and sub area planning is on project understanding and definition of project objectives and alternatives. Measures at this stage are based on project-specific values and objectives. CSS integration provides a process to define and evaluate the best alternative given the project specific context.

Application of CSS at the Corridor and Sub-area Level

The application of CSS principles to the development of corridor and sub area transportation plans can substantially increase the chances of successful transportation project development. CSS-based decisions must incorporate both transportation and non-transportation values so that the project is viewed as a community asset. CSS is also critical in early project planning to help define and refine understanding of the project(s) to be developed, to establish project scope and schedule, and provide the information to establish the purpose and need, the range of alternatives, and the key environmental and community issues that set the stage for the environmental review and approval process. This level of project planning is a process of discovery, dealing with not only fact finding, but also a process which generates a unique set of findings and conditions that define the project context. Key elements of the process include:

- Establishing the vision and purpose and need for the project: CSS emphasizes the importance of separating problems from solutions. A clear problem statement lays the foundation for the development of evaluation criteria and their systematic application to the evaluation of alternatives.
- Defining the study area: Transportation projects can only be evaluated in their proper geographic context. Conceptual planning for corridors and sub areas is an excellent time in which to define and refine study area boundaries. Doing so helps project planners to understand relevant travel behavior, and to engage appropriate stakeholders in the solution.
- Establishing functional classification: For highway projects, a focus on the functional classification is typically required to understand a proposed project's role in the larger transportation network. Sub-area transportation planning is frequently structured around the well-established concept of functional classification. The CSS challenge often is to manage tradeoffs in designs for facilities where accessibility and mobility, motorized and non-motorized travel, safety, and aesthetics all come to bear – and often come into conflict.
- Agreeing to project criteria: Careful development of evaluation criteria with early and continuous involvement of project stakeholders, will reduce information overload and expose tradeoffs in different solution sets, specifically in relation to community values and priorities.
- Constraints and opportunities: CSS principles obligate project teams to introduce environmental opportunities and constraints into the planning process as early as possible. Early integration of environmental data will draw stakeholder attention to issues which merit the most creative solutions. The challenges here are both technical and political. CSS recognizes that tradeoffs among resources will eventually arise and become understood by stakeholders; and so it is best to coordinate among agencies as early as possible.

Policies that Should be Considered

Best practices in corridor and sub-area planning must involve a discussion of the role that policies play in solving transportation problems. Policies to consider typically include land use, access management, parking, utilities and several others. In certain corridors, roadway pricing may also merit consideration. Area-wide transportation planning studies provide a good framework in which to consider policy concepts, advancing those that merit more detailed consideration and reaching consensus on eliminating those that do not.

Land use policies are widely applicable for CSS-based planning along corridors and in the sub areas that define projects. The location, mix and intensity of land uses influence trip generation, lengths and mode choice. Local land uses influence levels of service and safety in ways important to transportation plans. The extent to which such issues are considered should be consistent with the stakeholder issues identified and defined early in the planning and design processes.

State DOTs have long been engaged with local officials in evaluating access management and parking policies for their facilities. Best practice today focuses on evaluating parking and access not only in terms of its effect on vehicular operations but also in terms of impacts on local business and economic development. CSS principles support the consideration of parking and access policy in this broader context, and corridor planning affords an early opportunity to do this.

Linking to Project Development

As project teams integrate CSS into the early stages of project development transportation organizations will play key roles in leading innovative projects from the start – thus minimizing the need to go back and revisit issues and decisions late in the planning process. The integration of CSS into corridor and sub area planning must define and evaluate the best approaches and alternatives given transportation objectives and the project context. During the early project planning process, working with project stakeholders will help guide the development of a project-specific decision-making process and schedule that will structure further project planning and engineering studies to address project context and facilitate teamwork. This process ends with project level decisions to proceed with certain project design alternatives – sometimes with one alternative. Typically the project environmental documentation is also underway at this state, with final approvals to come in project development.

Tracking Commitments Made to Stakeholders and the Public

As agencies work through corridor and sub area planning, project details become clearer. In addition, required mitigation may be identified through the environmental process. Mitigation may be required for construction and for on-going operation and maintenance of proposed improvements. It is critical that agencies have an effective mechanism in place to track commitments made during the area wide planning stage – whether they relate to project features, mitigation, or on-going maintenance activities. Furthermore, this information needs to be communicated to stakeholders and the community in a timely manner.