Best Practices in Smart Growth and Transportation

AASHTO's Center for Environmental Excellence is pleased to announce the winners of the 2004 Best Practices in Smart Growth and Transportation competition, co-sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration. Three winners were selected by an expert review panel of transportation and environmental representatives. These transportation projects, programs, and initiatives demonstrate exemplary efforts in Smart Growth-balancing transportation mobility, efficient land use, community values, environmental protection, and economic growth.

Criteria

Thirty-six applications were received from 21 states. The review panel evaluated each application based on five criteria:

- Coordinated transportation and land use;
- Intermodalism and multi-modalism;
- Innovation and evaluation;
- Environmental protection; and
- Partnering and outreach.

Categories

Winners were selected in each of three categories:

Project-Oriented Activities

Maryland's West Hyattsville Transit-Oriented Development Strategy. This category recognizes collaborative efforts to plan, design and construct a major project that reflects smart growth principles.

Program Approaches

Vermont's Interstate Interchange Policy and Planning Initiative. This category recognizes organizational policies and programs that illustrate smart growth principles throughout a program or function.

Institutionalization or Organizational Change

California's Context Sensitive Solutions: Changing the Culture. This category recognizes efforts made to make permanent the changes in attitudes and organizational structure that help institutionalize smart growth practices in the agency's program of activities.

Expert Review Panel

Kathy Ames, Illinois DOT

Deron Lovaas, Natural Resources Defense Council

Michael Jackson, Maryland DOT

Marya Morris, American Planning Association, Chicago

Phil Selinger, Tri-Met, Portland, Oregon

Rosemary Monahan, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Beverly Ward, Center for Urban Transportation Research, Tampa, Florida

Sherry Ways, Federal Highway Administration

Tigist Zegeye, Wilmington Area Planning Council (WILMAPCO)

Bob Grow, Greater Washington Board of Trade

The Best Practices in Smart Growth and Transportation Competition was sponsored by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to showcase outstanding initiatives at integrating Smart Growth principles in the planning and delivery of transportation projects.

According to FHWA, transportation's role in smart growth can mean:

- Establishing state and local land use strategies to increase population and housing densities and make transit more viable;
- Managing and operating existing highway, transit, and other transportation modes to maintain or improve performance for each mode without adversely affecting neighborhoods or urban centers;
- Knitting transportation improvement projects and public/private investments so that they merge as seamlessly as possible into the community;
- Supporting the provision of mixed-use development so that options such as transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities are viable options to driving; and
- Accommodating the flow of freight throughout the country so that the economy can continue to grow.

The competition winners exemplify approaches to achieving these Smart Growth goals.

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
444 North Capitol Street, NW
Suite 249
Washington, DC 20001
www.environment.transportation.org

FHWA

Federal Highway Administration
400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20590

AASHTO
Center for
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Excellence

Best Practices in Smart Growth and Transportation

2004 Competition

Best Project
Maryland:
West Hyattsville Transit-Oriented Development Strategy

State and local transportation and planning officials in Maryland have developed a model Smart Growth strategy using transit as the anchor for revitalizing communities. The West Hyattsville Transit-Oriented Development Strategy was undertaken as a case study that focused on renewal of an existing neighborhood in Maryland, just outside Washington, D.C. Officials developed a plan to transform some 80 acres of underutilized land and aging commercial space near the West Hyattsville Metrorail station into a state-of-the-art "Transit Village."

The concept envisions a renewed community with residential units; office and commercial space; an extensive system of civic, park and open spaces; and a finely balanced street and circulation network balancing access to community amenities with access to transit.

The "Transit Village" concept resulted from numerous meetings and design charrettes held with representatives from the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Prince George's County Planning Department, the City of Hyattsville, Maryland Department of Transportation, and the Maryland Office of Smart Growth. Officials worked to ensure that the strategy would honor local values and reflect the regional context.

The effort involved developing detailed, alternative scenarios with renderings of each; gathering input from developers; conducting financial feasibility analyses including assessment of public and private investment needed; developing a detailed parking plan; and providing detailed steps for implementation. The strategy represents the county's first compact, mixed-use, "Transit Village" development, and Maryland DOT's first significant attempt at such planning in an urban/suburban setting. Officials say the strategy will be used as a model for growth and development of communities surrounding 14 other Metrorail transit stations in Prince George's County.

"The West Hyattsville transit-oriented development incorporates the best qualities of a traditional village neighborhood and includes a mix of civic amenities, home choices, retail services and employment opportunities. It is walkable and human scaled – a safe and pleasurable place to visit, live and work. Through all aspects of its land use and transportation systems, it will advance community values and provide meaningful integration of the nearby parks and open spaces. It will create quality development while revitalizing surrounding neighborhoods."
—West Hyattsville Transit-Oriented Development Concept Statement

Best Program
Vermont:
Interstate Interchange Policy and Planning Initiative

The state of Vermont is known for its scenic mountain vistas, green farmland, and quaint villages. And the state's planning and transportation agencies aim to keep it that way with a unique Smart-Growth approach for planning and designing the state's Interstate highway interchanges.

Large-scale commercial development near some interchanges had led to increased congestion and accidents as well as reduced level of service along intersecting roads. State officials were concerned that dispersed, auto-dependent growth patterns were evolving at many interchanges, threatening the economic vitality of Vermont's traditional downtowns and and impacting the state's scenery, environmental quality, and quality of life.

To address these concerns, the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) and the state Agency of Transportation (VTrans) worked together to implement a policy and planning initiative aimed at strengthening local planning and regulation and encouraging communities and developers to plan for appropriate land uses in conjunction with transportation investments.

As part of the effort, the state developed a handbook, Design Guidelines for Planning and Development at Interstate Interchanges. The effort included a land use inventory as well as a photographic catalogue and scenic analysis of each of the state's 52 interchange areas; categorization of the interchanges into six "typologies"; a build-out of five interchanges and corresponding preferred alternative growth scenarios based on smart growth principles; and implementation strategies, including planning and design guidelines.

DHCA and VTrans have made it a priority to support municipal and regional planning for interchange areas through grant funds as well as through education of local land-use decision-makers. With financial and technical support from DHCA, 11 separate municipalities have undertaken interchange-area planning. The effort included use of innovative tools, such as the "Community Viz" software to help communities visualize future development with a three-dimensional simulation of various development scenarios.

"Vermont seeks to retain the interstate system's most valuable assets and still allow it to generate economic growth, including 'smart growth' development near the interchanges. The key has been to engage citizens through planning, recognize community and state assets, and to promote development that remains sensitive to the assets and community interests." —Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Transportation

Best in Institutional Change
California:
Context Sensitive Solutions: Changing the Culture

Transportation officials across the country increasingly are working to make transportation facilities fit better into their surrounding communities and environment - a concept known as Context Sensitive Solutions. The California Department of Transportation's efforts at achieving Smart Growth in the state are reflected in a major initiative to institutionalize Context Sensitive Solutions by "changing the culture" throughout the agency.

The program focuses on three major elements that also promote Smart Growth: fostering early and continuous collaboration with stakeholders, balancing transportation needs and community values, and promoting interconnected, multi-modal transportation systems.

California's approach is reflected in a collection of policies, directives, guidance documents, and funding programs, translating into impressive planning and design features found in communities across the state.

Some of the tools for changing the culture within the agency have included:

- The Director's Policy on CSS, implemented in November 2001.
- The CSS Implementation Plan.
- Main Streets: Flexibility in Design and Operations guidance.
- Working groups, including a CSS steering committee, an Alternative Transportation and Livable Communities committee, and bicycle and pedestrian panels.
- Special funding through several accounts, including the Bicycle Transportation Account, Safe Routes to School program, Community-Based Transportation Planning grants, and Environmental Justice grants.
- Guidance on community involvement, a public participation guide, and a $2.5 million task-order contract that provides on-call services to support community outreach statewide, encouraging early public involvement in transportation decision-making.

At the foundation of the Department's CSS program are efforts at 'connecting the dots' in existing programs that support its three major CSS elements: fostering early and continuous collaboration with educated stakeholders; balancing transportation needs and community values; and promoting fully integrated and seamless multi-modal systems that are all interconnected. —California Department of Transportation